

TESTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTIONAL MONITORING PLAN AS A WAY TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN RESTART SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This problem of practice study examines the challenge of strengthening instructional leadership in North Carolina's Restart schools through a systematic instructional monitoring plan. Restart schools, which are granted charter-like flexibility to improve student outcomes, require strategic and data-driven leadership to drive sustainable school improvement. Utilizing a Plan, Do, Study, Act improvement science framework, this study involved the implementation of a structured instructional monitoring plan across multiple Restart schools. The design included weekly classroom walkthroughs, principal interviews, teacher focus groups, school improvement plans, and Restart monitoring documents. The analysis process integrated statistical comparisons with qualitative coding to identify leadership trends, challenges, and effective practices. The data and observations from this study indicate that this improvement strategy had a positive impact on the problem. Additional recommendations and implications are shared that are applicable to principal preparation programs, school district leadership development initiatives, refining instructional monitoring practices, and optimizing Restart to support low-performing schools.

TESTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTIONAL MONITORING
PLAN AS A WAY TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP
IN RESTART SCHOOLS

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DEDICATION

To my incredible children Kirnyn, Hadley, and Aidan, thank you for your unwavering love and support throughout this journey. You believed in me, celebrated every milestone, and listened patiently as I talked endlessly about my dissertation. Your encouragement gave me the strength to keep going.

To my friends, my village, whose laughter and support kept me grounded. You are the strongest, smartest, and most incredible women I know, and I am better and wiser because of you. I'm beyond grateful to have you in my life.

To my mom, my biggest fan, my best friend, and my constant source of encouragement, thank you for always believing in me. Your love, wisdom, and support have shaped me in more ways than I can count.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE.....	i
COPYRIGHT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Problem of Practice.....	2
Context of Inquiry.....	7
Bunker Elementary.....	16
Mulligan Elementary.....	16
Hook Middle.....	16
Statement of Problem of Practice.....	21
Problem of Practice Guiding Questions.....	24
Overview of Inquiry.....	25
Inquiry Partners.....	25
Theoretical Framework.....	27
Change Theory.....	27
Leadership Theory.....	28

Transformational Leadership Theory.....	28
Definition of Key Terms.....	29
Assumptions.....	31
Scope and Delimitations.....	32
Limitations.....	33
Significance of Inquiry.....	34
Advances in Practice.....	35
Summary.....	36
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	38
Theoretical Framework.....	38
Restart Reform Model.....	39
School Improvement.....	47
Instructional Capacity.....	53
North Carolina Executive Standards.....	59
Principal Leadership.....	62
Recruitment & Retention of Teachers.....	66
Summary.....	69
CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY.....	71
Problem of Practice Guiding Questions.....	71
Inquiry Design and Rationale.....	72
Context of Study.....	74

Inquiry Partners.....	77
Ethical Considerations.....	79
Inquiry Procedures.....	82
Phase 1.....	83
Description of Participants and Recruitment Strategy.....	83
Plan.....	85
Do.....	85
Study.....	85
Act.....	87
Instrumentation.....	87
Classroom Walkthrough Tool.....	89
Surveys.....	89
Principal Interview Protocol.....	90
Teacher Focus Group Protocol.....	91
Pilot Study.....	91
Phase 2.....	95
Plan.....	95
Plan for Data Collection & Analysis.....	96
Do.....	96
Data Analysis.....	101
Phase 3.....	105

Plan.....	105
Do.....	105
Study.....	105
Act.....	106
Inquiry Design Rigor.....	106
Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions.....	110
Role of the Scholarly Practitioner.....	111
Summary.....	112
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	114
Problem of Practice Guiding Questions.....	115
Demographics.....	115
Data Collection.....	116
Quantitative Data Collection.....	117
Principal Inventory.....	117
Classroom Observation Walkthrough.....	120
Qualitative Data Collection.....	121
Focus Groups.....	121
Principal Interviews.....	123
School Improvement & Restart Documentation.....	125
Data Analysis.....	125
Quantitative Data Analysis.....	126

Principal Inventory Findings.....	128
Classroom Walkthrough Observations.....	144
Qualitative Data Analysis.....	155
Teacher Focus Group.....	160
Summary of the Bunker Focus Group Responses.....	164
Summary of the Mulligan Focus Group Responses.....	166
Summary of the Hook Focus Group Responses.....	168
Principal Interview.....	171
Summary of Responses.....	179
Results.....	189
Analysis of Inquiry Question #1.....	190
Analysis of Inquiry Question #2.....	191
Analysis of Inquiry Question #3.....	192
Principal Inventory and Classroom Walkthrough Observations.....	193
Comparison of Pre- and Post-Inventory.....	194
Comparison of Walkthrough Observations vs. Principal Perceptions.....	195
Focus Groups & Interviews.....	196
Analysis of Inquiry Question #4.....	198
Summary.....	199
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS.....	200
Summary of the Findings.....	203

Leadership Inventory.....	203
Classroom Walkthrough Tool.....	205
Focus Groups.....	207
Principal Interviews.....	210
School Improvement and Restart Documentation.....	212
Interpretation of the Findings.....	214
Limitations of the Inquiry.....	225
Implications of the Findings for Practice.....	227
Recommendations for Practice.....	233
Recommendations for Future Study.....	235
Conclusions.....	238
Scholarly Practitioner Reflection on Leadership.....	239
REFERENCES.....	245
APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL.....	266
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	267
APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP.....	269
APPENDIX D: INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP SURVEY.....	272
APPENDIX E: INSTRUCTIONAL MONITORING CLASSROOM WALKTHROUGH.....	276
APPENDIX F: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	280
APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP EMAIL.....	282
APPENDIX H: SURVEY AND INTERVIEW EMAIL.....	284

LIST OF TABLES

1. Fairview County Growth and Report Card Grade by Year.....	12
2. Fairview County NCEES Summary Ratings by Standard for 2021-2022 School Year.....	13
3. Restart Schools in Fairview County Growth & Performance Grades 2021-2022	76
4. Collaborative Inquiry Partners during the Pilot Study.....	80
5. Survey Question Vocabulary with Recommended Revisions.....	92
6. Data Collection Timeline.....	98
7. Data Analysis Collection Matrix.....	102
8. Leadership Inventory – School-Wide Professional Development.....	129
9. Leadership Inventory – Shared Goals.....	131
10. Leadership Inventory – Teaching and Learning Process.....	133
11. Principal Inventory: School-Wide PD.....	139
12. Principal Inventory: Shared Goals.....	140
13. Principal Inventory: Teaching and Learning Process.....	142
14. Lesson Curriculum - Learning Targets.....	152
15. Classroom Walkthrough Observation Tool – Instructional Components.....	154
16. Focus Group Coding.....	157
17. Organization of Alignment: Focus Group, Interview and Research Questions.....	161
18. Organization of Interview and Research Questions.....	172
19. Principal Interview Coding.....	176

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Turnaround Framework.....	6
2. Fairview County demographics.....	9
3. Fairview County Schools grade level proficiency 4 year trend data.....	11
4. Fairview County principal turnover data by year.....	15
5. Bunker Elementary School GLP 5 year trend data.....	17
6. Bunker Elementary School growth and school performance grade 5 year trend data.....	18
7. Mulligan Elementary School GLP 5 year trend data.....	19
8. Mulligan Elementary School growth and school performance grade 5 year trend data.....	20
9. Hook Middle School GLP 5 year trend data.....	22
10. Hook Middle School growth and school performance grade 5 year trend data.....	23
11. Three phases of Plan-Do-Study-Act, PDSA cycles.....	26
12. Leadership framework in Restart schools.....	40
13. Collaborative inquiry partners.....	78
14. Three phases of the inquiry process.....	84
15. Fishbone diagram.....	86
16. The Learning-Focused Instructional Framework.....	88
17. Principal inventory – School-wide professional development.....	143
18. Principal inventory – Shared goals.....	145
19. Principal inventory – Teaching and learning process.....	146

20. Classroom walkthrough by school.....	148
21. Classroom walkthrough by weekday.....	149
22. Classroom walkthrough by grade.....	150
23. Classroom walkthrough by subject.....	151
24. Leadership framework in Restart schools.....	218

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Across the country, school districts are struggling to find solutions to the most pressing problems affecting student performance in education. A lack of resources, inconsistent staffing, and ineffective learning opportunities are among district and school leaders' concerns (Bennett et al., 2014). Teachers are seeking help, trust, and respect (Clotfelter et al., 2008). Consistency, excellence, and belonging are priorities for families and students and there is a desire for safety, equity, and prosperity in communities (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2019). School districts are facing challenges in their efforts to enhance and sustain academic outcomes. Yet, the number of low-performing schools in the nation is increasing (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2022). Districts have turned to comprehensive reform models such as Restart (United States Department of Education, 2020). Restart is a reform model option in North Carolina that allows public school units charter-like flexibility. This means they have the ability to operate with an exemption from specific statutes and rules. This inquiry aims to test the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools.

School performance matters and many districts are implementing practices that do not support low-performing schools and do not provide opportunities for innovation. In North Carolina, the State Board of Education policy requires that all low-performing schools develop school reform plans that specifically address strategies to improve school performance grades and school growth designations (NCDPI, n.d.e.). This chapter includes background information and context for the problem of practice. The purpose of the inquiry is to examine the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools. As a scholarly practitioner, I will provide an overview of the

inquiry, identify key terms, describe the process of engaging inquiry partners and how this collaboration enhances the inquiry, and share the theories that support the study. The assumptions, scope, and limitations of this inquiry will be shared, and the overall significance of the inquiry will be summarized.

Background of the Problem of Practice

Despite the desire for all school districts to close the achievement gap and improve outcomes for students who struggle, school and district leaders do not always know how to lead change and improve outcomes. There are many factors that influence low performance scores such as high poverty, chronic absenteeism, behavioral issues, and students coming to school with varying abilities (Schueler et al., 2022). Recruiting teachers to work in the high-needs schools is difficult because they are aware of the daily challenges and difficult situations (Ingersoll et al., 2014). The Restart schools have more turnover with staff and more beginning and lateral entry staff than their counterparts. As a result, many of the teachers in the low-performing schools lack the knowledge and skills to improve student achievement (Schueler et al., 2022). Research indicates that a lack of effective leadership, accountability pressure, appropriate professional development, low wages, deficit thinking, and implicit biases are barriers that teachers are facing in low-performing schools (Faubert, 2012; Hattie, 2009; Woessmann, 2008). These barriers are preventing effective school improvement outcomes.

A review of the school reform literature highlights that the lack of progress in school reform efforts is often attributed to issues related to the fidelity of implementation. Teacher and leader turnover, lack of buy-in and ownership from all staff, and external challenges that get in the way of school reform are all part of the program fidelity challenges (Berends et al., 2002; Desimone, 2002; Orland et al., 2008). One of the main challenges in school reform is

determining the type and level of reform implementation that would be effective. Additionally, current research is inconclusive about whether there is a relationship between local school improvement initiatives and increased student achievement. The positive relationships between increased student achievement and site-based decision groups that have been identified in the literature seem to depend on several factors (Marzano et al., 2005). One factor is the effectiveness of the leadership of the school improvement team (Marzano et al., 2005). Effective principals create a positive school culture, set clear expectations, and provide instructional leadership (Heck & Hallinger, 2014). Transformational leadership, which inspires and motivates teachers and students, is often emphasized in effective principal leadership (Corry & Carlson-Bancroft, 2014). The principal is crucial to reform efforts.

Low performing districts and schools in North Carolina are defined by the NC General Assembly and are based on the School Performance Grade (SPG) 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 G.S. 115C-83.15.” (G.S. 115C-105.37(a)). Consistently low performing schools can apply for ‘Restart’ that follow the ‘Turnaround Schools’ model for innovation. The Restart reform model allows North Carolina low-performing schools bottom-up, autonomous provisions such as extending the school day, changing the school calendar, flexibility in hiring teachers, and financial flexibility (NCDPI, n.d.h.). ‘Restart’ is an opportunity to be innovative; to think outside of the box. Restart schools have charter-like flexibility, which means they have the ability to operate with an exemption from specific statutes and rules. The flexibilities available to Restart schools include budget, employment, calendar, standard course of study, assessment, and class size.

Principals in Restart schools are charged with finding best practices and innovative ways to use Restart flexibilities. Principals seek to find what works in low-performing schools to improve overall outcomes aligned to the North Carolina Standards for School Executives. The North Carolina Standards for School Executives focuses on building a culture of disciplined thought and action that is rooted in the ability to build relationships among all stakeholders to build trust and create a transparent environment that reduces all stakeholders' sense of vulnerability as they address the challenges for transformational change (NCDPI, 2013). The main responsibility of the school executive is to create aligned systems of leadership throughout the school and its community (NCDPI, 2013). The North Carolina Standards for School Executives are the standards by which school administrators are evaluated.

The principal is one of the most important school-based factors for student success, second only to the influence of the classroom teacher (Doyle & Locke, 2014). Approximately one quarter of a school's impact on academic achievement can be attributed to the principal (Doyle & Locke, 2014). Evidence from both business and education confirms that an effective turnaround, transforming persistent low-performance into a successful organization, requires a highly effective leader at the helm (Hassel & Hassel, 2009). The Restart reform model is an opportunity for school leaders to be transformative.

Restart schools run on guiding principles from research on turnaround schools. There are four components of innovative change; Talent Recruitment and Retention, Academics/Curriculum Development, Culture and Climate, and Operations. Leaders in Restart school use flexibilities to address:

- Talent: Systems and strategies to recruit, hire, develop, evaluate, and retain excellent school leaders, teachers, and support staff.

- Academics: Rigorous, aligned, and engaging academic program that allows all students to achieve at high levels, including aligned curricula, instruction, and assessments.
- Culture and Climate: Positive learning environment that supports high-quality teaching and learning and engages families and the community as partners in the educational process.
- Operations: Systems and processes that promote organizational efficiency and effectiveness, including through the use of time and financial resources.

The work and how the components address increased support for students is captured in Figure 1. The Turnaround Office in North Carolina believes that if provided support and technical assistance aligned to the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Turnaround Framework, then districts and schools will create systems to improve student outcomes.

While the turnaround framework primarily focuses on systemic improvements at the school level, classroom walkthrough observations offer a valuable tool for gathering specific classroom-level data and insights. When used together, they can provide a comprehensive approach to school improvement, with the data from classroom walkthroughs informing the strategies and actions outlined in the turnaround framework. This alignment can lead to more effective and targeted efforts to enhance teaching and learning in schools. Often, school leaders implement classroom walkthroughs in order to monitor the expectations and practices occurring in the classrooms during times of change. According to an in-depth study of three urban districts conducted by the Rand Corporation, administrators find walkthroughs more useful than do teachers – who rarely receive individual feedback, and those doing the walkthroughs report learning more than do those who are observed (Marsh et al., 2005). District leaders and

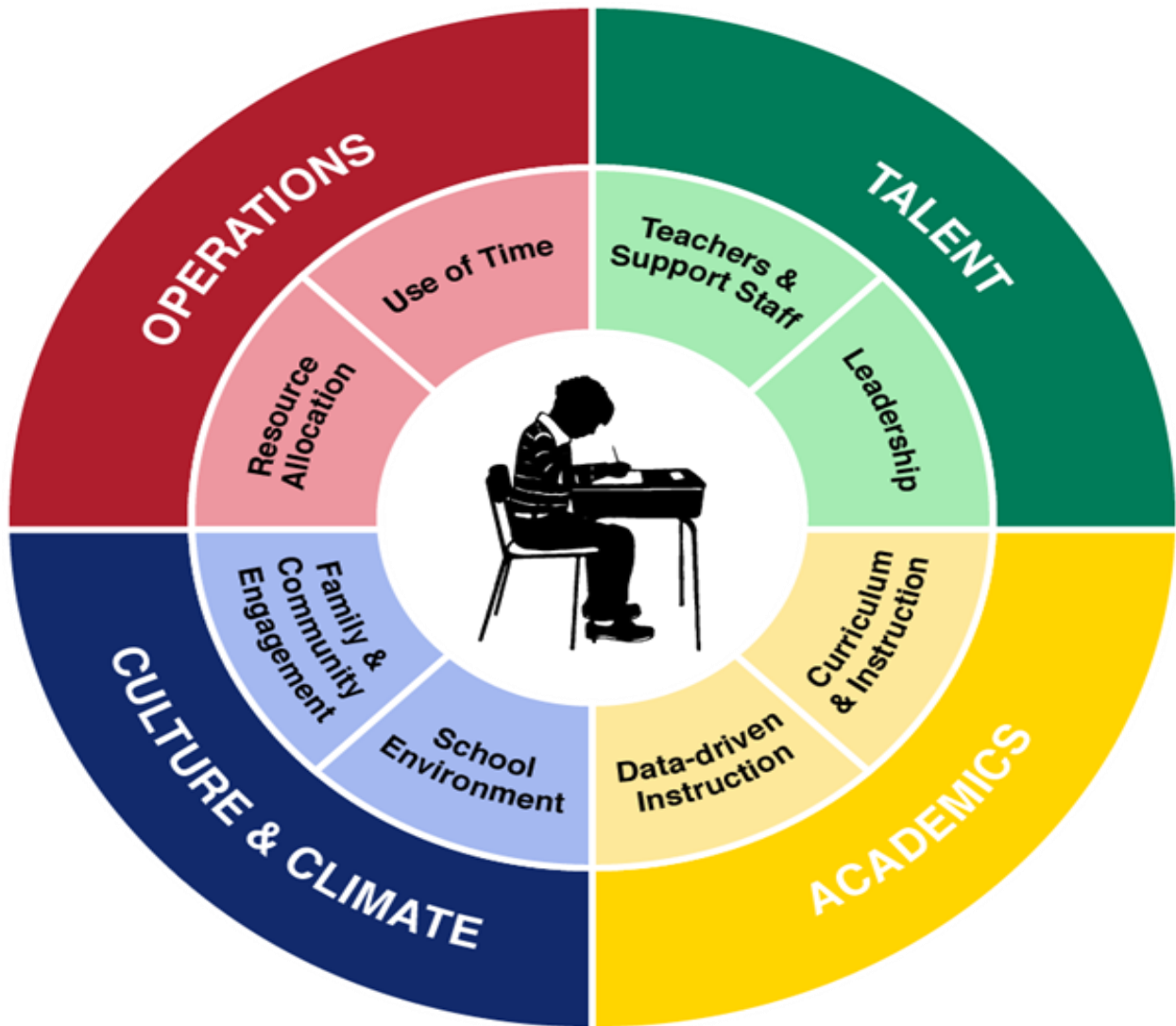


Figure 1. Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Turnaround Framework.

principals in a sample of schools in one large urban district reported that the data from walk-throughs gave them a better understanding of how well teachers were able to identify and move students in and out of support programs (Supovitz & Weathers, 2004). This finding led them to make adjustments in the professional development they provided (Supovitz & Weathers, 2004). In low-performing schools that use Restart flexibilities, classroom walkthrough data that informs professional development and coaching support can be supported by using Restart flexibilities. This inquiry seeks to provide an understanding of best practices for school administrators to monitor instruction to improve outcomes and use Restart flexibilities in the Restart schools. In addition, the data collected could identify strategies that will help the district design school improvement practices that will improve effective instructional practices, improve student performance, and overall support all low-performing schools in the district. Examining leadership practices to implement classroom walkthroughs that give teachers feedback on instructional delivery will assist school leaders with designing effective processes for monitoring instruction and leading change in systemically low-performing Restart schools.

Context of Inquiry

Fairview County Schools, a pseudonym, has been a highly effective school district for many years. In previous years the district had been number one in the region for academic performance and in the top 15% across North Carolina in performance. Out of 23 schools, three schools (two elementary and one middle school) have been designated as consistently low-performing. The most recent report card data showed the elementary schools did not meet growth and fell to F ratings. The three low-performing schools have struggled for many years to find ways to improve grade-level proficiency and meet growth as measured by End of Grade (EOG), End of Course (EOC), and Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS).

Fairview County applied for Restart for the three consistently low-performing schools in the district. The schools are in their third year of implementation, including time under the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, the Restart middle school exceeded growth and moved from a D to a C while the two Restart elementary schools did not meet growth and slipped to F ratings. In addition, the district added three new low-performing elementary schools. In light of the challenges the district is facing, school leadership is responsible for both managing school culture and enacting change initiatives (Macneil et al., 2009).

Fairview County Schools (FCS), located in North Carolina, offers a K-12 comprehensive curriculum that includes workforce development, programs for special needs, gifted, and arts education students. All three high schools offer a variety of Advanced Placement courses, as well as other academically challenging opportunities for all students. Fairview County, North Carolina, is economically diverse and noted for its high quality of life. Although agriculture has always played an important part in the county's economics, current major industries include tourism, health care, and education. The center of the county is well-known for horseback riding, golf and recreation and is often a tourist destination. The local community college is recognized as one of the premier community colleges in the nation.

Fairview County School district contains 23 schools and approximately 13,000 students. The student body at the schools served by Fairview County Schools is 62.2% White, 14.9% Black, 1.1% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 15.1%, Hispanic/Latino, 0.9% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (see Figure 2). In addition, 5.6% of students are of two or more races, and 0% have not specified their race or ethnicity. Also, 47% of students are female, and 53% of students are male. At schools in Fairview County,

Fairview County Demographics

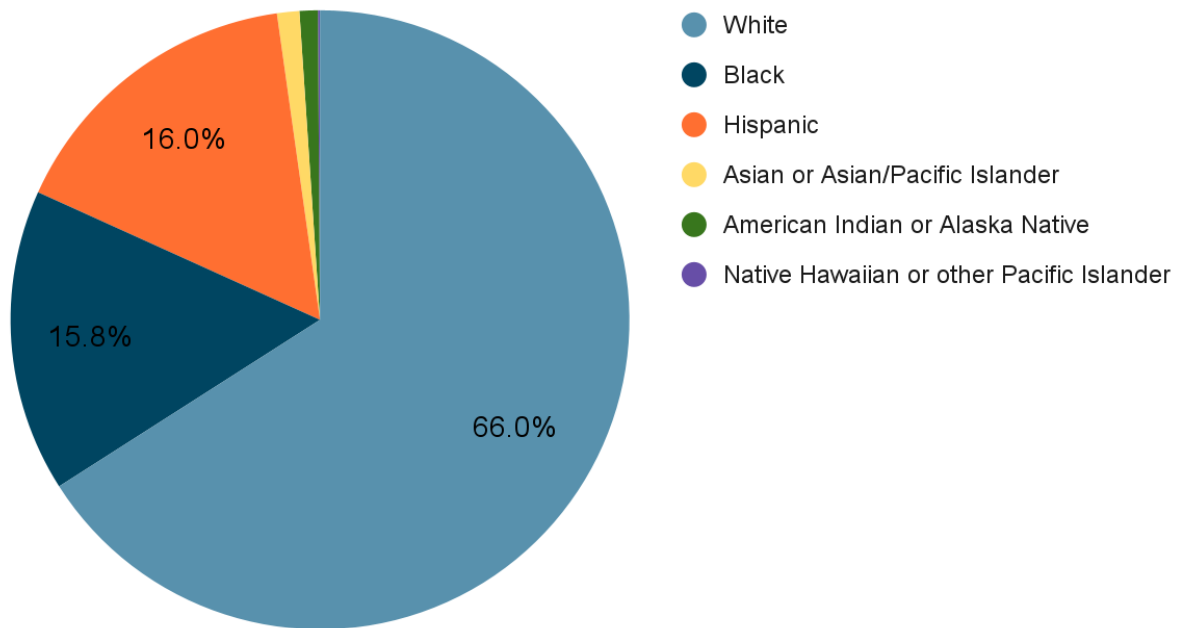


Figure 2. Fairview County demographics.

27.4% of students are eligible to participate in the federal free and reduced-price meal program and 4.0% of students are English language learners.

Historically, Fairview County Schools has been a school district that many want their children to go to and where many educators want to find employment. The reputation was that Fairview was a county everyone wanted to live in and that their children would be very successful in most of the schools within the district except for two that had historically served the low-income populations in the county and typically struggled with academic results. However, even with that community understanding, Fairview has predominately been perceived as a high-performing district. Since the global pandemic of COVID-19, the district has seen a decline in overall scores and a slow rebound to previous standings (see Figure 3). The overall report card data shows that more schools are not meeting growth as measured by EVAAS and there are more C, D, and F schools (see Table 1).

As with any district in the state, Fairview County monitors instruction with the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System (NCEES). As part of NCEES, the intended purpose of the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process is to assess the teacher's performance in relation to the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards and to design a plan for professional growth (NC GS 115C-333).

The principal conducts the evaluation process following board procedures to ensure the teacher will actively participate through the use of self-assessment, reflection, presentation of artifacts, and classroom demonstration(s). A summary of the district evaluation rubric shows that principals are marking all teachers as 'proficient', 'accomplished', or 'distinguished' (see Table 2). Principals are also marking beginning teachers 'proficient' and 'accomplished' 98% of the time. These data of the summary ratings does not align to grade level proficiency data.

District
Performance Composite
Grade Level Proficiency (GLP) 2022-23

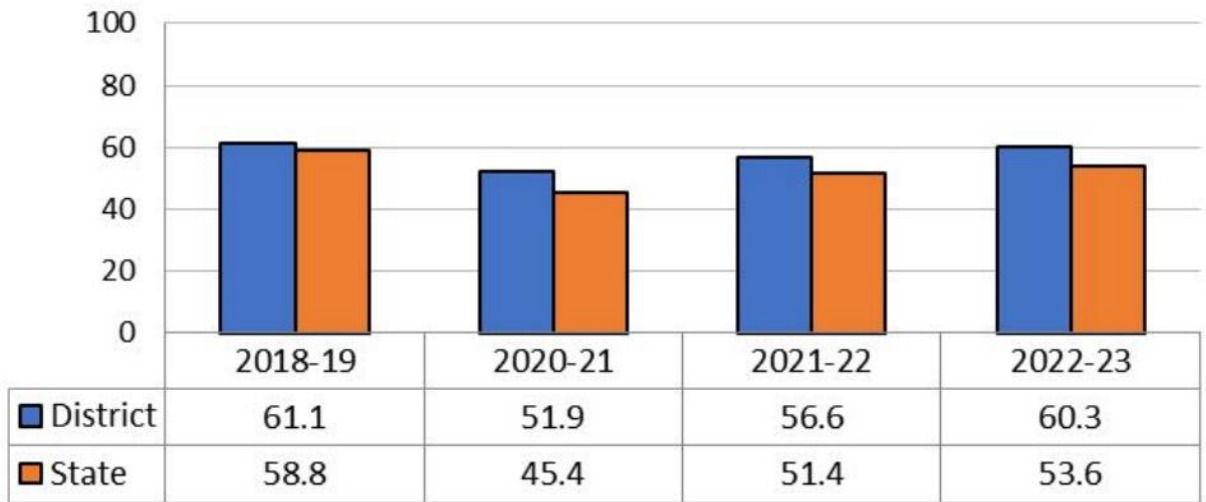


Figure 3. Fairview County Schools grade level proficiency 4 year trend data.

Table 1

Fairview County Growth and Report Card Grade by Year

Year	Letter Grade					Growth		
	A	B	C	D	F	Not Met	Met	Exceed
2017-18	0	9	8	3	0	4	8	8
2018-19	0	8	8	4	0	5	13	2
2021-22	0	6	9	4	2	7	10	4
2022-23	1				0			

Note. The overall report card data shows that more schools are not meeting growth as measured by EVAAS and there are more C, D, and F schools.

Table 2

Fairview County NCEES Summary Ratings by Standard for 2021-2022 School Year

Standard	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished
District Summary Evaluation Data by Standard				
Standard 1	0.1%	31.4%	59.9%	8.6%
Standard 2	0.0%	36.7%	57.5%	5.8%
Standard 3	0.0%	49.4%	44.7%	5.8%
Standard 4	0.3%	28.3%	66.6%	4.9%
Standard 5	0.4%	50.3%	41.8%	7.4%
District Beginning Teacher (BT) Summary Evaluation Data by Standard				
Standard 1	1.40%	87.8%	10.8%	0.0%
Standard 2	0.0%	79.7%	20.3%	0.0%
Standard 3	0.0%	93.2%	6.8%	0.0%
Standard 4	1.4%	86.5%	12.2%	0.0%
Standard 5	0.0%	83.8%	16.2%	0.0%

Perhaps the misalignment of the summary evaluation ratings to achievement scores is connected to the data around principal turnover (see Figure 4). Over the last three years there have been 17 changes in school principals. Out of 23 schools, 13 schools started the 2022-2023 school year with a new principal or had a change in leadership mid-year. Some schools started with a principal, had an interim, and ended with a new principal or started the next school year with a new principal. The principal turnover directly impacted how expectations were communicated in the schools. The turnover data show why it is important to investigate monitoring plans. The turnover of principals may have contributed to an overall decline in academic performance and growth, the district added three recurring low-performing schools, and inconsistent implementation of district initiatives and inconsistent plans for instructional monitoring, providing feedback to teachers, and consistency of school expectations.

This inquiry focuses on Fairview County's three Restart schools: Bunker Elementary School, Mulligan Elementary School, and Hook Middle School (pseudonyms). The three Restart schools have been continually low-performing (LP). Students have not met grade level expectations in reading, math, or science. Each school is unique and faces different challenges. Those challenges include high teacher turnover rates, teacher attendance issues, and fewer teachers with higher level credentials. Teachers discuss all the barriers they face being in LP schools and deficit thinking may have been found to lead to low expectations and non-engaging classrooms. Other challenges include high poverty populations, high English learner (EL) populations, higher exceptional children (EC) populations, limited parent support, not enough funds to secure additional preschools and daycares, and a vast array of social and emotional needs of the students and their families.

New Principal by Year				
	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Total out of 23 Schools	3	1	13	3
17 out of 23 Schools Over 3 Years				

Figure 4. Fairview County principal turnover data by year.

Bunker Elementary

Bunker Elementary School (PK-5) has roughly 700 students. It is a Title 1 school with about 82% economically disadvantaged and 21% EC. Bunker has a diverse population: roughly 55% Black, 25% White, 15% Hispanic, and 5% Multi or 'Other'. Bunker is one of two feeder schools for Hook Middle, also a Restart school. Bunker was designated low-performing, received an 'F' rating on the 2021-2022 state report card, and did not meet growth as measured by EVAAS, see Figures 5 and 6.

Mulligan Elementary

Mulligan Elementary School (PK-5) has roughly 450 students. It is a Title 1 school with about 85% economically disadvantaged and 14% EC. Mulligan has a high EL population with 56% Hispanic, 34% White, and 10% 'Other'. Mulligan is designated low-performing, received an 'F' rating on the 2021-2022 state report card, and did not meet growth as measured by EVAAS. Mulligan is the feeder school for Bird Middle School. Bird Middle School did not qualify for Restart because they had not been low-performing for more than two consecutive years and have since gotten out of LP status (see Figure 7 and 8).

Hook Middle

Hook Middle (6-8) has roughly 600 students. It is a Title 1 school with about 64% economically disadvantaged and 18% EC. Hook has a diverse population: roughly 40% Black, 36% White, 14% Hispanic, and 5% Multi or 'Other'. Hook Middle was designated low-performing but received a 'C' rating on the 2021-2022 state report card and met growth as measured by EVAAS (Education Value-Added Assessment System). Interestingly, the inference from the better results are not credited to the Restart flexibilities but instead are based on redistricting and changing demographics. Community stakeholders and school board members

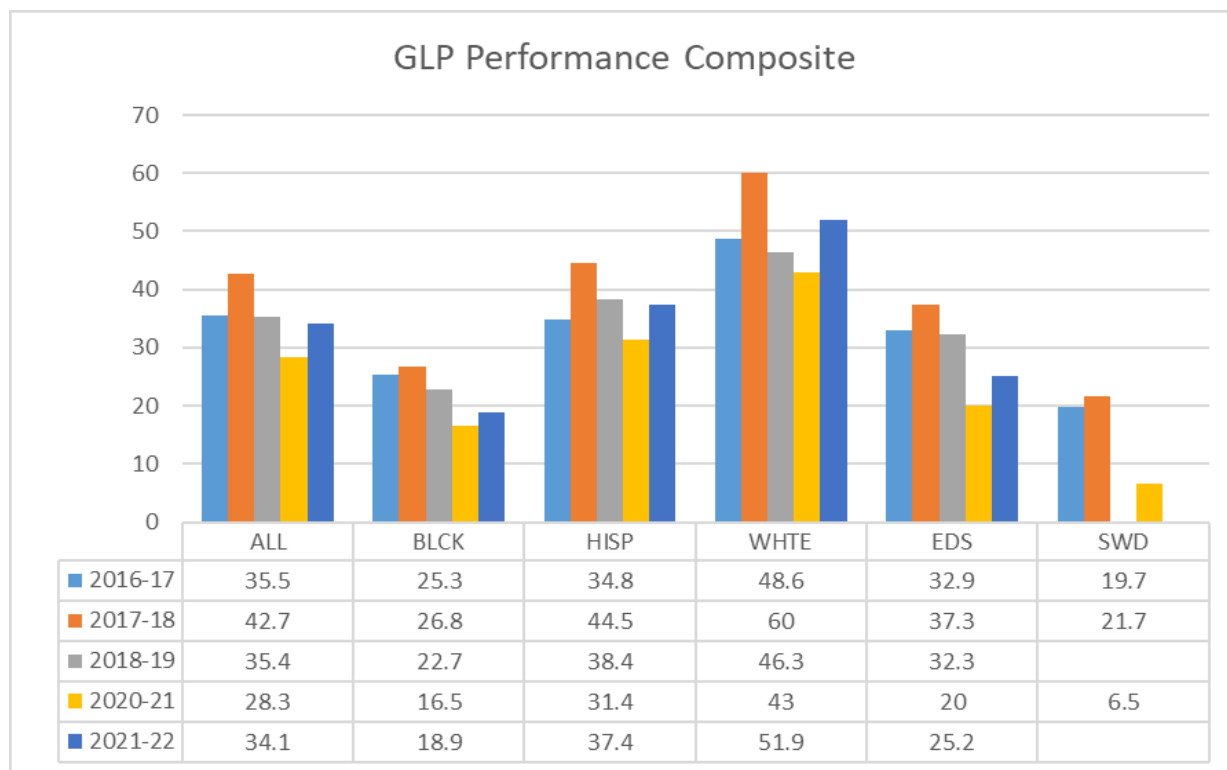


Figure 5. Bunker Elementary School GLP 5 year trend data.

School Accountability Growth Type	2016-2017		2017-2018		2018-2019		2021-2022		2022-2023	
	Index	Growth Indicator	Index	Growth Indicator	Index	Growth Indicator	Index	Growth Indicator	Index	Growth Indicator
	0.66	Meets Expected Growth	3.04	Exceeds Expected Growth	-2.7	Does Not Meet Expected Growth	-5.73	Does Not Meet Expected Growth	-3.02	Does Not Meet Expected Growth

School Performance Grade	2018-19		2019-20		2020-21		2021-22		2022-23	
	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score
	D	42	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	F	39	D	49

Figure 6. Bunker Elementary School growth and school performance grade 5 year trend data.

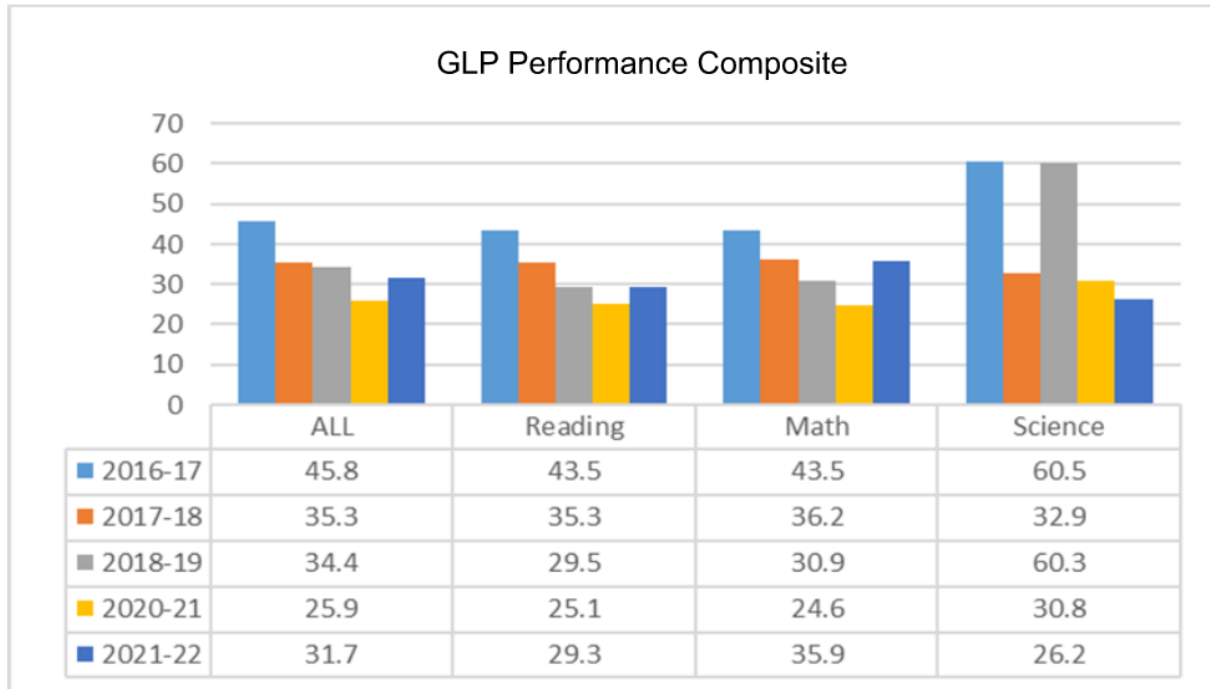


Figure 7. Mulligan Elementary School GLP 5 year trend data.

School Accountability Growth Type	2016-2017		2017-2018		2018-2019		2021-2022		2022-2023	
	Index	Growth Indicator	Index	Growth Indicator	Index	Growth Indicator	Index	Growth Indicator	Index	Growth Indicator
	1.02	Meets Expected Growth	-4.39	Does Not Meet Expected Growth	-1.93	Meets Expected Growth	-3.19	Does Not Meet Expected Growth	-2.08	Does Not Meet Expected Growth

School Performance Grade	2018-19		2019-20		2020-21		2021-22		2022-23	
	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score
	D	42	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	F	38	D	51

Figure 8. Mulligan Elementary School growth and school performance grade 5 year trend data.

believe the school received higher achievement levels because they had students who were more prepared. The belief is that the school itself did not impact the performance and that the students already came with more knowledge (see Figure 9 and 10).

The achievement gap continues to grow for Bunker, Mulligan, and Hook. Additionally, it is difficult to recruit and retain highly effective teachers for these schools. Teachers are unwilling to move to the Restart schools. Teachers who are there leave after only a couple years. Bunker Elementary had a teacher turnover rate of 24.04% in the 2019-2020 school year. The turnover at Hook Middle was 18.95% in 2019-2020. In turn, relevant professional development that is based on school and county goals is not consistent and follow-through for this professional development is challenging. As a result, there are large numbers of students that are not meeting grade level expectations. Based on the grade level proficiency (GLP) from all three schools, on average only 39 percent of students (667 students/1,700 total students from all three schools) are meeting grade level expectations. It is a ripple effect as each school feeds into another. By the time the students reach high school, the gap for some students is too large to overcome. When students fail to meet grade level expectations for extended periods of time, it is much more difficult to get them college and career ready. The school leadership needs to find ways to use Restart flexibilities effectively to improve school outcomes.

Statement of Problem of Practice

This inquiry aims to examine the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools. In low-performing Restart schools, keeping highly qualified and effective teachers is a challenge. Low-performing schools have more mobility with staff, more beginning teachers, and more residency license staff. As a result, many of the teachers in the low-performing schools lack the knowledge and skills

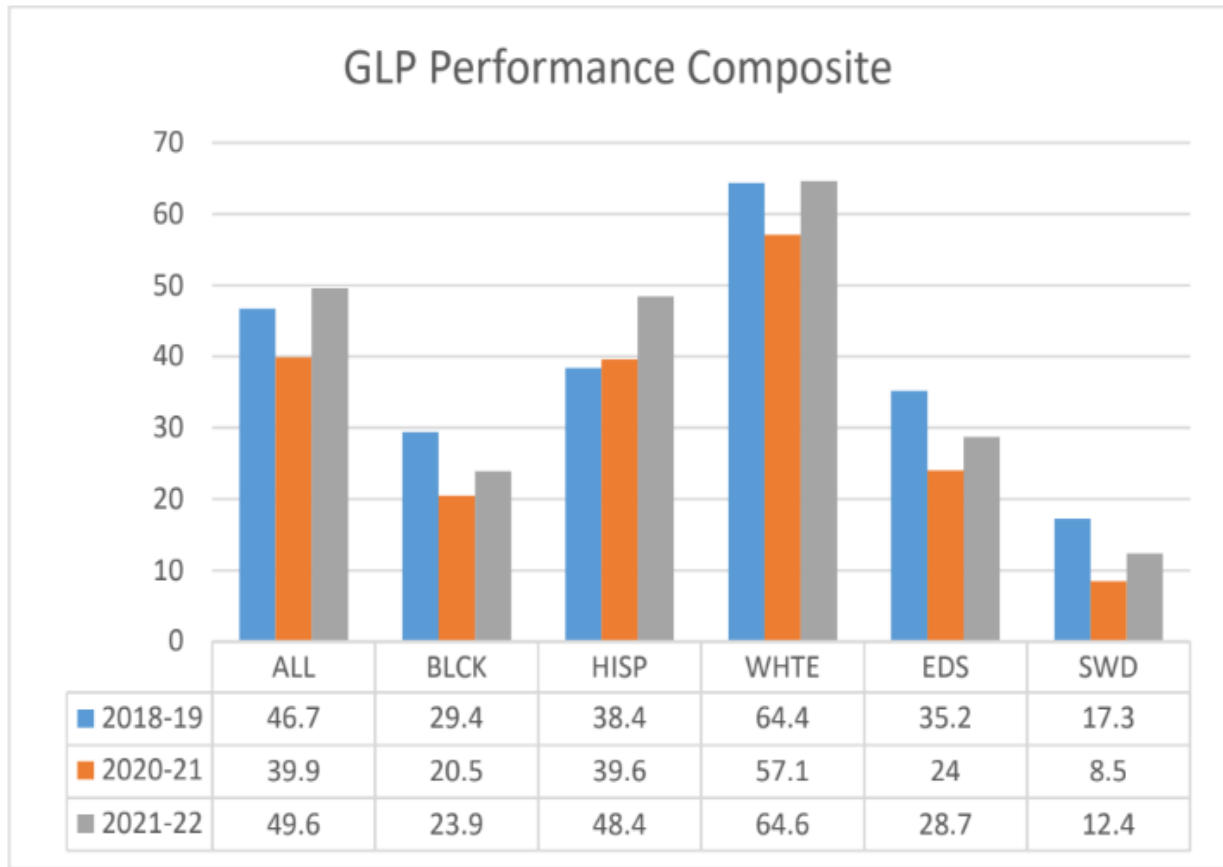


Figure 9. Hook Middle School GLP 5 year trend data.

School Accountability Growth Type	2016-2017		2017-2018		2018-2019		2021-22		2022-2023	
	Index	Growth Indicator	Index	Growth Indicator	Index	Growth Indicator	Index	Growth Indicator	Index	Growth Indicator
	-0.45	Meets Expected Growth	-4.78	Does Not Meet Expected Growth	-1.07	Meets Expected Growth	-0.89	Meets Expected Growth	1.36	Meets Expected Growth

School Performance Grade	2018-19		2019-20		2020-21		2021-22		2022-23	
	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score
	D	53	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	C	55	C	59

Figure 10. Hook Middle School growth and school performance grade 5 year trend data.

to improve student performance. Highly qualified and effective teachers are needed in priority schools and are an essential element necessary to impact student achievement. School administrators increase teacher effectiveness by monitoring instruction and providing timely feedback. Feedback to teachers makes the learning visible (Hattie, 2009). Consistently low performing schools can apply for restart flexibilities that follow the ‘Turnaround Schools’ model for innovation. The Restart Program allows North Carolina low-performing schools bottom-up, autonomous provisions such as extending the school day, changing the school calendar, flexibility in hiring teachers, and financial flexibility (NCDPI, n.d.h). Being a Restart school is an opportunity to be innovative; to think outside of the box. School administrators use Restart flexibilities to reduce barriers to improving achievement. Examining leadership practices to implement a monitoring plan that includes classroom walkthroughs that give teachers feedback on instructional delivery will assist school leaders with designing an effective process for monitoring instruction and leading change in systemically low-performing Restart schools. In addition, the information gathered will help school districts design processes and procedures for monitoring instruction and creating expectations and support plans for school administrators to lead change.

Problem of Practice Guiding Questions

The questions guiding this Problem of Practice inquiry are:

1. How do principals perceive restart flexibilities around strategic and instructional leadership?
2. How are administrators using Restart Flexibilities in the school?
3. What effect does a systematic instructional monitoring plan have on principal instructional leadership behaviors in Restart schools?

4. How can a systematic monitoring process using classroom walkthroughs influence how principals plan for school improvement using Restart flexibilities?

Overview of Inquiry

This inquiry will employ improvement science methodology on three schools in the Fairview County district that have had consistent difficulty with meeting grade level standards and meeting expected growth. This inquiry will occur in three phases. Each phase will be organized using a Plan-Do-Study-Act, or PDSA cycle (see Figure 11).

PDSA cycles are iterative mini-experiments during which educators articulate improvement changes, carry out the change, study the results, and decide how to proceed (e.g., adopt the change, adapt the change, or abandon the change) (Bryk et al., 2015). Phase 1 will serve as the needs assessment and innovation phase. Phase 2 will involve planning and testing the agreed upon changes for improvement that were developed in Phase 1. Phase 3 is when the data will be collected and analyzed, and the results will be shared to determine the impact and relevance of the inquiry. The overall purpose of using PDSA cycles during the testing phase is to conduct an improvement investigation; during this investigation educators learn quickly and affordably which interventions work and, later, how to adaptively integrate them to attain quality outcomes reliably at scale (Bryk et al., 2015).

Inquiry Partners

Inquiry partners will be utilized throughout the three phases of the inquiry. These inquiry partners will include the district leadership team, principals, instructional coaches/specialists, and school improvement teams. Inquiry partners will be engaged in the process of goal-setting and analyzing outcomes, designing implementation and monitoring processes, and developing communication and feedback opportunities. The implications of this inquiry will affect these

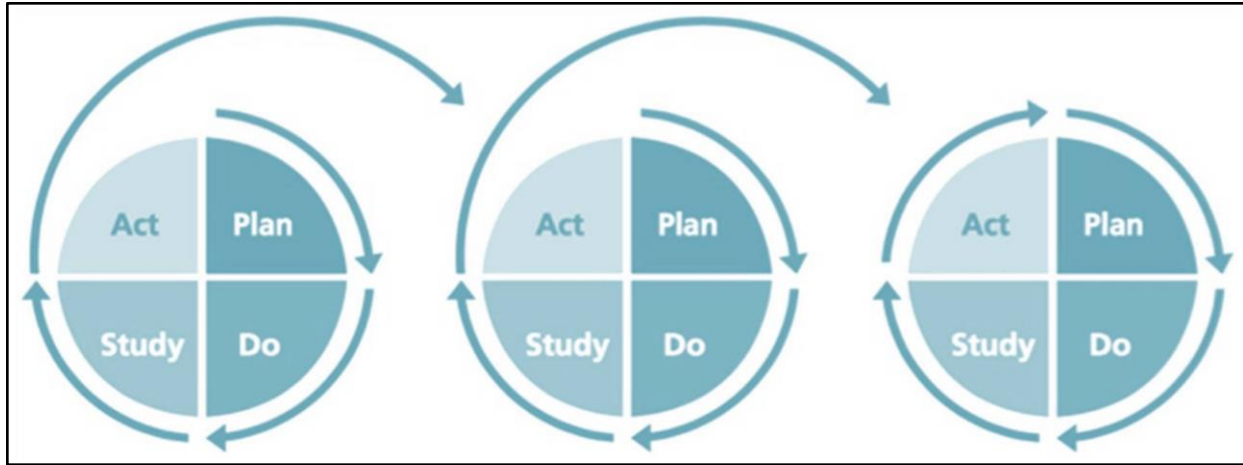


Figure 11. Three phases of Plan-Do-Study-Act, PDSA cycles.

inquiry partners as it may inform planning for professional learning, resource management, designing principal/AP coaching and support, and overall effective school improvement efforts.

Theoretical Framework

Change theory, leadership theory, and transformational theory provide the foundation for this inquiry. This inquiry aims to test the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools. Examining leadership practices to implement classroom walkthroughs that give teachers feedback on instructional delivery will assist school leaders with designing effective processes for monitoring instruction and leading change in systemically low-performing Restart schools. Change theory describes how a change in leadership affects an organization (Lewin, 1947), while leadership theory provided a theoretical foundation for how leaders influence all facets of an organization (Blanchard & Hodges, 2005), and transformational leadership theory identifies effective leaders as charismatic leaders (Avolio & Bass, 1998).

Change Theory

According to Lewin (1947), change can and will affect all people within an organization. However, change will affect different members of an organization in different ways, according to their positions and the leadership (Schein, 1995). Lewin's change model tries to describe the experience of change as it happens in an organization. For Lewin's model, there are three phases: unfreeze, move, and freeze. Phase 1 of change, according to Lewin, is unfreezing. Unfreezing involves examining the current situation of the organization often called a comprehensive needs analysis in education. Lewin's second phase is called "move." The move phase involves taking action or creating a school improvement plan. The final step of Lewin's model of change is "refreeze." Refreeze involves making whatever changes that were implemented permanent;

consistent expectations and part of the overall processes and procedures of the school. Lewin's change management theory helps account for both the uncertainty and resistance to change that can be experienced at all staff levels within an organization. The lack of cooperation between staff members, a general distrust of unproven processes, or the fear of turning away from what has worked in the past are some of the barriers to implementing change. This model aligns to the way in which teachers will respond to the implementation of classroom walkthroughs. This can influence the decisions the school leader will make as a response.

Leadership Theory

Leadership is the result of a relationship between those people within an organization who want to lead and those who are willing to follow (Gallos, 2008). According to Blanchard and Hodges (2005), both leaders and workers must build a relationship based on trust for either to be effective. Increasing worker output by building a strong culture and enhancing worker commitment is also a strong component of leadership theory (Gallos, 2008). Good leaders can build on workers' strengths and can understand their weaknesses to get the most out of them (Bowman, 2005). Leadership in effective schools is based on communication between the leader and teachers, and both play a role in how the culture is created. This theory connects to the feedback piece of a classroom walkthrough process and how the relationship the school leader has with the teachers can impact the outcomes.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that motivates workers above what they believe they can do by focusing them on the goals of the organization (Avolio, 2007). Leaders who have been proven to be the most effective are referred to as charismatic and have a dynamic personality that influences others to follow (Avolio & Bass, 1998). An inference of this inquiry

is that implementing innovative practices using Restart flexibilities and monitoring the effectiveness of those practices with a systematic walkthrough process, will produce leadership styles that will transform the school.

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms will be referred to throughout the inquiry and are defined as follows:

Restart - Restart is one of four Reform models available to LEAs to support the reform of any school designated as Recurring Low Performing (NCDPI, n.d.h).

Reform - Education “reform” comprises any planned changes in the way a school or school system functions, from teaching methodologies to administrative processes (NCDPI, n.d.h).

Turnaround - Turnaround model, which would involve, among other actions, replacing the principal, if the principal has been in that position for at least three years, and rehiring no more than 50% of the school's staff, adopting a new governance structure at the school consistent with this Article, and implementing an instructional program aligned with the Standard Course of Study as defined by G.S. 115C-105.37B.

Transformation - Transformation model, which would address the following four specific areas critical to transforming a continually low-performing school: (a) Developing and increasing teacher and school leader effectiveness; (b) Comprehensive instructional reform strategies; (c) Increasing learning time and creating community-oriented schools; (d) Providing operational flexibility and sustained support as defined by G.S. 115C-105.37B.

Flexibilities - For Restart schools, the school's authorization to use charter-like flexibility is intended to provide more opportunities for school reform. Flexibility may provide the ability

to address specific needs and barriers to school improvement. The use of flexibility will result in strengthening the systems and structures of the school and in turn, result in positive student outcomes (NCDPI, n.d.h).

Low-performing schools - “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 G.S. 115C-83.15. (G.S. 115C-105.37(a).

Recurring Low-performing - Schools that have been on the low-performing list for two out of the past three testing years will be considered “recurring” or “continually” low-performing (NCDPI, n.d.e).

Continually Low-performing - Schools that have been on the low-performing list for two out of the past three testing years will be considered “recurring” or “continually” low-performing (NCDPI, n.d.h).

Innovation - “to think outside of the box” (NCDPI, 2023); to design and implement strategies for school improvement, creating innovative conditions for accelerating student growth and achievement (NCDPI, n.d.h).

Meeting or Exceeding Growth - EVAAS is a value-added growth model that uses EOG (math, ELA/reading, and science) and EOC (NC Math 1, English II, and Biology) assessment data to measure the amount of growth groups of students make in a year. The Growth Score for a school depends upon the EOG and EOC assessments administered in the school. EVAAS calculates a composite index of growth, known as School-wide Accountability Growth Composite, which determines the designation of the school. There are 3 designations of growth: (1) Exceeds Expected Growth, (2) Meets Expected Growth, and (3) Does Not Meet Expected Growth (NCDPI, n.d.c).

Grade Level Proficiency - grade level proficiency means Level III or above on end-of-grade assessments in reading and mathematics in grades 3-8 (NCDPI, n.d.a).

School Improvement – School improvement refers to a systematic way of generating change and development within the schools and makes inquiries on how to enhance student achievement through focusing on the teaching-learning process and the conditions that support this process (Hopkins, 2008).

Multi-Tiered System of Support - Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a framework that helps educators provide academic, behavioral, socio-emotional, and attendance strategies for students with various needs (NCDPI, n.d.i).

Professional Development - Professional development refers to instructors developing and improving their skills to better meet the needs of their students.

NCStar - NCStar is a web-based tool that guides a district or school team in charting its improvement and managing the continuous improvement process. NCStar builds accountability as well as helps schools track their improvement plans (North Carolina State Board of Education, n.d.).

PSU - public school unit or Local Educational Agency [LEA] (NCDPI, n.d.b).

Assumptions

Certain aspects of this inquiry are assumed to be true given the population and research design. In this inquiry there will be three data collection tools utilized: surveys, interviews, and observations. To determine the impact of a systematic walkthrough process on the instructional practices of teachers, the inquiry team will develop a survey to use with classroom teachers at each Restart school. The survey that will be given at the end of the school year to ascertain how teachers changed their practice over time or in contrast did not change any practices. One of the

more common assumptions made in survey research is the assumption of honesty and truthful responses. The same might be true for the second form of data collection, the principal interviews. As part of the inquiry process, interviewing Restart school principals will provide the inquiry with information about the decision making process that the principal goes through when planning walkthrough processes and considering implementing a restart flexibility. Again, there is an assumption that the principals will be honest and truthful in their answers during the interview process. Principals may not be honest because they might feel evaluated as a skilled leader based on their responses. They may exaggerate their level of influence or attribute changes to their actions. The last data collection tool will be observations in the form of a classroom walkthrough tool. Implementing the tool with fidelity and collecting data with inter-rater reliability is another assumption of the inquiry.

The main purpose of assessing inter-rater reliability is to determine the degree to which different raters or observers provide consistent and comparable assessments or judgments (Mertler, 2022). High inter-rater reliability indicates that multiple observers are likely to arrive at the same or very similar conclusions. Several factors can influence inter-rater reliability, including the clarity of the criteria being assessed, the training and experience of the raters, and the complexity of the data or judgments being made (Mertler, 2022). Adequate training and clear guidelines can help improve inter-rater reliability. To establish inter-rater reliability, the principal and I will conduct classroom walkthrough observations collaboratively, working together to make joint assessments and decisions using the walkthrough data collection tool.

Scope and Delimitations

This inquiry aims to test the effectiveness of classroom walkthroughs as a way to improve systemic issues in Restart schools. The scope of this inquiry is three schools in Fairview

County; two elementary schools and one middle school. The scope of the inquiry includes the principals and classroom teachers at the three schools. The size of each schools varies by the number of students served. The three schools are recurring low-performing and have applied for the Restart reform model from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

Delimitations in an inquiry help define the scope and boundaries of research. Some potential delimitations for this inquiry study using classroom walkthrough observations includes the time frame, the school type (Restart) and the observation tool.

Limitations

The primary goal of this inquiry is to examine the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools. In conducting the inquiry, data will be analyzed the relationship between classroom walkthrough observations, feedback, Restart, school improvement, and leadership within low-performing schools in Fairview County. It is important to identify potential limitations. In this inquiry, achievement data are limited to student performance on North Carolina End of Grade (EOG), End of Course (EOC) assessments, mClass data, and iReady data. As such, this inquiry is limited to student achievement in tested subject areas. School improvement is a slow and tedious process. Low-performing schools with successful improvement efforts tend to experience periods of improvement, followed by periods of stagnation or decline, followed by periods of improvement again (Elmore & City, 2007). As such, this inquiry reflects a short time frame to implement Restart and see school improvement. Since the Restart model is new in North Carolina, caution is advised in assessing the long-term impact of Restart on school improvement solely based on this inquiry. Additional limitations include the exact type of participants in the inquiry as their school staff is predetermined. The teachers taking the survey will not truly be a

random sample, which is also a limitation. Outside factors such as changes in leadership and staff turnover might affect the outcomes of the inquiry. The district will be simultaneously implementing tiered supports to help the low-performing schools in the district improve student performance. Some of these supports might include changes in curriculum, professional learning, and independent consultation. These practices may also impact school improvement and leadership decision making practices.

Significance of Inquiry

For decades, educators and policy makers have investigated strategies and programs to improve the quality of education in low-performing schools. The well-meaning, top-down approaches to school reform aimed at turning around failing schools “largely disappoint” (Iyengar et al., 2017). School reform efforts have been difficult to replicate given the challenges that many schools face and that each system is unique. Some challenges include high poverty populations, high English learner (EL) populations, higher exceptional children (EC) populations, limited parent support, not enough funds to secure additional preschools and daycares, and a lot of social and emotional needs of the students and their families. Additional challenges include high teacher turnover rates, teacher attendance issues, and fewer teachers with higher level credentials. Turning around low-performing schools requires a variety of strategies to attend to each challenge within the context of the individual school. Attempts at transforming low-performing schools have led to a growing interest in which approaches are most successful to school reform. Barriers to ensuring the fidelity of traditional school reform models are a major part of the different success outcomes (Kim et al., 2019). Across the United States, a movement to create a new kind of public school is giving districts the freedoms charter schools receive (Kim et al., 2019). Innovation and flexibility are key components of this new approach to school

reform. The Restart program of North Carolina, a new educational policy targeting school reform in low-performing schools, reflects this idea of creativity for school improvement.

The purpose of this inquiry is to test the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools. This work focuses on three schools in the Fairview County district that have had consistent difficulty with meeting grade level standards and meeting expected growth. In this inquiry there will be three data collection tools utilized; surveys, interviews, and observations through walkthrough tools. Using data from End of Grade (EOG) and End of Course (EOC) student assessments, as well as data points from the full SAS EVAAS school-level report cards, this inquiry will analyze the school improvement results through Restart flexibilities on schools that have implemented a systematic monitoring plan as an approach to improving instructional delivery.

Advances in Practice

It is important to understand that North Carolina policy requires that all low-performing schools develop school reform plans that specifically address strategies to improve school performance grades and school growth designations (NCDPI, n.d.e). As Restart is new in educational policy in North Carolina, limited research on the relationship of Restart and school improvement is available. The findings of this inquiry are significant to those districts looking to implement the Restart model in North Carolina. This inquiry is also significant to legislators in North Carolina who make decisions about the long-term role of Restart as a model for school reform. The findings of this inquiry are important for identifying leadership practices that improve performance in recurring low-performing schools. The outcomes of this inquiry may also shed light on how to implement each Restart flexibility more effectively. Finally, the data

from this inquiry are significant to school districts across the state, as they seek systemic school improvement in their low-performing schools.

Summary

This inquiry aims to examine the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools. Examining leadership practices to implement a monitoring plan that includes classroom walkthroughs that give teachers feedback on instructional delivery will assist school leaders with designing effective processes for monitoring instruction and leading change in systemically low-performing Restart schools. The inquiry questions address the effect systematic monitoring plans that include walkthrough processes have on principal leadership skills in Restart schools, the effect a systematic monitoring process impacts instructional planning and delivery, specifically in Restart schools, and the use of classroom walkthroughs influencing how principals plan for Restart flexibilities. There was a lack of research on the use of classroom walkthroughs in turnaround schools. To address this gap in the research, I used improvement science methodology to explore classroom walkthroughs. In Chapter 1, I presented the research problem, the background of the inquiry, the purpose of the inquiry, the conceptual framework, the limitations, the significance, and other pertinent elements of the inquiry. Chapter 2 includes a description of the conceptual framework and its applicability as well as a review of current literature on the instructional leadership role of principals, teacher professional development and learning, reform models and the introduction of Restart, and school improvement. The literature review provides information relevant to validating the inquiry and understanding how classroom walkthroughs can be utilized within systemically low-performing Restart schools to increase the instructional capacity of teachers. Chapter 3 includes the inquiry questions, the inquiry design, detailing the

characteristics of the inquiry participants, and the instruments that are utilized. Chapter 3 will also include the step-by-step procedures followed during data collection, specifying the planned data analysis methods, and providing a rationale for the chosen sample size. This comprehensive treatment of the inquiry methodology supports the credibility and rigor of the inquiry. Chapter 4 serves as a comprehensive presentation of the research findings, offering a detailed account of the data collection process. This chapter incorporates various data displays to visually represent and synthesize results. Chapter 5 synthesizes the outcomes of the inquiry. It begins with a summary of the findings, highlighting the relevance to the inquiry questions posed in Chapter 2. Chapter 5 explores the broader implications of the findings for the field of education and leadership as it relates to improving low-performing schools.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Restart program is a new school reform model in North Carolina that allows autonomy and flexibility for low-performing schools. The Restart program also encourages innovation as a method of improving low-performing schools in North Carolina. The purpose of this chapter is to review literature relevant to this inquiry. The first section of this literature review provides an overview of the Restart Reform Model. The second section provides an in-depth review of school improvement processes and how restart flexibilities drive the work. The third section of this literature review looks at the research on building teacher capacity as it relates to school reform and restart flexibilities. The last section focuses on recruitment and retention of qualified staff. Overall, the research shows that school administrators that implement monitoring plans improve outcomes for students.

Theoretical Framework

Change theory, leadership theory, and transformational theory collectively form the bedrock upon which this investigation is built. By delving into leadership practices geared toward instituting classroom walkthroughs, which offer teachers valuable insights into their instructional methods, educational administrators can equip themselves with the tools required to craft efficient systems for monitoring instruction and spearheading transformation within consistently underperforming Restart schools. Change theory describes how a change in leadership affects an organization (Lewin, 1947), while leadership theory provided a theoretical foundation for how leaders influence all facets of an organization (Blanchard & Hodges, 2005), and transformational leadership theory identifies effective leaders as charismatic leaders (Avolio & Bass, 1998).

These factors shape instructional leadership practices. Instructional leadership is a critical aspect of educational leadership, and it is influenced by various factors. Lewin's Change Theory suggests that any change in leadership can have a significant impact on an organization. Leadership theories, such as the Situational Leadership Theory by Blanchard and Hodges, provide a foundation for understanding how leaders influence various aspects of an organization. Transformational leadership theory emphasizes the role of charismatic leaders who inspire and motivate others to achieve their full potential (Avolio & Bass, 1998). Instructional leaders who embody transformational leadership qualities can have a profound impact on the teaching and learning environment. Effective instructional leadership often relies on data-driven decision-making. Leaders who prioritize instructional monitoring by collecting classroom observation walkthrough data, support teacher growth and impact the quality of instruction in the classroom. These factors interact and shape the role of instructional leaders in educational settings. Effective instructional leadership requires a deep understanding of these factors and the ability to adapt to the dynamic and evolving nature of education. Figure 12 shows the Leadership Framework in Restart schools as a way to conceptualize the leadership theories of practices, and how they shape an effective monitoring plan.

Restart Reform Model

Restart is a reform model adopted by North Carolina. The model is an option for schools that have been designated continually low performing as a means to improve academic performance (Granados et al., 2018). Improving schools that have had consistently low academic scores, high teacher turnover, discipline issues, and low attendance rates has been a problem that many communities have faced for many years (Guarino et al., 2006). Determining what works to improve schools is a complex issue. There are many factors involved from improving teacher

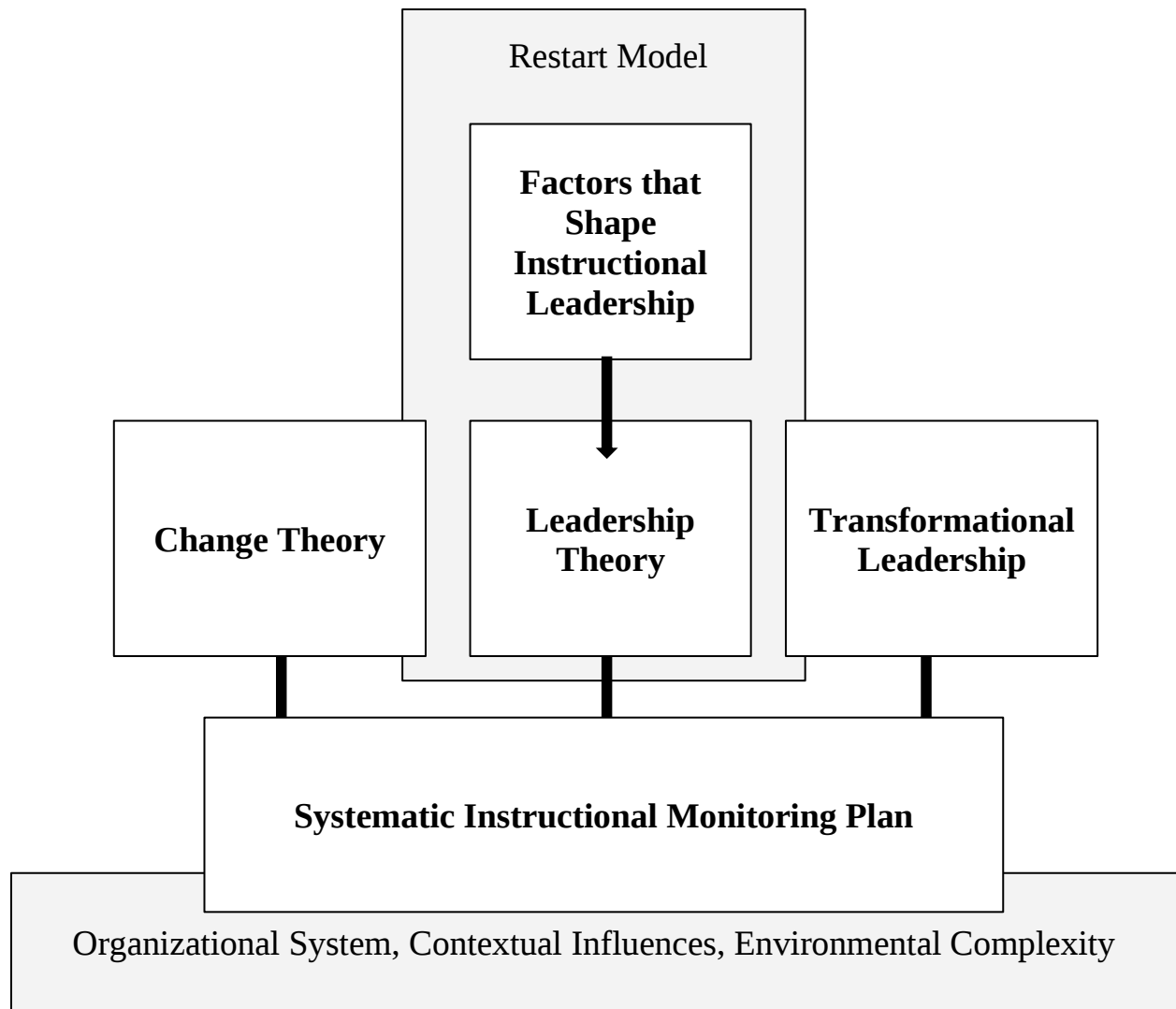


Figure 12. Leadership framework in Restart schools.

capacity, leadership, culture, and community engagement to implementing processes and procedures, data analysis, and management of instructional resources (Fullan & Quinn, 2010). Understanding why the restart model might be advantageous for a district and subsequently how the model is implemented effectively is an important component to improving consistently low performing schools.

Despite significant investments of time and money in school improvement efforts, school reform remains a slow and challenging process for many districts (Desimone, 2002). The fidelity of school reform efforts is part of the lack of progress with school reform efforts. Teacher and leader turnover, lack of buy-in and ownership from all staff, and external challenges that get in the way of school reform are all a part of the challenges with fidelity (Berends et al., 2002; Desimone, 2002; Orland et al., 2008). One of the main challenges in school reform is the determination of the type and level of reform implementation that is effective.

In the past two decades, the United States has made many attempts to reform its schools. As practitioners and researchers learn more about how students learn, different ideas are presented to try to improve schools. In addition, as technology and workforce changes, so do the standards for what is deemed important for what students need to know and be able to do. With new standards comes new instructional strategies to teach those standards. School reform models reenergize and reinvent themselves through societal evolutions. One of the first responses to reform was the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This reform called largely for systemic changes, such as increasing standards and relations, and resulted in increased teachers' salaries, increased core requirements, a lengthened school day and year (Boyer, 1990; Hawley, 1988; Kirst, 1988). The early reform efforts were deemed unsuccessful because it couldn't be sustained without financial support and for relying

primarily on top-down approaches. As a result, new approaches to school improvement and reform were implemented. New reform initiatives focused on broadening and deepening the relationship between schools and families, addressing the needs of special groups of students, attracting and retaining effective teachers, upgrading teacher education, and restructuring teachers' roles to make them more effective (Carnegie Corporation, Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Hawley, 1988; Metz, 1988). Even with early efforts for reform, schools continue to struggle with improving proficiency and growth with the neediest student populations.

After the release of *A Nation at Risk*, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) reported that 30% of nearly 100,000 schools did not meet student achievement goals (Corry & Carlson-Bancroft, 2014). Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), passed in 2016, marks a new era in the focus on reforming low-performing schools. ESSA has adjusted traditionally top-down school reform mandates, allowing states and districts autonomy to implement innovative ways to approach school reform (Burke, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; United States Department of Education, 2020; Zimmer et al., 2017). ESSA allows innovative and flexible provisions to public schools that have traditionally been perceived as barriers to school improvement (Burke, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Zimmer et al., 2017). Examples of flexible and innovative provisions include loosening the requirements for the “highly qualified teacher” (ESSA, 2016) mandate, allowing flexibility in funding allocations, allowing state control over performance ratings, and allowing an expansion of school accountability that goes beyond performance in reading and math.

ESSA is an attempt to strengthen the support of school reform from the state and federal level. ESSA gives states the freedom to choose their school improvement plan; those plans,

however, must meet ESSA standards of evidence (Smith & Wright, 2017). Specifically, ESSA standards of evidence require school improvement plans to include promising, moderate, and strong tiers of evidence-based interventions (Herman et al., 2017). Schools have the ability to choose their school improvement plans but chosen interventions must align with practices and programs that are research-based. Identifying what is research based is essentially one of the issues as to why school reform models are inconsistent and ineffective. However, by delegating to the states responsibility for identifying interventions for persistently low-performing schools, one report argues that ESSA offers opportunities for advocates to leverage the law to support charters or governance-based interventions (i.e., turnaround districts and receiverships) (Smith & Wright, 2017). Through the ESSA, school reform provisions to increase support and flexibility, national school reform models deemed innovative schools and zones have shown promising signs of school improvement (Granados et al., 2018). These improvements may be one of the reasons why the restart reform model became increasingly enticing. Policy makers, educational leaders, and parents sought out choice and the opportunity for innovation.

In response to the inconsistencies and fidelity of implementation and monitoring of the early reform models and because of a renewed focus on the importance of restructuring schools to foster changes in teaching and learning, energy and efforts moved to comprehensive school-wide reform (CSR). Comprehensive school-wide reform focuses on improvement for entire schools rather than on particular populations of students within schools; and it is not limited to particular subjects, programs, or instructional methods (Desimone, 2002).

Comprehensive school reform is currently a popular approach to school improvement and is intended to influence school-wide practices that affect all aspects of schooling like curriculum, instruction, organization, professional development, and parent involvement (Desimone, 2002).

One study points to three main factors relevant to the specificity of a comprehensive school reform model: (a) the locus of development (i.e., whether the model is designed by the school or is externally developed by a design team); (b) the level and type of professional development provided (e.g., curriculum-based professional development that provides lesson plans, as opposed to philosophically based professional development that provides only general guidelines); and (c) information and monitoring provided by design teams and districts (Borman et al., 2002). Comprehensive school reform has aspects similar to that of the Restart model used in North Carolina. The components of curriculum, instruction, organization, professional development, and parent involvement are threaded into the planning tool used to design the written plan. The tool used is called NCStar. NCStar is a web-based tool that guides a district or school team in charting its improvement and managing the continuous improvement process. (NCDPI, n.d.e). In addition, the comprehensive school reform approach looks to improve overall school improvement through multiple means; curriculum, instruction, professional learning, and environment. It underscores the importance of recognizing that reform necessitates a multifaceted approach, involving various perspectives and intricate layers to cultivate an environment conducive to change. It emphasizes that there is no single solution capable of universally enhancing student performance.

The roots of Restart trace back to Race to the Top, a federal grant program under the Obama administration. To meet Race to the Top requirements, North Carolina adopted into law four reform models in 2010: school closure, transformation, turnaround, and restart. Each model required schools to make varying degrees of changes, including firing the principal, rehiring no more than 50% of the staff, or allowing an outside company to manage the school (Granados et al., 2018). Using Race to the Top dollars, the state Department of Public Instruction worked with

struggling schools around the state to help them implement whichever of the four reform models they selected (Granados et al., 2018). Initially, many schools and districts chose other models. Restart didn't begin to gain traction until some accountability and overreaching parameters were removed. In the beginning, the program required school districts to hire an education management organization to run their Restart schools — a requirement not included in the current model (Granados et al., 2018).

In 2015, the Innovation Project (TIP) was started by a small group of education leaders in North Carolina, along with a Raleigh-based law firm, Everett Gaskins Hancock LLP. North Carolina State Superintendent of Education Bill Harrison stated, “We had a conversation about, what is it that successful charter schools are doing that we can't do, that we might be able to model” (Granados et al., 2018, p. 2). Through TIP, five schools in North Carolina were approved to implement the Restart Program in 2016. Similar to national innovation models of school reform, former Superintendent Jim Merrill, Wake County Public Schools, notes that the genesis of Restart is about “entrepreneurialism on the part of district leadership and looking for seams in policy and law where there might be room for creativity, maneuverability, flexibility, and opportunity” (Granados et al., 2018, p. 2). Aligning with ESSA provisions for flexibility, Restart Program allows North Carolina low-performing schools bottom-up, autonomous provisions such as extending the school day, changing the school calendar, flexibility in hiring teachers, and financial flexibility (NCDPI, n.d.h). Being a Restart school is an opportunity to be innovative; to think outside of the box. Restart schools have charter-like flexibility. They have the ability to operate with an exemption from a specific statute and rule. The flexibilities available to Restart include Budget, Employment, Calendar, Standard Course of Study, Assessment, and Class Size. The North Carolina General Statute states:

§ 115C-105.37B “Restart model, in which the State Board of Education would authorize the local board of education to operate the school with the same exemptions from statutes and rules as a charter school authorized under Article 14A of this Chapter, or under the management of an educational management organization that has been selected through a rigorous review process. A school operated under this subdivision remains under the control of the local board of education, and employees assigned to the school are employees of the local school administrative unit with the protections provided by Part 3 of Article 22 of this Chapter” (North Carolina General Assembly, n.d.).

In combination with the flexibility provisions from Restart, low-performing schools in North Carolina are offered support from North Carolina’s Department of Instruction. Support includes an assigned regional case manager to facilitate and support best practices for school reform, individual school coaching on school reform plans, and district and regional support in maximizing the capacity of high-quality educators to serve in the lowest performing districts and schools (NCDPI, n.d.b). Ideally, the combination of support and flexibility would remove barriers that have historically prevented schools from successfully progressing through past school reform models.

The interest in the Restart Program has expanded exponentially since its origination. By the 2017-2018 school year, more than 100 schools were approved to implement the Restart program in North Carolina (Childress, 2019; Granados et al., 2018). As a new school reform policy in North Carolina, as well as a new focus of school improvement throughout the nation, understanding the relationship between innovation and flexibility, increased federal and state support, and school improvement is critical to improving low performing school outcomes.

School Improvement

Improving school performance through the Restart Reform model requires the school to implement effective school improvement processes. This includes electing members to be a part of the school improvement team, creating and implementing a school improvement plan, meeting regularly, using data to monitor the plan, and evaluating the process. Investigations into school improvement practices have shown that a lot of strategies work. Effective school improvement starts with a school improvement team. The team creates a sense of purpose and sets goals for working on school improvement. Often the school improvement team determines norms for how they will work collaboratively and ensure that they hold each other accountable for their work. Effective school improvement teams create processes and procedures for setting agendas, identifying roles, documenting their work, and data analysis. The school improvement team begins with a comprehensive needs assessment. After reviewing the data, the team determines the priority needs. The team might do some research about root causes and strategies that might improve outcomes. The team sets goals, implements action steps, monitors implementation, and evaluates the process. The purpose of this work is to see what works to change adult behavior and/or increase student achievement. Pairing these processes with innovative practices of running a school could create a culture of change and collective agency that could break through the school reform barrier.

School improvement begins with the school improvement team. Federal policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 as well as School Improvement Grants (SIG) have stressed that school improvement plans are vital components of the country's efforts to support interventions to help turn around low-performing schools (Meyers & VanGronigen, 2019; United States Department of Education, 2020). In some

states, school improvement teams are required in all public schools and these teams are responsible for leading legislated school improvement according to a set of laws that require and guide specific procedural steps. In North Carolina, there are state statutes that define some of the regulations. NC general statute § 115C-105.27 contends that the School Improvement Team consists of the principal of each school, representatives of the assistant principals, instructional personnel, instructional support personnel, and teacher assistants assigned to the school building, and parents of children enrolled in the school. Working collaboratively the team develops a school improvement plan to improve student performance. Members of the team are elected by secret ballot. There has to be a parent representative on every school improvement team, meetings are open to the public, and the records are open to the public.

According to the statute all school improvement plans should be data-driven. Also according to the statute, school improvement teams shall use the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) or a compatible and comparable system approved by the State Board of Education to (i) analyze student data and identify root causes for problems, (ii) determine actions to address them, and (iii) appropriately place students in courses such as Algebra I. School improvement plans shall contain clear, unambiguous targets, explicit indicators and actual measures, and expeditious time frames for meeting the measurement standards (North Carolina General Assembly, n.d.). The school improvement team collects academic, behavior, attendance, and social emotional learning data to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement. Based on a root cause analysis, the teams set goals that are SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, timely), and determine strategies and action steps to intervene. As the team implements the actionable steps, they collect data to identify if the actions are meeting the indicators of success and making measurable progress towards the goal.

Strategies in the plan to improve student performance include professional development for staff, school safety measures, duty-free lunch and planning periods, and limitations on reporting processes. School improvement teams create their plans in a web-based tool that guides a district or school team in charting its improvement and managing the continuous improvement process called NCStar (NCDPI, n.d.e). After the school improvement team creates the plan in the web-based tool, the school staff votes on the plan, the plan goes before the local board for approval, and then the plan is implemented for no more than a period of two years.

The purpose of the school improvement team is to create a school plan to improve student performance (North Carolina G.S. § 115C-105.27). Historical research is inconclusive about whether there is a positive relationship between local school improvement initiatives and increased student achievement. Many researchers claimed there is no evidence of such a relationship (Arterbury & Hord, 1991; Conley & Bacharach, 1990; David & Peterson, 1984; Lindquist & Mauriel, 1989). Newer research from the impact of Success in Sight, a comprehensive approach to school improvement, on increasing student academic achievement showed a correlation between school improvement and increased student achievement (Apthorp, 2004). The Success in Sight study aimed to determine whether the approach built school-level capacity to engage in four reform practices: data-based decision making, purposeful community, shared leadership, and effective school practices; these practices have been linked to improved student achievement (Marzano, 2003; Marzano et al., 2001; Marzano et al., 2005). The positive relationships between increased student achievement and site-based decision groups that have been identified in the literature seem to depend on several factors (Marzano et al., 2005). One factor includes the effectiveness of the leadership of the school improvement team (Marzano et al., 2005). Another factor is human resource management or how staff is assigned to certain

grade levels, content areas, or groups of students (Marzano et al., 2005). Effective human resource management also includes hiring practices that recruit employees that are highly qualified. Organizational development is another factor embedded in the model that has the potential to increase student achievement. An example of this would be departmentalizing in one particular grade level to ensure that the teacher that is highly qualified and gets the most growth and higher results impacts more students in a specific content area. The other factors include organizational behavior strategies implemented and the importance of student achievement as a recognizable goal of the process (Cohen, 1989; Cotton, 1992; Fullan & Steigelbauer, 1991; Mitchell, 1990).

Hackman (1990) described a work group or team as having three main attributes. First, the members depend on one another for some shared purpose. The group follows protocols and processes that contain boundaries for the work, interdependence among members, and differentiated roles. Second, the team has one or more tasks to perform, and it produces some outcome for which members have collective responsibility. Tasks are assigned to each member or to all members, timelines are articulated and put into place, and then the team determines the indicator for successful completion. Finally, the group operates in an organizational context. This implies that the group, acting together, oversees its interactions with other individuals or groups within the broader societal framework in which the group is situated (Hackman, 1990).

The literature suggested that school improvement teams will not bring about improvements unless it includes teachers' participation in making decisions in areas that are important to them (Conley & Bacharach, 1990). The school improvement initiatives and strategies need to be relevant to the teachers and aligned to the data that shows a need. A major responsibility of a school improvement team is to help teachers change how they view learning

itself, develop new habits of instruction, and work collegially in public in order to facilitate the types of changes necessary to increase student achievement (Meijer, 1995).

Fullan (1993) stated that teams function more successfully when members have a shared culture that promotes collaboration. They primarily need to take responsibility for the student achievement results of their collective efforts. Some evidence suggests that distributed leadership may have a positive impact on school and student outcomes through effective school improvement teams. Leithwood et al.'s (2006) study that was cited throughout the literature presents 'seven strong claims' about successful school leadership. Two of these 'strong claims' relate to distributed leadership: school leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed; some patterns of distribution are more effective than others. One study concluded that leadership accounted for a significant percentage of the variation in student achievement across schools (Leithwood et al., 2006). This suggests that there are clear benefits from distributing leadership. This is also very reminiscent of Hattie's research on effect sizes. In other literature, Harris (2008, 2010) claims that successful schools have restructured and redesigned themselves so that leadership can be more widely shared and spread.

Leadership is another component of school improvement. Leadership defined as the interaction of multiple leaders and followers using specific tools, protocols, and artifacts around leadership tasks (Spillane, 2006). The interdependencies among the constituting elements – leaders, followers, and situation – of leadership activity are critical in understanding leaders' practices (Spillane, 2006). This concept is directly connected to the adult behaviors on the school improvement team and shared leadership on the team is important. The members work collaboratively to implement the school improvement plan facilitated by the principal. The principal uses a variety of leadership practices to develop trust and build relationships with the

team members. As the instructional leader, the principal may share ideas for the school improvement team to adopt and implement.

To assess the effectiveness of a school improvement team's leadership, the behaviors and practices impacted by the transformational leader or individuals who take on leadership responsibilities must be examined (Blitz et al., 2014). Spillane (2006) do not promote a singular leadership style to accompany a distributed leadership perspective. The literature cites that the implementation of certain leadership styles depends upon resources and experiences. Thus, distributed leadership is a meaningful lens through which leadership is situational and stretched across an organization where activities and practices should be assessed (Blitz et al., 2014).

The literature stressed that principals, as leaders, must articulate the mission and vision of the school as set forth by the school improvement team, with measurable objectives identified in the plan. Setting the expectations for the staff is crucial for school improvement efforts to be successful. To address the various learning needs of all individuals, principals need to be not only leaders of learning organizations or communities but also key designers of plans and structures that support the higher levels of learning that are expected and mandated (Benoliel & Somech, 2018). Principals that spend time building team trust create more effective teams (Benoliel & Somech, 2018). Those principals that also promote a common mission or set expectations for the team receive more collaboration and improved student outcomes (Benoliel & Somech, 2018).

School leadership is key in both managing school culture and enacting change initiatives (Macneil et al., 2009). The culture of the school impacts on how change is enacted (Hinde, 2004). Effective principals understand that positive culture is an important attribute to successful schools (Macneil et al., 2009). Principals' understandings of the school culture can drive

decision-making that will better enact change within their organizations (Macneil et al., 2009). Therefore, a positive school culture as a place where staff are committed to student learning can increase the likelihood that teachers will implement the new ideas to determine effectiveness. It can also be surmised from the literature that effective teams have staff members that are collegial and supportive of each other, share a common vision and goals, and where student achievement, parent commitment and instructional innovation are celebrated. Teachers are more likely to accept changes and take risks if they are part of a positive culture of learning and support (Hinde, 2004). Conversely, teachers in schools with negative cultures oppose change and fear taking risks (Hinde, 2004). Developing a school improvement plan that will foster a collaborative culture includes leadership that reinforces collaboration; this also means that teachers take ownership of results, hold structured collaboration time sacred, and hold collaborative teams accountable for the results (Bernhardt, 2017). Fullen (1993) research indicates that when teachers, specialists, and principals work together to engage in conversations about data and student performance, reach agreements about improvements and interventions, and agree on how they will change the teaching; school wide improvements have a much better chance of succeeding. In each positive culture study, teachers and principals were convinced that proposed changes made sense in their particular situation.

Instructional Capacity

Many factors contribute to a student's academic performance, including individual characteristics and family and neighborhood experiences (Rockoff et al., 2011). But research suggests that, among school-related factors, teachers matter most (Rockoff et al., 2011). When it comes to student performance on reading and math tests, teachers are estimated to have two to

three times the effect of any other school factor, including services, facilities, and even leadership (Rockoff et al., 2011).

Engaging in specific action steps designed to build teacher capacity is common in school improvement efforts. Building capacity is a reflective process that promotes better teaching. Capacity building provides clarity, motivation, application, and experiences for successful intervention implementation (Fullan, 2007). Despite the increase in the use of the term “capacity” (e.g., school capacity, organizational capacity) in education research today, there’s a limited amount of research on schools’ efforts to build it (Borko et al., 2003). The main ideas investigated for the literature review were: (1) defining capacity; (2) collaboration; (3) implementation; and (4) professional development.

The terms organizational capacity and school capacity are often used interchangeably in education research. Fullan (2007) defines capacity building as “the policy, strategy, or action taken that increases the collective efficacy of a group to improve student learning through new knowledge, enhanced resources, and greater motivation on the part of people working individually and together” (p. 58). Spillane and Seashore (2002) referred to capacity as having three components – human capital, social capital, and financial resources – necessary for change. In 2010, Fullan and Quinn referred to it as the “capability of the individual or organization to make the changes required for improvement and involves the development of knowledge, skills, and commitments” (p. 1). These differing definitions show the lack of consensus of what is “capacity building” which makes it hard to identify when measuring outcomes in school reform efforts. Anfara and Mertens (2012) identified five common definitional components across school capacity scholarship: teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions; professional learning communities; program coherence; technical resources; and leadership. All five components are

interrelated and have the potential to affect one or more of the others, yet few studies have been designed to examine all five within one study (Anfara & Mertens, 2012). While many studies of school capacity directly or indirectly focused on teaching and learning, most researchers continue to use the term capacity broadly. Mattos (2011) revealed important interdependence connections among a school's human, organizational, structural, and material capacity types, with changes in organizational capacity more influential in changing educator literacy practice. Recognizing this gap, some researchers have begun defining and studying instructional capacity and instructional capacity building (Adams, 2013; Easley, 2016; Talley & Keedy, 2006).

Schools require different 'supports' for educator development and capacity building. The literature supports a blended approach to capacity building that combines aspects of both professional learning communities and administrative support (Bennett et al., 2014; King & Bouchard, 2011). Teacher collaboration and supportive collaborative cultures have been shown to have a significant positive effect on instruction and student learning, teacher professional development, and teacher well-being (Akin & Neumann, 2013; Kelly & Cherkowski, 2015; Nicholson et al., 2016). One of the most effective ways to build capacity is to provide teachers with dedicated and protected time during the regular school day to reflect on their practices. According to Fullan's (2007) observations, as schools establish professional learning communities, educators continually seek innovative ways to make improvements. Fullan (2007) emphasizes that there is substantial evidence supporting teachers as the primary source of ideas for their peers. Furthermore, he underscores that opportunities for teacher-to-teacher interaction are limited, and for promising ideas initiated by one or more teachers to succeed, the support of their colleagues is essential (Fullan, 2007). Many states have adopted legislation requiring school leaders to create collaborative cultures and structures to increase the instructional capacity of

teachers (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Goodwin & Babo, 2014). Improved collaborative relationships that increase the instructional capacity of teachers can promote greater learning and development of students. Collaboration increases teacher efficacy by providing opportunities for educators to share instructional strategies. The Ohio Department of Education (2015) standards and Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) expanded the role and function of school administrators to develop collaborative relationships to increase the instructional capacity of teachers with the goal of increasing student learning and development. Many states have adopted legislation requiring school leaders to create collaborative cultures and structures within their schools (Poekert et al., 2016). Although there is a large amount of literature demonstrating how positive professional collaborative relationships can increase the professional growth and learning of teachers (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Goddard et al., 2015; Nicholson et al., 2016). Classroom strategies and behaviors, planning and preparation, and teacher reflection on teaching are all improved when school environments exhibit high levels of teacher collegiality and professionalism (Marzano et al., 2011). Collegiality and professionalism include three activities within this domain of teaching: a positive environment where administrators and teachers interact positively with each other, with parents, and with students; freely exchanged strategies and ideas aid in the development of teacher expertise; and school development is promoted through procedures and teacher participation in initiatives (Marzano et al., 2011).

For a school to effectively build its own instructional capacity, it is likely that the evidence-based intervention will need to be clearly defined and understood. The most common description of fidelity of implementation is the degree to which an intervention is delivered as intended by the intervention developers (Carroll et al., 2007). Applied to K-12 curriculum interventions, definitions of fidelity of implementation often reference instructional quality

(O'Donnell, 2008). For instance, Loucks (1983) describes fidelity of implementation as “related to the amount of change that occurs in the teacher’s practice” (p. 5). Often, fidelity of implementation is defined only by adherence to an intervention design (i.e., intervention processes) and is also known as “treatment fidelity” (Desimone, 2002; Kuri et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2005). This medical concept of fidelity is not only restricting because it does not take into account the unpredictability of contexts, conditions, and people within schools, but it views schools as “treating” versus “teaching” students (Desimone, 2002). Instead, implementation science, the study of factors influencing the full and effective use of innovations in practice to determine what is required (National Implementation Research Network, 2015), distinguishes between intervention fidelity (i.e., intervention processes) and implementation fidelity (i.e., implementation processes) (Fixsen et al., 2005). Central to implementation science is having both well-defined intervention features and identified standards for implementation. Fixsen et al. (2005) contend that fidelity of implementation cannot be narrowly contained to just the processes for the intervention. Rather, implementation processes need to be purposeful and described in sufficient detail so that independent observers can detect the presence and strength of a “specific set of activities” related to intervention implementation (Fixsen et al., 2005). Carroll et al.’s (2007) fidelity of implementation definition stresses that the circumstances affecting the implementation of distinct intervention features may be just as important as the intervention features themselves. Because implementation fidelity acts as a potential intermediary between programs and their intended outcomes, it is critical to explore what the influencing implementation elements are for an intervention (Carroll et al., 2007). Every fidelity of implementation element not only affects the intervention processes but also the implementation processes. The activities of implementation (e.g., instructional capacity building) must therefore

be identified just as explicitly as the intervention features (e.g., evidence-based literacy interventions) are (Fixsen et al., 2005). The implementation processes that improve intervention fidelity will be easier to identify and replicate in other schools. Finally, while those in the implementation science field consider intervention adaptation a natural and important part of the implementation process, when it is appropriate to make adaptations has been a source of contention (Fixsen et al., 2005; Meyers et al., 2012).

Professional development, as described by various sources, encompasses a range of activities aimed at enhancing teaching and incorporating positive changes into current practices. Hadar and Brody (2013) define it as a process that involves improving teaching methods. Fullan (2007) characterizes it as comprising workshops, courses, programs, and related endeavors designed to equip teachers with new ideas, skills, and competencies to enhance classroom performance. According to the No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB] (2002), professional development is sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused, extending beyond one-day workshops or short-term conferences. Glickman et al. (2010) extend the definition to any experience that broadens a teacher's knowledge, appreciation, skills, and understanding of their profession. Despite these differing definitions, they all share a common objective: to enhance teaching and classroom practices.

Professional development should meet the goal of improving teachers' instructional knowledge and practice. Desimone (2009) states that professional development is the key to changing teaching practice and the way students learn. A positive school culture is one essential element for effective professional development (Glickman et al., 2010; Postholm, 2012) and a place where it is commonly accepted that teachers have a teaching practice. However, Fahey and Ippolito (2014) are sure that schools need to also be a palace where teachers have a learning

practice. Expecting only ideas coming from outside of the school to meet the demands of professional development and cause changes in instructional practice is a mistake and will not be effective in moving teachers forward in implementing new teaching practices (DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2007).

Job-embedded, site-based professional development is the best avenue for educators to continue to grow and improve their practice (Alber & Nelson, 2010; DuFour, 2004; Glickman et al., 2010; Wood & McQuarrie, 1999). On-site professional development allows teachers to collaborate closely with peers (Butler et al., 2004; Strong et al., 2004) and to build existing knowledge as a springboard for moving learning forward (Strong et al., 2004). A school's instructional system is more complex to understand and evaluate because it encompasses several major components including curriculum, instructional materials, assessment, and professional development, and all those components must be considered when determining capacity of the instructional system (Century, 2000).

North Carolina School Executive Standards

Assessing principals has consistently shown potential for enhancing their effectiveness, promoting learning and reflection, and heightening accountability for job performance (Orr, 2011). Performance evaluation is particularly important for principals because they report having few opportunities to receive trusted feedback on their work and commonly feel isolated from colleagues due to the rigors of their position (Friedman, 2002). Performance evaluation provides a method for principals to receive feedback on their practices from an evaluator. In 2006, the North Carolina State Board of Education and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction created the North Carolina Standards of School Administrators or School Executives (NCDPI, 2016). In the description of the standards, the NCDPI (2016) developed the standards:

as a guide for principals and assistant principals as they continually reflect upon and improve their effectiveness as leaders throughout all of the stages of their careers.

Although there are many influences on a school executive's development, these standards will serve as an important tool for principals and assistant principals as they consider their growth and development as executives leading schools in the 21st century. (p. 2)

The NCDPI (2016) emphasized that these standards play a multifaceted role, serving not only as an assessment tool but also as an integral resource for informing higher education programs. Furthermore, the executive standards contribute to sharpening the focus of school districts in supporting their administrators by offering valuable guidance for the development of targeted professional learning opportunities. Additionally, these standards serve as a compass for mentoring and coaching initiatives directed at school-based administrators.

The NCDPI organized the best practices into seven standards. The NCDPI's (2011, p. 4-8) seven school executive standards are:

1. Standard One: Strategic Leadership. The principal leads the school staff in constant reflection of their vision, mission, and goals. The administrator guides the school through constant inquiry on how it prepares students for the future.
2. Standard Two: Instructional Leadership. The principal creates an environment in which the staff is accountable for the performance of their students. The administrator leads the staff in the use of the best instructional practices and spurs collaboration between teachers.
3. Standard Three: Cultural Leadership. The principal fosters a positive school culture focused on student achievement. He or she understands school traditions and values

and uses them to create a sense of pride. When necessary, the principal leads the school community to shape its culture into a more positive one.

4. Standard Four: Human Resource Leadership. The principal creates a professional learning community through recruitment, induction, support, evaluation, development, and retention of high-performing staff.
5. Standard Five: Managerial Leadership. The principal organizes the school and its systems in a manner that ensures efficiency and effectiveness in practices.
6. Standard Six: External Development Leadership. The principal engages the community in the support and ownership of its schools.
7. Standard Seven: Micro-political Leadership. The principal uses diversity and constructive differences between staff members to push the school toward its goals. The administrator uses his or her awareness of staff needs, issues, and interests to build cohesion.

In summing up these seven standards, the standards are interconnected and that a school principal's abilities in each standard will impact their ability to perform effectively in other standard areas.

Principal evaluation systems provide credible evidence and actionable feedback on school principal performance, which can be used by principals to improve their practice (Goe et. al, 2014). The evaluations measure principal effectiveness and are intended to inform professional development, instructional improvement and growth. Principal evaluation systems provide district leaders with evidence of principal performance, which can be used for decisions about job retention, advancement, and compensation (Goe et. al, 2014). Principals can play an important role in evaluating teachers and creating conditions amenable to teacher learning.

Principal evaluation systems can reinforce the importance of principals' roles in teacher accountability and professional learning as well as compliance with teacher evaluation practices (Goe et. al, 2014).

Moreover, a comprehensive review of the research on school leadership found that the quality of the principal alone accounts for 25% of a school's impact on student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). The importance of the principalship is increasingly understood by policymakers at all levels of the American public education system (Orr, 2011). Nearly all states and most Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have adopted school leadership standards identifying what principals should know and be able to do. These standards often form the basis of policies related to principal licensure, training, and evaluation. Principals engage in multiple types of leadership within their role of leading a school including Strategic Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Cultural Leadership, Human Resources Leadership, Managerial Leadership, External Development Leadership, and Micro-political Leadership. Principals must ensure processes, procedures, and protocols are in place to ensure adequate time is devoted to instructional leadership. Prioritizing instructional leadership by the principal is critical to the school's success and increasing student achievement. "An instructional leader is one who creates a climate that puts learning first for students and adults, has contagious enthusiasm and excitement about learning, creates a climate free of distractors, has clear priorities for instruction, and high expectations for students and teachers" (Hattie, 2016)

Principal Leadership

Reviewing the literature provides insight to how principals use effective principal leadership practices to improve teacher planning and instruction. Researchers have identified instructional leadership as an important factor in student achievement; however, conclusions

vary regarding the essential skills required to be a successful instructional leader (Hornig et al., 2010). Hallinger and Murphy (1986) found that the most influential effect of the principal is his or her ability to shape the school's vision and mission. The mission of empowering staff and gaining buy-in for the vision is essential to successful implementation (Thornton, 2010). A leader's capacity to inspire and motivate their staff to challenge what is considered the norm for the benefit of students necessitates a well-defined vision and meticulous execution. A good leader is a visionary, who uses a variety of ways to give people hope and meaning (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Many researchers have developed enough confidence in classroom walkthroughs to be able to call them a transformative tool with the power to provide meaningful data to support leaders, teachers, and student achievement (Bloom, 2007; Brown & Coley 2011; Stephens, 2011). The purpose of feedback from walkthroughs is to help improve lessons and instructional strategies. The most effective and telling feedback that teachers will receive is from the purposeful interaction with the principal (Fullan, 2007). Instead of evaluating teachers for accountability's sake, effective principals grow teaching practice by providing feedback from classroom observations (Fullan, 2007).

In the current structure of public education, the principal is typically the person held accountable for all decisions within a school (Ross & Gray, 2006). The top two ingredients to turning around any school are great teachers and a great principal. The impact of school leadership is recognized as second only to teaching regarding school influences on student success (Leithwood et al., 2006). The principal is expected to coach, mentor and support teachers as they approach the difficult task of promoting high levels of student achievement in a standards-based, accountability-oriented environment (Marzano et al., 2005). The movement

toward instructional leadership calls for the principal to further their leadership role by becoming familiar with the instructional practices actually occurring in their schools (Kachur et al., 2010). When a principal can help a teacher feel like they can be successful in an activity, then the likelihood of success increases (Ross & Gray, 2006). This concept is called teacher efficacy. A principal should be able to build on a teacher's strength (Bowman, 2005) and allow teachers access to other teachers' teaching styles (Hausman & Goldring, 2001).

Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) showed that principal leadership affects teacher commitment and overall morale. High quality instruction will increase as a result of good leadership (Martin & Epitropaki, 2001). If principals can raise teacher morale, then teacher effectiveness will increase (Martin & Epitropaki, 2001). MacKenzie (2007) found a significant relationship between teacher morale and student success. According to Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) a principal should focus on influencing the teachers and the overall organization of the school because he or she is unable to directly affect student success.

School leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school (Louis et al., 2010). Effective principals promote an inclusive and equitable educational environment by attracting, supporting, and learning of high-quality teachers by supporting professional development, promoting a climate of collaboration, time, resources, and effective teacher evaluations systems that provide explicit feedback on effective instructional strategies (United States Department of Education, 2020). Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) state that principals need to be strategic in their planning to focus their time, attention, and energy towards classroom instruction and organizational management over administrative activities.

Walkthroughs are often described as “snapshots” with the unique power to reflect stories within educational settings, including the instructional strategies in use at a school and indicators of student learning (Allen & Topolka-Jorissen, 2011; Bole & Farizo, 2013; Kachur et al., 2010). Walkthroughs are often described as “snapshots” with the unique power to reflect stories within educational settings, including the instructional strategies in use at a school and indicators of student learning (Allen & Topolka-Jorissen, 2011; Bole & Farizo, 2013; Kachur et al., 2010). Mentoring and peer coaching became a significant part of the educational landscape in the 1980s and 90s, and walkthroughs arose as a way for school leaders to participate in this newly supportive form of school improvement (Bloom, 2007; Garza et al., 2016; Protheroe, 2009). The school leader doing the walkthroughs needs to learn how to capture data that can be put to use in a way that is meaningful, objective, and (again) nonjudgmental (Feeney, 2014; Larson, 2007). No classroom walkthrough approach is necessarily exhaustive or perfect. But when guided by the fundamental components described above, any of them can contribute to systematic school improvement (Bloom, 2007). Performing walkthroughs may help staff feel that leaders have a greater awareness of the school setting, instructional practices, curriculum, and the ways that students and teachers are doing well or struggling (Brown & Coley, 2011; Ginsberg & Murphy, 2002; Westcott, 2010). In the course of a walkthrough a leader can gain knowledge that helps inform staff professional development, as well as builds rapport with students and supports their needs (Brown & Coley, 2011). Once they witness the school leader’s commitment to ongoing school renewal, staff may be more likely to partner in continuous improvement efforts (Ginsberg & Murphy, 2002). Schools with an active walkthrough process may actually arrive at better instructional practices than those without (Garza et al., 2016) when the walkthroughs are used to tailor professional development to teachers’ needs. Teachers have reported increased satisfaction,

self-efficacy, and positive attitudes when walkthroughs are used regularly in their school (Brown & Coley, 2011). And when walkthroughs are focused on improved classroom instruction, teachers say they perceive their principal—and the entire school—as more effective (Ing, 2013).

Recruitment & Retention of Teachers

High-quality teachers are critical to raising student achievement in low-performing schools, but schools most in need often have difficulty in attracting and retaining high-quality teachers. The Restart model and the flexibilities allowed with budget, employment, calendar, class size, assessment and curriculum might be the way to recruit and retain high quality teachers to low performing schools.

Many strategies have been proposed to close the achievement gap for recurring low-performing schools: smaller classes, smaller schools, standards-based reform, whole-school reform, lengthening the school day, lengthening the school year, before- and after-school programs, charter schools, and parental involvement. However, it is more likely that having highly qualified teachers and the ability of the school leadership to retain them is what will improve student performance (Rockoff et al., 2011). Many have suggested that school districts should create incentives that influence well-qualified teachers to select and remain in the schools that serve students with the greatest needs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

Teacher recruitment and retention, particularly in hard to staff schools, has historically impacted students' academic success. The real teacher retention crisis is not the failure to retain enough teachers, according to the New Teacher Project study of 90,000 teachers in four urban school districts, it is the failure to retain the right teachers as most of the schools studied failed to have a solid recruitment or retention strategy. A report on recruitment and retention described the vast and critical challenges of teacher recruitment in priority schools (Morris et al., 2020). The

study emphasized that the pool of talented teacher candidates was too small and there was a need to identify programs and potential partners in order to widen the pipeline of highly-qualified teachers in struggling schools. The National Center for Educational Statistics presented a study in 2011-2012 that included 16,990 public schools across the United States. One of the key findings revealed that over 48% of schools utilized pay incentives to attract teachers to work in less desirable subjects and locations (Goldring et al., 2013). This illustrates the importance of teacher quality and its consequential impact, particularly when school districts aim to tackle challenges related to teacher recruitment and retention. Highly qualified and effective teachers are needed in priority schools and are an essential element necessary to impact student achievement. The Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (ESSA) in several states focused on school turnaround in 2012 by developing state run school districts, and an option for local districts to utilize innovative structures to turnaround identified priority schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). One of the major components of turnaround initiatives in priority schools was implementing customized strategies and techniques to recruit and retain highly effective teachers, as measured by EVAAS to significantly impact student achievement. Irvine and Fenwick (2011) found that the problem of poor teacher retention and recruitment efforts had an adverse effect on the entire community, but the impact in areas that serve students in priority or low- income communities was even more devastating. Teacher recruitment and retention is a historical issue and continues to increase as districts with high priority schools work to address factors that perpetuate lack of applicants and high teacher turnover rates (Agyei & Christopher, 2016).

Shortages in the United States are most apparent in rural and urban schools that serve students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Guarino et al., 2006; Sutchter et al., 2016). Many

states face the challenge of hiring and retaining high-quality teachers. Finding such teachers is particularly difficult in the areas of math, science, and special education. The shortage of qualified teachers in these fields poses special challenges for schools serving large numbers of low-income and low-performing students. Because many teachers tend to view such schools as less attractive places in which to teach than schools serving higher-performing students, such schools are likely to be in a weaker position to attract and retain quality teachers in fields in which there are shortages. Some educators and policy makers have advocated a policy of higher pay as part of the solution to the challenges these schools face. Salaries are often a determinant of teachers' decisions to stay at a school. Existing studies suggest that observed salary differentials are often insufficient to compensate teachers for differences in working conditions associated with low student test scores, high poverty rates, or high concentrations of minority students (Boyd et al., 2005; Hanushek et al., 1999; Murnane et al., 1991). In recent years, a number of states have experimented with various types of bonus programs, although only a few have targeted low-income or low-performing schools. High turnover rates are devastating to schools because they are disruptive and because they force administrators to hire large numbers of new teachers, many of whom are likely to be novice teachers. Regardless of how effective novice teachers may eventually become, they are undoubtedly less effective at raising student achievement than are more experienced teachers (Clotfelter et al., 2006).

Since 2013-14, student performance data have been used to assign letter grades to North Carolina public schools as required by North Carolina General Statute 115C-83.15 (NCDPI, n.d.g). The grades are based on each school's achievement score (weight of 80%) and each school's students' academic growth (weight of 20%). An important aspect to consider is how the accountability system affects the allocation of teachers to schools, and in particular the

willingness of high-quality teachers to teach in low-performing schools. The accountability system in most states discourages the best teachers from working in the schools with the largest populations of low-performing students. The accountability program could limit the ability of those schools to raise the achievement of their students. Teachers who leave low performing schools describe being frustrated with expectations regarding accountability, class size, paperwork, student attitudes, lack of parental and administrative support, perceptions of the low status of the profession, and low salaries (Kersaint et al., 2007). Teachers who leave do not always feel valued or supported.

The issue of retaining teachers is really one of retaining quality teachers who positively influence student learning, not just retaining all teachers. Teachers who feel effective with their students are more likely to stay. Teachers in collaborative, collegial environments are more likely to stay. Increased pay is positively associated with retention; however, it is not sufficient to overcome poor working conditions. Turnover is highest among high poverty, high minority schools. Many factors contribute to increasing teacher retention.

Summary

Restart schools are a type of education reform strategy implemented in the United States (Granados et al., 2018). These schools are often part of the broader school improvement and turnaround efforts. Restart schools are typically public schools that have been struggling academically and are given the opportunity to operate with increased flexibility. The idea behind restart schools is to bring about positive changes by implementing innovative practices. School improvement refers to a systematic and continuous process of enhancing the quality of education and overall performance of a school (North Carolina General Assembly, n.d.). It often involves assessing and addressing various aspects of a school's functioning, such as curriculum, teaching

methods, student achievement, and school culture. Strategies for school improvement can include professional development for teachers, data-driven decision-making, and community engagement. Principal leadership plays a crucial role in school improvement (Marzano et al., 2005). Effective principals create a positive school culture, set clear expectations, and provide instructional leadership (Heck & Hallinger, 2014). They are responsible for fostering a safe and supportive learning environment, supporting teachers' professional growth, and managing resources efficiently. Transformational leadership, which inspires and motivates teachers and students, is often emphasized in effective principal leadership (Corry & Carlson-Bancroft, 2014). Monitoring practices in education involve the systematic collection and analysis of data to track school performance and progress toward specific goals. Data can include student test scores, attendance rates, behavior records, and teacher evaluations. The use of data-driven decision-making allows educators and administrators to identify areas of improvement and adjust strategies accordingly. It's important to note that effective school improvement efforts are often tailored to the specific needs and challenges of each school or district (Corry & Carlson-Bancroft, 2014). Principals engage in multiple types of leadership within their role of leading a school. Leadership, data monitoring, and reform models may vary widely based on local context and education policies. Chapter 3 will outline the inquiry methodology and methods used to answer the inquiry questions. Chapter 3 will outline the inquiry with instrumentation, data collection and analysis methods, ethical considerations, limitations and assumptions, and describe the impact of the inquiry on educational reform.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY

This inquiry aims to examine the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools. In low-performing Restart schools, keeping highly qualified and effective teachers is a challenge. Low-performing schools have more mobility with staff, more beginning teachers, and more residency license staff. As a result, many of the teachers in the low-performing schools lack the knowledge and skills to improve student performance. Highly qualified and effective teachers are needed in priority schools and are an essential element necessary to impact student achievement. School administrators increase teacher effectiveness by monitoring instruction and providing timely feedback. Feedback to teachers makes the learning visible (Hattie, 2009). Consistently low performing schools can apply for restart flexibilities that follow the ‘Turnaround Schools’ model for innovation. Being a Restart school is an opportunity to be innovative; to think outside of the box. School administrators use Restart flexibilities to reduce barriers to improving achievement. Examining leadership practices to implement a monitoring plan that includes classroom walkthroughs that give teachers feedback on effective delivery of instruction will assist school leaders with designing effective processes for monitoring instruction and leading change in systemically low-performing Restart schools.

Problem of Practice Guiding Questions

This inquiry is guided by the following questions:

1. How do principals perceive restart flexibilities around strategic and instructional leadership?
2. How are administrators using Restart Flexibilities in the school?

3. What effect does a systematic instructional monitoring plan have on principal instructional leadership behaviors in Restart schools?
4. How can a systematic monitoring process using classroom walkthroughs influence how principals plan for school improvement using Restart flexibilities?

Inquiry Design and Rationale

This inquiry aims to examine the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools. Examining leadership practices to implement a monitoring plan that includes classroom walkthroughs that give teachers feedback on instructional delivery will assist school leaders with designing an effective process for monitoring instruction and leading change in systemically low-performing Restart schools. This inquiry will employ improvement science methodology with an explanatory sequential, mixed methods design. This inquiry will occur in three phases. Each phase will be organized using a Plan-Do-Study-Act, or PDSA, cycle. PDSA cycles are iterative mini-experiments during which educators articulate improvement changes, carry out the change, study the results, and decide how to proceed (e.g., adopt the change, adapt the change, or abandon the change) (Bryk et al., 2015).

A mixed-methods research is described as a combination of quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, and concepts into a single study where the research utilizes the strengths of both methodologies (Johnson & Onwegbuzie, 2004). This type of design uses both qualitative and quantitative data from multiple perspectives within the study in order to retrieve a more comprehensive understanding of the problem of practice in the study (Mertler, 2022). The explanatory sequential approach is a sequential method that is utilized when the researcher is expecting to follow up the quantitative data with qualitative data. The qualitative data is used in

data disaggregation and interpretation to clarify the results from the quantitative data used in the study (Mertler, 2022). For the purposes of this inquiry, the quantitative data analysis provides the information to address the question of restart flexibility impact. The qualitative walkthrough data, surveys and interviews will provide descriptive information that will provide insight and possible explanations for the quantitative results. A qualitative method allows participants and the researcher a more personal rapport (Seidman, 2006) during interviews. Additionally, qualitative methods allow for information that is not as readily discerned through a quantitative approach (Merriam, 1998).

Change depends on the culture, learning, and the change-process leaders choose to take during a specific amount of time. This approach depends on the leader/researcher's applicability of knowledge/truth and theory, which enables differing paradigms that offer different perspectives (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Heppner & Heppner, 2004; Patton, 1997; Seidman, 2006).

Working collaboratively with my inquiry partners, I intend to provide professional learning of effective monitoring practices. To determine if strategic and instructional leadership practices are impacted a systematic walkthrough process will be implemented. Restart documents will be analyzed to determine if principals use if restart flexibilities improve. Additionally, a teacher focus group will be conducted, survey data from principals will be collected, and interview data will be collected. The data from the classroom walkthroughs will offer an opportunity for quantitative analysis to investigate a relationship between strategic and instructional leadership decisions and Restart flexibilities.

Classroom visits conducted by principals are oftentimes simply too limited in their frequency (Warring, 2015). They may also lack strategic focus with unclear expectations and

purpose. Furthermore, classroom walkthroughs conducted frequently are rarely if at all shared in data format with the classroom teachers (Whitehurst, 2015). Applying the Improvement Science framework, I will investigate how implementing a monitoring plan may influence instructional leadership practices in Restart schools by collecting classroom walkthrough data with school principals. Furthermore, the data from the classroom walkthroughs will offer an opportunity to investigate a relationship between leadership behaviors and using Restart flexibilities captured in the flexibility monitoring templates and school improvement plan. Instructional practices will be measured by the classroom walkthrough data. In doing so, investigating the change intervention may provide findings that support the momentum for change towards greater implementation of the restart flexibilities found to be connected or correlated to student learning and achievement.

Context of Study

Implementing classroom walkthroughs in systemically low-performing schools may provide insight on how desired instructional delivery practices as a result of timely feedback, collaborative conversations, and professional dialogue at Restart schools in North Carolina will impact principal leadership strategies. The scope of this inquiry is three schools in Fairview County; two elementary schools and one middle school. The three schools are recurring low-performing and have been designated Restart. Bunker Elementary (PK-5) is a low-performing, F School. In 2022, they did not meet growth. In the 2022-2023 school year, Bunker had 663 students. It is a Title 1 school with about 82% economically disadvantaged and 21% EC. Bunker has a diverse population: 55% Black, 25% White, 15% Hispanic, 5% Multi or 'Other'. Bunker is the feeder school for Hook Middle. Hook Middle (6-8) is a low-performing, C School. In 2022 Hook Middle Met growth as measured by EVAAS. In the 2022-2023 school year, Hook had 582 students. It is a Title 1 school with about 64% economically disadvantaged and 18% EC. Hook

also has a diverse population: roughly 40% Black, 36% White, 14% Hispanic, 5% Multi or ‘Other’. The third school is Mulligan Elementary (PK-5). Mulligan is a low-performing, F School. In 2022, Mulligan did not meet growth. Mulligan had 391 students in the 2022-2023 school year. It is a Title 1 school with about 85% economically disadvantaged and 14% Exceptional Children. Mulligan has a high English Learner population with 56% Hispanic, 34% White, 10% ‘Other’.

Changing the professional behaviors of teachers at three Restart schools in Fairview County Schools was necessary, as evidenced by the academic growth history on the North Carolina School Report Card accountability model. The three Restart schools have been continually low-performing (LP). As seen in Table 3, the two elementary schools did not meet expected growth and received an ‘F’ on the NC Report Card. The middle met growth and got a ‘C’ on the NC Report Card; however, redistricting may have led to a one-year improvement in academic achievement.

The schools used in this inquiry have some commonalities in systemic issues related to school improvement. Overall common patterns include the need to improve incorporating engagement strategies, differentiation, and rigor into classroom lessons. The schools also need to work on using data more effectively to drive instruction, improve pacing of lessons, and implement a variety of instructional strategies. The administrators at the schools did not effectively implement a process for monitoring and providing feedback on instruction. According to the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2007), a walkthrough is a “brief, structured, non-evaluative classroom observation by the principal that is followed by a conversation between the principal and the teacher about what was observed” (p.

Table 3

Restart Schools in Fairview County Growth & Performance Grades 2021-2022

School	Index	Growth Indicator	Grade	Score
Bunker Elementary	-5.73	Does Not Meet Expected Growth	F	39
Mulligan Elementary	-3.19	Does Not Meet Expected Growth	F	38
Hook Middle School	-0.89	Meet Expected Growth	C	55

1). The intended outcome of classroom walkthroughs is that teachers closely examine their practices and become increasingly reflective, self-directed, critical thinkers focused on continually improving their teaching (Kachur et al., 2010). Examining leadership practices to implement classroom walkthroughs that give teachers feedback on instructional delivery will lead change in systemically low-performing Restart schools.

Inquiry Partners

Inquiry partners will be utilized throughout the three phases of the study; Phase 1 to analyze data and provide feedback on instruments, Phase 2 to analyze implementation data, and Phase 3 making inferences of impact. Inquiry partners include the district leadership team and school-based leaders. The district leadership team in Fairview County meet weekly as part of their communication and collaboration plan to align work to the district strategic plan. The team is comprised of the directors and assistant directors from all the departments in the district. The team meets weekly to plan for board meetings, collaborate on district initiatives, plan for meetings, analyze data, and monitor support plans. As a member of the team, I will work closely with my colleagues on the design of this inquiry. Each department supports the Restart schools in one way or another like approving Title funds, implementing grants, allocating resources, standards unpacking, and scheduling. Their input through the process will be ongoing and already part of a tiered support plan for schools. Figure 13 shows how collaborative inquiry partners will participate in the process through each phase of the PDSA cycle. Engagement in the inquiry will be captured through the weekly agendas, a commitment plan for focus schools, planning documents, district walkthrough data, and differentiated professional development for identified schools. I will also work closely with my direct supervisor on the implementation of

Phase	Role in the Process
Phase 1 PLAN	Identify the Issue or Problem: In the first stage, the team identifies a specific educational issue, problem, or area that needs improvement. Formulate Research Questions: Once the issue is identified, the team helps to frame the inquiry questions.
Phase 1 DO	Collect Data: Collaborators gather data related to the inquiry questions; quantitative student achievement data, growth data, perception data, behavior data, and attendance data.
Phase 1 STUDY	Analyze Data: After data collection, the team collaboratively analyzes the data to draw insights and identify patterns or trends.
Phase 1 ACT	Develop Action Plans: Based on the findings from the data analysis, the team develops action plans or strategies to address the identified problem or improve the educational practice; professional learning on monitoring practices.
Phase 2 PLAN	Create a timeline for Implementation: The team will work together to determine how and when to collect implementation data.
Phase 2 DO	Implement Changes: The collaborative team studies the classroom observation walkthrough data to put the action plans into practice, making the necessary changes to implementation and fidelity
Phase 2 STUDY	Monitor Progress: Collaborators continuously monitor the progress and impact of the implemented changes.
Phase 2 ACT	Mid-course Corrections: The team may make changes to the implementation based on data to assess whether the changes are leading to the desired improvements.
Phase 3 PLAN	Reflect and Revise: The team engages in reflection and ongoing dialogue about the effectiveness of the changes. If the desired outcomes are not achieved, the team revises the action plans and implements further changes as needed.
Phase 3 DO	Develop a plan to collect outcome data.
Phase 3 STUDY	Carry out plan to collect End-of-Year (EOY) school discipline data, performance data, NCTWC survey data, evaluation data and walkthrough data.
Phase 3 ACT	Share Findings and Insights: Share finding broadly with stakeholders, determine whether to continue, expand, or discontinue walkthrough processes as designed.

Figure 13. Collaborative inquiry partners.

this inquiry. Feedback and analysis will be provided bi-weekly and captured in the meeting notes.

Additional collaborative inquiry groups were used during the pilot study and during Phase 2 of the inquiry process (see Table 4). Non-Restart school principals were used to pilot the walkthrough tool, principal survey, principal interview questions, and teacher focus group questions. These collaborative inquiry partners engaged in the process of collecting and analyzing data during Phase 2 to identify professional development and coaching need for effective implementation.

Ethical Considerations

Ensuring ethical processes and procedures are met will be imperative for my inquiry. I engaged in ongoing dialogue and content review with my dissertation committee chair throughout the development and implementation of the inquiry. I utilized the Institutional Review Board (IRB) processes to ensure the action research inquiry will be both useful to the educational community and safe for human subjects involved throughout the inquiry (see Appendix A for IRB approval). Focusing on the safety of human subjects throughout the inquiry, I conducted all data collection processes with transparency. Surveys and interviews will be used in this inquiry. Anonymous surveys were made available and treated with confidentiality to ensure human participant safety. Each participant filled out a survey independently without any outside influence. The participants' survey results were completely anonymous to follow the policies set forth by East Carolina University Institutional Review Board. Participants had the ability to opt out at any time. Examples of the participant consent form can be found in Appendix B. Each participant received a participant consent form that included the right to willingly participate, the purpose of the inquiry, procedure of the inquiry,

Table 4

Collaborative Inquiry Partners during the Pilot Study

Collaborative Inquiry Partners	Piloting Instruments
Green Elementary Principal	Walkthrough Tool
Principals from other schools in the district	Principal Survey
School administrators/Curriculum Specialists	Principal Interview
School administrators/Curriculum Specialists	Teacher Focus Group Interview

and a right to ask for a copy of the results. This inquiry will be done under the assumption that all participants are open and honest concerning their answers and will not be under any outside influence affecting their responses. Each of the participants will be given one survey and be given ample amount of time for them to be completed. The surveys will be distributed during the standard school year and two weeks will be provided to ensure that the school day will be not disturbed.

Grade level proficiency data, school growth data, attendance data, and other relevant school data sources will be used in this inquiry for the purpose of making connections and inferences to leadership practices. Student achievement data will be collected from the school district data dashboard for each Restart school. No student names or any other student information will be used in this inquiry. Student rights were protected according to East Carolina University IRB.

Permission will be requested to conduct the inquiry in the Fairview School District. The mixed-methods explanatory sequential inquiry will be sent to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. A copy of the approval letter to conduct this inquiry will be placed in Appendix A as verification of approval from the IRB regarding procedures, protocol and methodology for this inquiry. After obtaining IRB approval to conduct the inquiry, I used principal survey, teacher focus groups, a classroom walkthrough observation tool and a principal interview as the major data collections methods. School improvement plans and monthly meetings minutes, Restart Annual Reports, and Restart flexibility planning templates were analyzed for strategic and instructional leadership behaviors and decisions.

In addition to survey, interview, achievement, and walkthrough data, qualitative data will be collected during school visits. Examples of qualitative data collected are observation notes

during school improvement team meetings, meetings with school leadership team, and district professional development. The observations notes taken were directly related to change implemented; classroom walkthroughs. All engagement with the site-based school improvement teams and/or individual team members occurred beyond the school hours. I accommodated participants at other times during the day, such as teacher planning periods, as a measure to honor their time after hours and minimize disruption to student learning. During any time throughout the research inquiry, individual inquiry participants could request to opt-out of surveys and interviews, if so desired. When the research inquiry will be completed, the results of the inquiry will be shared with the Fairview County Schools leadership team. All data collected will be kept secure on an encrypted flash drive, locked in a drawer at the Fairview County Schools district office during the inquiry. The data will be kept secure for a period of two years.

In consideration of the approval process for this research inquiry, specific benchmarks were completed throughout the program for East Carolina University K-12 Educational Leadership graduate students. Prior to engaging human participants in this mixed methods research inquiry, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program ethics course entitled Social/Behavioral Research Investigations and Key Personnel as a measure to build capacity in ethical, moral, and legal protocols for working within a human research inquiry.

Inquiry Procedures

This inquiry tested the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools. The change or improvement being implemented in this inquiry will be classroom walkthrough observations. The leadership from three Restart schools participated in professional learning about implementing a classroom

walkthrough process; learned the purpose and philosophy behind walkthroughs, collaborated to create a tool, planned training for staff, investigated how to collect data, investigated when and how to share data with staff, and used the data to drive school improvement and make Restart flexibility decisions.

The inquiry occurred in three phases. Each phase will be organized using a Plan-Do-Study-Act, or PDSA, cycle (see Figure 14). PDSA cycles are iterative mini-experiments during which educators articulate improvement changes, carry out the change, study the results, and decide how to proceed (e.g., adopt the change, adapt the change, or abandon the change) (Bryk et al., 2015). Figure 14 represents the three phases of the inquiry process.

Phase 1

Phase 1 of Plan-Do-Study-Act is the needs assessment and innovation phase. Phase 2 of the cycle involves planning and testing the agreed upon changes for improvement that were developed in Phase 1. Phase 3 in the inquiry is when the data is collected and analyzed, and the results are shared to determine the impact and relevance of the inquiry. The overall purpose of running PDSA cycles during the testing phase is to conduct an improvement investigation; during this investigation educators learn quickly and affordably which interventions work and, later, how to adaptively integrate them to attain quality outcomes reliably at scale (Bryk et al., 2015).

Description of Participants and Recruitment Strategies

This inquiry will be implemented in three Restart schools in a rural district in North Carolina. The Restart Program is a reform model in North Carolina that allows schools to have charter-like flexibility and operate with exemptions from a specific statute and rule. Restart

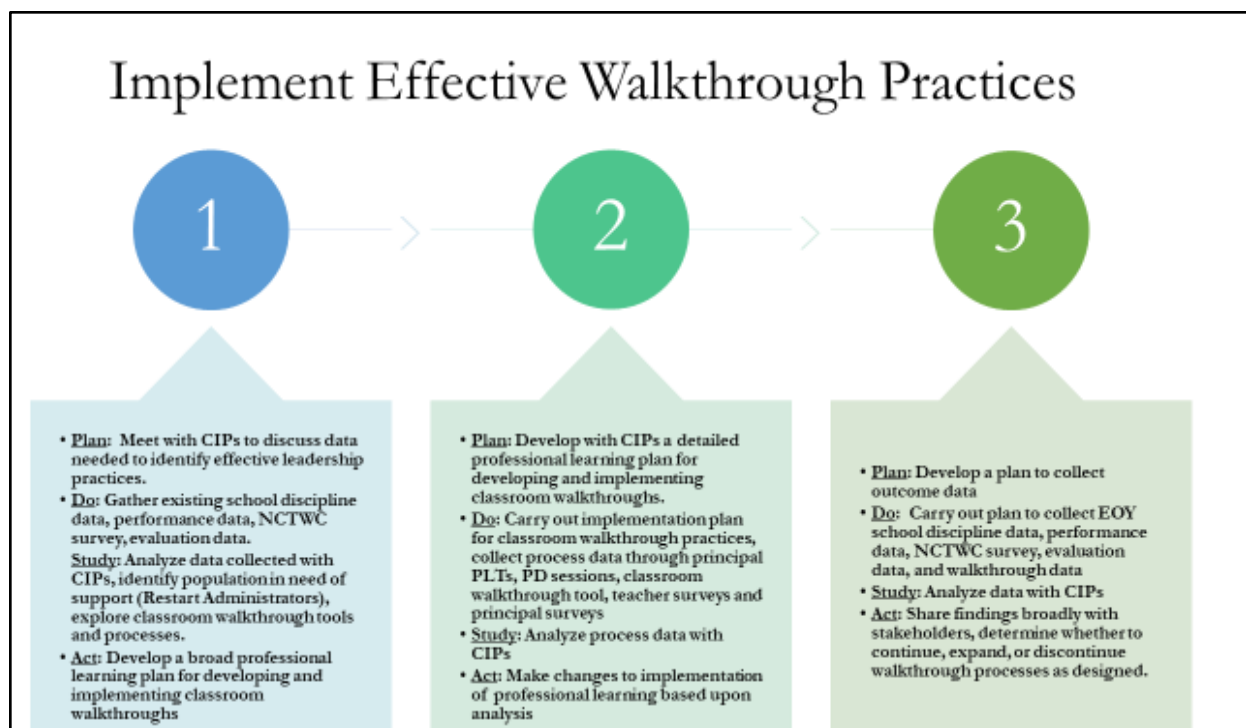


Figure 14. Three phases of the inquiry process.

allows low-performing schools bottom-up, autonomous provisions such as extending the school day, changing the school calendar, flexibility in hiring teachers, and financial flexibility (NCDPI, n.d.h). The principals of three Restart schools in Fairview County were invited to participate in the inquiry. A presentation of school and district data will be shared that outlined the critical needs of the schools. The team discussed research on instructional leadership practices and were introduced to the focus of practice.

Plan

In Phase 1 of this inquiry, I worked with the collaborative inquiry partners (CIP) through the first PDSA cycle. I met with the CIPs to introduce the problem of practice and the overall inquiry questions of the inquiry. The team developed a plan to collect data to set the baseline and significance of the inquiry. Figure 15 shows a driver diagram call the Fishbone where root causes and assets are identified to narrow down the focus of inquiry.

Do

Working with the CIPs, I gathered existing school performance data, discipline and attendance data, North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions (TWC) data, and teacher effectiveness and evaluation data.

Study

The team analyzed the data collected using a district created data dive protocol. For each set of data, the team made notes on chart paper listing: I see, I can infer, Next Steps. The team compared the overall district data to the Restart schools to make inferences of root causes. Using the fishbone diagram seen in Figure 15, I led the team to the problem of practice. Working with the CIPs, the team explored classroom walkthrough tools and practices.

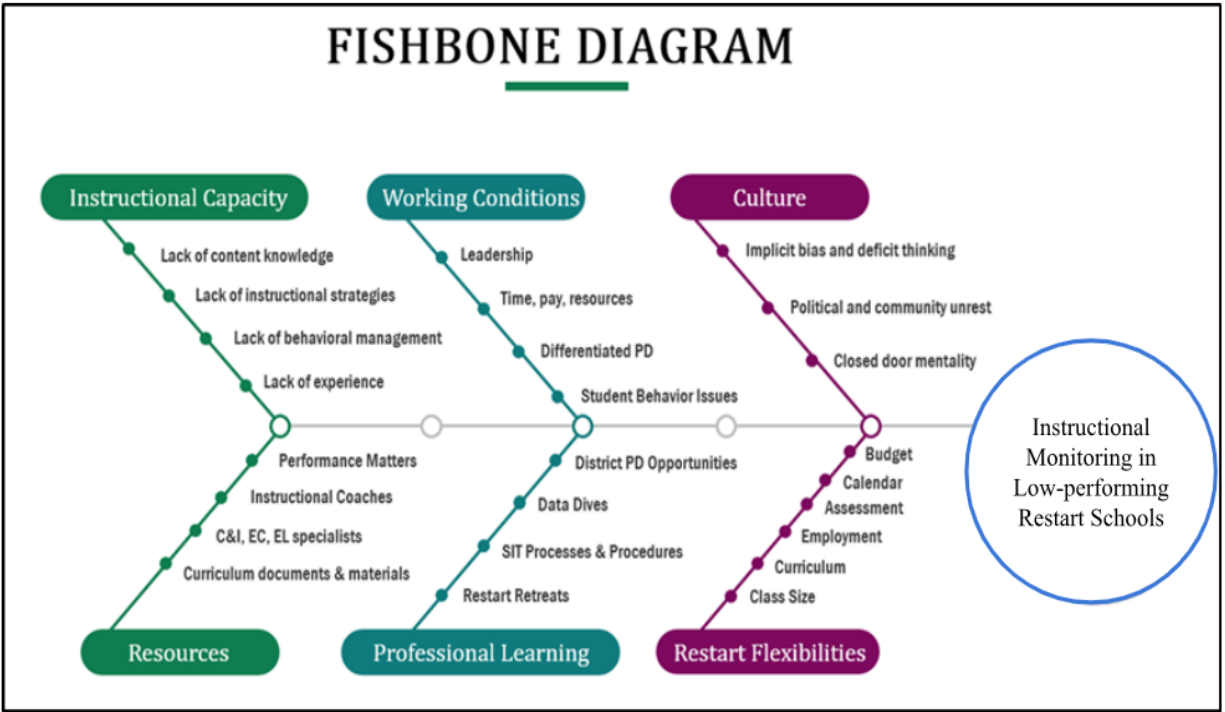


Figure 15. Fishbone diagram.

Act

Finally in Phase 1, I will work with the CIPs to develop a broad professional learning plan for developing and implementing classroom walkthroughs, identifying and creating data collection instruments, and planning the pilot study.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation in this inquiry will include a teacher focus group interview (see Appendix C), a principal survey (see Appendix D), a walkthrough tool (see Appendix E) and a principal interview (see Appendix F). School administrators are always looking for ways to provide teachers with feedback on instructional progress and support in developing engaging learning experiences that meet students' needs. Academic rigor, relevance and engagement are difficult to assess but critical for student success. The Learning-Focused Instructional Framework (see Figure 16) integrates and connects top research-based learning strategies in every Learning-Focused lesson. The research-based strategies were compiled from the research conducted between 1998 and 2015 by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), the 90/90/90 school research by Reeves, the Evaluation Consortium, Graham and Perin, Rowe, Kagan, and Hattie. Evidence-based strategies and the Learning-Focused Instructional Framework will be used to design a classroom walkthrough tool (see Figure 16). The components align to the initiatives in place in the district. A principal survey was created based on the Instructional Leadership Inventory (Alig-Mielcarek & Hoy, 2005). The questions promote reflection on monitoring practices and instructional leadership. From the classroom walkthrough tool and the principal survey, the principal interview questions and the teacher focus groups questions were developed. The principal interview and the teacher focus group

The LEARNING-FOCUSED Instructional Framework is implemented in a sequence:

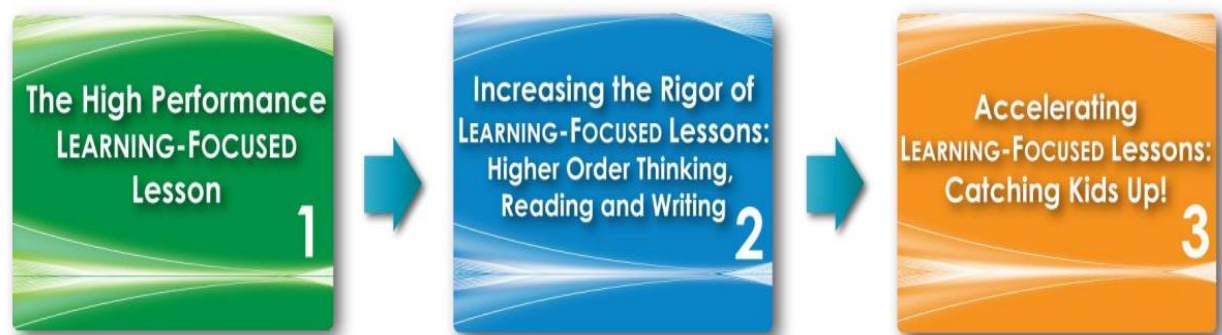


Figure 16. The Learning-Focused Instructional Framework.

questions were designed to determine the level of impact the classroom walkthroughs had on strategic and instructional leadership practices.

Classroom Walkthrough Tool

Classroom walkthroughs can be defined as short, informal observations of classroom teachers and students conducted by administrators, coaches, mentors, peers, and others, followed by feedback, conversation, and/or action (Kachur et al., 2010). The quantitative data consists of the collection of the classroom walkthroughs. The classroom walkthrough tool, adapted from the Learning-Focused Instructional Framework, consists of two sections; lesson curriculum and lesson instruction (see Appendix E). For the purposes of collecting quantitative data during classroom walkthroughs, a digital form will be developed for each school participating in the inquiry. With the use of digital form, a mobile device will be used to collect the classroom walkthrough data. The items on the walkthrough form collect data on student learning and instructional planning and delivery. The classroom walkthrough form will be created in Google. Permissions for accessing the data collected will be restricted to the scholarly practitioner. At monthly intervals, the data will be downloaded to an encrypted flash drive and stored in a locked cabinet at the district office.

Surveys

Surveys provide quantitative descriptions of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a sample of the population in an attempt to generalize the findings to the larger population (Creswell, 2013). The decisions to be considered encompass the entire survey design process (Fowler, 2014). This includes what model to use when developing the survey. The next instrument used for data collection will be a survey adapted from the Instructional Leadership Inventory (Alig-Mielcarek & Hoy, 2005; see Appendix C). The inventory consisted of questions that were grouped into

three domains: (1) School-wide Professional Development; (2) Shared Goals; (3) Teaching and Learning Process. Questions utilized a 5-point Likert response format and identified how frequent principals promoted school-wide professional development, defined and communicated shared goals, and monitored and provided feedback on the teaching and learning process. A survey will be given to participating principals at the beginning and end of the inquiry to gather perception data on monitoring practices and strategic and instructional leadership practices. (See Appendix D).

Principal Interview Protocol

The purpose of the interview will be to gather the perception data from the principals on how their leadership practices changed as a result of implementing classroom walkthrough observations. The interview will consist of twelve questions (see Appendix F). The questions were designed for open-ended responses. The interview will be recorded using a digital device. The answers will be transcribed and coded for analysis. A coding scheme is a set of codes, defined by the words and phrases that researchers assign to categorize a segment of the data by topic according to Merriam-Webster online dictionary. With assistance from the inquiry partners, a preliminary coding scheme will be developed. The team will look for recurring or key issues that informs what codes were necessary. At this stage, a coding symbol table will be created. The team will test and refine the coding using a small subset of the qualitative data collected and documented inter-rater reliability. Coding will be completed by hand, entering data into a spreadsheet. Once all the data is coded, the data will be sorted by code to identify patterns, trends, and themes. Summary tables and charts will be created to make the results easier to analyze.

Teacher Focus Group Protocol

The purpose of the focus group will be to gather the perception data from the teachers on how the principal's leadership practices changed as a result of implementing classroom walkthrough observations. The interview will consist of twelve questions similar to the principal interview questions (see Appendix C). The questions are designed for open-ended responses. The interview will be recorded using a digital device. The answers will be transcribed and coded for analysis. With assistance from the inquiry partners, a preliminary coding scheme will be developed. The team will look for recurring or key issues that informs what codes were necessary. At this stage, a coding symbol table will be created. The team will test and refine the coding using a small subset of the qualitative data collected and documented inter-rater reliability. Coding will be done by hand, entering data into a spreadsheet. Once all the data is coded, the data will be sorted by code to identify patterns, trends, and themes. Summary tables and charts will be created to make the results easier to analyze.

Pilot Study

Instrumentation in this inquiry included a principal survey, a classroom walkthrough tool, and a principal interview. A pilot study was conducted to test the instruments to determine if the tools gathered the information needed and intended. A pilot study is a small-scale "rehearsal" to test the instruments and methods to implement them in the inquiry. A pilot study helps ensure the reliability and validity of the survey questions by checking to see if the answers collected are consistent across all inquiry partners and if the responses answer the question in the way it was expected (see Table 5). A successful pilot study does not ensure the success of a research project (Mertler, 2022). However, it does help determine if the data collected is useful, if there are any misconceptions, and what might be needed to implement the tool(s) with fidelity. In this inquiry,

Table 5

Survey Question Vocabulary with Recommended Revisions

Survey Question	Recommendation
In house	Site based
Plans PD	Plans or works with others to plan...
Plans professional development in-service with teachers	Supports teacher leaders to plan professional development
Works with students on academic tasks	Models instructional strategies
Evaluating teachers to improve instructional practice	Implements the NCEES teacher evaluation process effectively
Providing private feedback of teacher effort	Providing private feedback of instructional delivery
Providing private feedback of student effort	Providing private feedback of evidence of student learning

the survey, walkthrough form, and interview questions intended for the principals of three Restart schools was piloted. I used different collaborative inquiry groups that were not staff members of those schools to test the instruments. Participants in the pilot study volunteered and confidentiality protected.

The Instructional Leadership Survey collaborative inquiry team tested the survey in the same manner as the first inquiry team. An email was sent to three principals from schools not in the inquiry asking for their participation. Upon agreement through email, I sent the Instructional Leadership Survey to the principals with directions to complete the survey. I invited the principals to a virtual meeting after they had time to complete the survey. I introduced and defined the project, the research, and their roles in the process using a one-page summary of the inquiry. I asked the group to share what they thought of the overall survey and their experience taking it. As a group, we reviewed the survey questions, analyzed the data, shared and noted feedback about the questions and patterns in the results, and determined revisions to be made to the overall instrument. Similar recommendations were made on wording and clarifying certain questions. The overall data showed a direct relationship between the principal survey and making strategic and instructional leadership decisions. The pilot survey demonstrated that the data accurately reflected principal perceptions and that the results were not due to an instrument error. The updated Instructional Leadership Survey can be found in Appendix D.

The Instructional Monitoring Classroom Walkthrough form was piloted in one school. I chose a K-8 school to test the walkthrough instrument because the form will be used in either an elementary school (K-5) or a middle school (6-8) during the inquiry. I met with the principal and described the inquiry in the same way as I had with the other collaborative inquiry teams. I shared the walkthrough form with the principal so that we could use our mobile devices to

collect data. We reviewed each component and question on the walkthrough form prior to walking into classrooms to clarify any terms or ideas. A schedule was created based on available classrooms and we traveled as a pair to collect data. After collecting data from five classrooms we reviewed the data. The overall feedback was that the walkthrough form was easy to use, and the data collected was very informative for instructional feedback purposes. Some recommendations were given to add options of “whole group” and “small group” to specific questions, to add a few more learning activities that might be seen in specific content areas or grade levels, and clarifying formative assessments as informal or formal. A very helpful recommendation was to add a section to capture the type of student work that was observed in the lesson; worksheet, guided notes, task cards, etc. This addition would allow the observer to identify how often worksheets were being used instead of more effective research-based activities. I made the changes in the walkthrough form as suggested and the next day we conducted three more classroom visits to test the revisions. The updated Instructional Monitoring Classroom Walkthrough form is listed in Appendix E.

The last instrument tested was the principal interview. The interview with the principals will be conducted at the end of the school year, after implementing classroom walkthrough observations, as part of Phase 2 of the Plan-Do-Study-Act process. The purpose of the interview is to gather the perception data from the principals on how their leadership practices change as a result of implementing classroom walkthroughs. I piloted the interview questions with collaborative inquiry partners that were district administrators and those that had experience as school administrators. We met as a small group after school hours in a central location convenient to everyone. I shared the overview of my inquiry, a summary of the other instruments used in the inquiry, and the purpose of the principal interview. I conducted a mock interview

using one CIP member as the interviewee. As I modeled the interview, the other inquiry partners took notes about the process, the questions, and the answers provided. At the conclusion of the mock interview, as a team we reviewed the overall process and deliberated on each question. The feedback that I received included suggestions to make some questions more specific. The first question was confusing for the group. The suggestion was to make the question more general toward overall historical experiences as a whole with classroom walkthroughs. For questions 2 and 9, it was recommended to add the phrase “course of action” or “give an example” to ensure that the interviewee adds more detail in the answer. The group recommended changing question 6 to use similar verbiage like question 5. The answer for 6a is a “yes” or “no” answer and the recommendation was to edit the question to require the interviewee to answer the question with evidence. The feedback for question 6a was to modify the original question from “Have you increased the feedback provided to teachers and in what ways?” to “In what ways have you increased the feedback provided to teachers”. Question number 10 needed rephrasing for clarity because the sentence was arranged in a confusing way. The collaborative inquiry partners also determined that question 11 should be more directive to overall leadership practices. The updated Interview Questions are listed in Appendix F. The teacher focus group interview was created based on the principal interview questions. See Appendix C.

Phase 2

Plan

In Phase 2 of the inquiry, I will develop with the CIPs a detailed professional learning plan for developing and implementing classroom walkthroughs. With support from the CIPs, I will carry out the implementation plan for classroom walkthrough practices. I will collect process data through administrative PLTs, PD sessions, the walkthrough tool, teacher focus groups,

principal surveys, interviews with principals, school improvement and restart monitoring tools, and observation notes.

Plan for Data Collection & Analysis

When considering the collection and analysis of data, I will consider the impact from the use of walkthroughs, the degree to which the walkthroughs were implemented with fidelity, the influence on instructional delivery and planning, the perception of how walkthroughs shaped lesson delivery and instructional planning, and who did or didn't benefit from the walkthrough process. Because Restart schools are complex organizations with multiple challenges (Supovitz & Weather, 2004), the array of data being collected will provide a more complete picture of the schools where successful implementation of classroom walkthroughs occurred.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the procedure for data collection will follow the explanatory sequential mixed-methods process where the quantitative data will be collected and analyzed prior to the qualitative data being collected and analyzed. The existing school performance data, discipline and attendance data, North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions (TWC) data, and teacher effectiveness and evaluation data will be acquired from the school district using the NC School Report card, PowerSchool and the Teacher Working Conditions survey results. The district uses a database called Performance Matters that connects proxy IDs and scores with no student names attached. This will ensure the inquiry will be in compliance with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This large data source will be used for statistical analysis of the quantitative data.

Do

I will begin the data collection process by obtaining authorization to conduct the inquiry from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of East Carolina University and from the participating

school district. A timeline for data collection aligned to the professional learning that principals will receive is shown in Table 6. The principal survey will be given before the implementation of the classroom walkthrough process in the schools to collect data on the principals' perception of the effectiveness of implementing classroom walkthroughs on leading change in persistent low-performing schools.

I will begin the qualitative data collection process by collecting survey data from principals in each Restart school. The survey will be sent via email. The initial page of the survey includes a letter that explains the informed consent process and enables participants to agree or disagree to participate in the inquiry. The letter of informed consent also explains the purpose of the inquiry, description, and procedures. The participants will be informed about how much time the survey would take to complete. Participants will be assured that in no way would they or their schools be identified in the final report and that all responses would be completely confidential. A follow up email explaining this and reminding participants to return the survey will be sent two weeks after surveys are emailed.

The classroom walkthrough data will be ongoing throughout the school year. Professional learning and reflection will occur monthly at district principal meetings to support the fidelity of implementation as part of a district-wide professional development plan. At the midpoint of the inquiry, the staff and principal will review the classroom walkthrough data at the site level on the instructional strategy targets. The mid-point data review will be accompanied by the review of research literature covering the effectiveness of the instructional strategies of focus. At the conclusion of the walkthrough data collection, the data will be shared a final time with the school staff at each Restart school. I will collect the walkthrough data from each Restart school in three

Table 6

Data Collection Timeline

Professional Learning & Instrument	January	February	March	April	May	June
Professional Learning for Principals	Classroom Walkthrough Practices	Implementation & Calibration	Data Analysis	Impact & Next Steps	School Improvement Planning	Reflect on Process
Principal Inventory			X			X
Walkthrough Tool			X	X	X	
Principal Interview						X
Teacher Focus Group						X

excel spreadsheets. The data will be compiled to make comparisons and identify patterns and trends at each school.

A primary source of data for this inquiry will be site visits and document collection conducted with each principal and SIT in the Restart schools. The visits are necessary because, regardless of the criteria used to measure effectiveness, these measures could provide only a good starting point for identifying and understanding organizational problems and provide only a rough framework for diagnosis and data interpretation. It is necessary to gain additional insight into the leadership practices by gathering qualitative data that provide a richer description. Observation data will be collected at the weekly leadership planning meeting from each Restart school. The data will be handwritten on a Rocketbook. The notes will be turned into a PDF and sent to digital folders for transcription. School improvement plan changes in response to walkthrough data will be identified and collected from NCStar and copied to a table in the school digital folder. The Restart monitoring documents and annual reports will be housed in a digital folder. Restart flexibilities used in response to walkthrough data will be coded in the documents.

At the conclusion of the inquiry implementation and school year, the principal leadership survey will be given a second time to the principals. The data will be analyzed and compared to the pre-assessment survey. The surveys will be sent via email. The initial page of the survey will again include a letter that explains the informed consent process and enables participants to agree or disagree to participate in the inquiry. The letter of informed consent will also explain the purpose of the inquiry, description, and procedures. The participants will be informed about how much time the survey will take to complete. Participants will be assured that in no way would they or their schools be identified in the final report and that all responses would be completely confidential. A follow up email explaining this and reminding participants to return the survey

will be sent two weeks after surveys are emailed. The second duplicate survey sent to principals at the end of the inquiry will be used to determine changes in practices, if any, were perceived by the principal.

Qualitative interviewing starts with the premise that the viewpoints of individuals hold significance, are comprehensible, and can be articulated explicitly. At the end of the implementation of the walkthrough implementation plan, the principal from each Restart school will be interviewed. Interviews will be conducted individually with each Restart principal. Interviews will be a necessary method of data collection because the complexity of the school setting and organizational change makes it difficult to use inventories or other mass collection methods to adequately collect enough information to find meaningful patterns and/or trends (Creswell, 2013). The in-depth and focused interviews will be used to explore information that will help other Restart schools implement classroom walkthroughs as a driver for change. Interviews will be semi-structured interviews to allow me to understand the process each individual felt was important in the implementation of the walkthrough process (Krathwohl, 2009). The format will be semi-structured allowing for some open-ended questions in the beginning of the interview, and structuring the final questions based on what information the interviewee shares throughout the process. A recorder application will be used to collect audio from the interviews that the reviewer transcribed at a different time. A member check will be conducted after the interview is transcribed. Member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation, allows the interviewee the opportunity to read the findings from their interview to ensure the data collected was an accurate representation of the person's experience (Krathwohl, 2009).

Focus groups are an assessment method where rich detail and deeper levels of information on a specific topic/experience are collected through an interview with a small group of people. Focus groups are used to ask questions and gather feedback that is not easily captured through a survey, and to supplement information that has been gathered from the principal interview and the Restart monitoring documents. The focus group protocol will include preparation, introduction, ground rules, questions, and a closing. The focus group protocol and questions are listed in Appendix C.

Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed in two phases. The first phase includes a statistical analysis of the secondary quantitative data for the district and the three Restart schools. This analysis will be used for comparison and impact at the end of the inquiry. The second phase involves coding of survey data, an analysis of the walkthrough data, coding the interviews with the principals and a teacher focus group, coding school improvement and Restart documents, and coding observation transcriptions. Table 7 lists the type of analysis that will be used for each instrument. I will investigate if the mean frequency of strategic and instructional leadership practices increased, decreased, or stayed the same as the year progressed from the classroom walkthrough data. I will also conduct a document analysis to determine how those leadership practices influenced the use of Restart flexibilities. The data analysis addresses the research questions: How do principals perceive restart flexibilities around strategic and instructional leadership? How are administrators using Restart Flexibilities in the school? What effect does a systematic instructional monitoring plan have on principal instructional leadership behaviors in Restart schools? How can a systematic monitoring process using classroom walkthroughs influence how principles plan for school improvement using Restart flexibilities? Finally, a descriptive analysis of the

Table 7

Data Analysis Collection Matrix

Tool	Collection Process	Type of Analysis	Inquiry Questions
Classroom Walkthrough Tool	Google forms will provide graphs and Excel spreadsheets to compile and analyze data	Descriptive statistics – Used to summarize and describe data	What effect does a systematic instructional monitoring plan have on principal instructional leadership behaviors in Restart Schools?
Principal Survey	Systems such as Qualtrics or Google Workspace will be utilized to organize survey data for easier analysis	Descriptive statistics – Used to summarize and describe data	How do principals perceive restart flexibilities around strategic and instructional leadership? What effect does a systematic instructional monitoring plan have on principal instructional leadership behaviors in Restart Schools?
Principal Interview	Digital Voice Recorder Transcription Notes	Content analysis – examines and quantifies the presence of certain words, subjects, and concepts in text, image, video, or audio messages	How do principals perceive restart flexibilities around strategic and instructional leadership? What effect does a systematic instructional monitoring plan have on principal instructional leadership behaviors in Restart Schools? How can a systematic monitoring process using classroom walkthroughs influence how principals plan for school improvement using Restart flexibilities?

Table 7 (continued)

Tool	Collection Process	Type of Analysis	Inquiry Questions
Teacher Focus Groups	Digital Voice Recorder Transcription Notes	Content analysis – examines and quantifies the presence of certain words, subjects, and concepts in text, image, video, or audio messages	What effect does a systematic instructional monitoring plan have on principal instructional leadership behaviors in Restart Schools? How can a systematic monitoring process using classroom walkthroughs influence how principals plan for school improvement using Restart flexibilities?
Restart Flexibility Monitoring Tool	Google document in a Shared Drive folder	Thematic analysis – helps to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns in qualitative data.	How are administrators using Restart Flexibilities in the school? How can a systematic monitoring process using classroom walkthroughs influence how principals plan for school improvement using Restart flexibilities?
Restart Annual Report	PDF of Report submitted to NCDPI.	Content & Thematic	How are administrators using Restart Flexibilities in the school? What effect does a systematic instructional monitoring plan have on principal instructional leadership behaviors in Restart schools? How can a systematic monitoring process using classroom walkthroughs influence how principals plan for school improvement using Restart flexibilities?

Table 7 (continued)

Tool	Collection Process	Type of Analysis	Inquiry Questions
School Improvement Plan	PDF of plan in NCStar	Content & Thematic	How are administrators using Restart Flexibilities in the school? What effect does a systematic instructional monitoring plan have on principal instructional leadership behaviors in Restart schools? How can a systematic monitoring process using classroom walkthroughs influence how principals plan for school improvement using Restart flexibilities?

qualitative data from the walkthroughs will be utilized to gain a better understanding and explanation of the results. The quantitative and the qualitative data will be viewed and analyzed holistically to provide a deeper understanding of the perceptions and reasons as to why the classroom walkthrough data results turned out the way it did. Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize and describe the data to identify the impact of the use of walkthroughs and the degree of influence that occurs on strategic and instructional leadership practices and the use of Restart flexibilities as a result of walkthroughs. The integration of the quantitative and qualitative data will be used for the conclusion, discussion, and implications of the research inquiry.

Phase 3

Plan

In Phase 3 of the inquiry, I will work with my collaborative inquiry partners to develop a plan to collect the outcome data from the inquiry.

Do

In the ‘Do’ part of the cycle, data from principal actions will be collected through the school improvement plan that shows intentional use of Restart flexibilities and changes to the school improvement plan based on instructional monitoring. In addition, walkthrough data, survey of teacher and principal perception data, principal interview data and school improvement and Restart monitoring documents will be collected.

Study

With support for the CIPs, the team will analyze the data to identify the degree of influence, impact, and benefits of classroom walkthroughs.

Act

The final part of the cycle will be to share the findings broadly with stakeholders and to determine whether to continue, expand, or discontinue the walkthrough processes as designed in the Restart schools.

Inquiry Design Rigor

Rigor must be addressed in a research inquiry. Rigor refers to the ‘trustworthiness’ of the results and the ability to produce similar results with a similar context. Validity and trustworthiness of data mean that the data collected provides a true measurement or description of the reality experienced by participants (Creswell, 2013). For the purpose of controlling for credibility and replicability, this inquiry utilized strategies proposed by Merriam (1998). According to Merriam (1998), “internal validity deals with the questions of how research findings match reality” (p. 199). These questions pertaining to the reality of research findings include:

- How congruent are the findings with reality?
- Do the findings capture what is really there?
- Are investigators observing or measuring what they think they are measuring?

(Merriam, 1998, p. 201).

Merriam (1998) additionally compiled a list of six basic strategies a scholarly practitioner can utilize to help ensure internal validity:

1. Triangulation – using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings.

2. Member checks – taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking those if the results are plausible. A number of writers suggest doing this continuously throughout the inquiry.
3. Long-term observation at the research site or repeated observations of the same phenomenon – gather data over a period of time in order to increase the validity of the findings.
4. Peer examination – asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge.
5. Participatory or collaborative modes of research – involving participants in all phases of research from conceptualizing the inquiry to writing up the findings.
6. Researcher's biases – clarifying the researcher's assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study (pp. 204-205).

I will use the majority of Merriam's basic strategies to ensure the internal validity of this inquiry. Triangulation will be used by compiling multiple sources of data through surveys, interviews, walkthroughs, and observation. To ensure the validity of this inquiry, data will be triangulated. In this inquiry triangulation of data will be achieved from walkthrough data, interviews, focus groups, survey questions, and document analysis. A member check will be conducted after interviews were transcribed. Member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation, allows the interviewee the opportunity to read the findings from their interview to ensure the data collected will be an accurate representation of the person's experience (Kratwohl, 2009). Member checks were used during the pilot study. Long-term observation at the three Restart schools assisted with gathering data over a period of time in order to increase the validity of the findings. Peer examination will be utilized by having the collaborative inquiry partners (CIPs) help conduct periodic analysis of the data collected. Parts of

the inquiry included participatory or collaborative modes of research because the principals of the Restart schools were involved in all phases of research.

Content validity will be established for the surveys through the assistance of CIPs. Content validity refers to the “extent to which the questions on the instrument and the scores from these questions are representative of all the possible questions that could be asked about the content or skills” (Creswell, 2002, p. 184). A draft form of the survey instrument was piloted. The feedback provided by participants was used to make modifications to the survey.

Interviews are a necessary method of data collection because the complexity of the school setting and organizational change made it difficult to use surveys or other mass collection methods to adequately collect enough information to find meaningful patterns and/or trends (Creswell, 2013). The accuracy of the data collected depended on the extent to which participants responded honestly. Honesty in data collection can be facilitated if the researcher establishes rapport with inquiry participants. In this inquiry, I worked to establish a rapport with all participants. Data are valid if the measure used to collect the data actually measures what it sets out to measure. In this inquiry one-on-one interviews will be conducted with the Restart school principals. The validity of the interview questions will be analyzed by the CIPs to determine if the appropriate questions achieved the desired results. Modifications were made to the interview questions based on their feedback and recommendations.

A teacher focus group protocol refers to a structured set of guidelines and procedures that researchers or facilitators use to conduct a focus group with teachers. A focus group is a qualitative research method where a small group of participants, in this case, teachers, engage in a discussion guided by a facilitator to gather insights, opinions, and perceptions on a particular topic. Focus groups are less threatening to many research participants, and this environment is

helpful for participants to discuss perceptions, ideas, opinions, and thoughts (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Merriam (1998) maintains that “external validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (p. 207). To enhance the possibility of the results of a specific qualitative study being replicated by other researchers, Merriam (1998) recommends that the following strategies be used:

- Rich, thick description – providing enough description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred.
- Typicality – describing how typical the program, event, or individual is compared with others in the same class, so that users can make comparisons with their own institutions.
- Multisite designs – using several sites, cases, situations, especially those that maximize diversity in the phenomenon of interest; this will allow the results to be applied by readers to a greater range of other situations. This variation can be achieved through purposeful or random sampling (pp. 211-212).

I will provide a rich, thick description of the Restart schools, describe how typical implementing walkthroughs in low-performing schools were, and use three different sites and participants that have different needs but are still ‘Restart’ schools. As explained by Merriam (1998), “reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (p. 205). In other words, if this inquiry should happen to be repeated in the future, would it yield the same results? I will describe in detail how data will be collected, how categories and patterns will be identified, and how decisions will be made throughout the inquiry.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

Certain aspects of this inquiry are assumed to be true given the population, statistical test, and research design. In this inquiry there will be three data collection tools utilized; surveys, interviews, and observations. To determine the impact of a systematic walkthrough process on the instructional practices of teachers, I will request help from the CIPs, develop focus group questions to use with classroom teachers at each Restart school. The focus group at each school in the inquiry will convene at the end of the school year to ascertain how teachers perceive the monitoring practices of their principals. One of the more common assumptions made in survey research is the assumption of honesty and truthful responses. The same might be true for the second form of data collection; the principal interviews. As part of the inquiry process, interviewing Restart school principals provide the inquiry with information about the decision making process that the principal goes through when planning walkthrough processes and considering implementing a restart flexibility. Again, there is an assumption that the principals will be honest and truthful in their answers during the interview process. Principals may not be honest because they may feel evaluated as a skilled leader based on their responses. They may exaggerate their level of influence or attribute changes to their inherent leadership and not the inquiry. The last data collection tool will be a classroom walkthrough tool. Implementing the tool with fidelity and collecting data with inter-rater reliability will be another assumption of the inquiry.

This inquiry aims to examine the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools. The scope of this inquiry will be three schools in Fairview County; two elementary schools and one middle school. The three schools are recurring low-performing and have been designated Restart. The primary goal

of this inquiry will be to analyze the relationship between classroom walkthrough, feedback, Restart, school improvement, and leadership within low-performing schools in Fairview County. It is important to identify potential limitations and delimitations. In this inquiry, achievement data are limited to student performance on North Carolina End of Grade (EOG), End of Course (EOC) assessments, mClass data, and iReady data. As such, this inquiry is limited to student achievement in tested subject areas. School improvement is a slow and tedious process. Low-performing schools with successful improvement efforts tend to experience periods of improvement, followed by periods of stagnation or decline, followed by periods of improvement again (Elmore & City, 2007). As such, this inquiry reflects a short time frame to implement Restart and see school improvement. Since the Restart model is new in North Carolina, caution is advised in assessing the long-term impact of Restart on school improvement solely based on this inquiry. Additional limitations include the exact type of participants in the inquiry as their school staff is predetermined. The teachers taking the survey are not truly a random sample, which is also a limitation. Outside factors such as changes in leadership and staff turnover might affect the outcomes of the inquiry. The district will be simultaneously implementing tiered supports to help the low-performing schools in the district improve student performance. Some of these supports might include changes in curriculum, professional learning, and independent consultation. These practices may also impacted school improvement and leadership decision making practices.

Role of the Scholarly Practitioner

As the scholarly practitioner, I am a district administrator and have the opportunity to work with each of the three Restart principals. Within an action research study, the scholarly practitioner takes on the role of an insider who examines their own environment and community,

aiming to instigate both personal and organizational transformations. As an insider, the goal is for local change that critiques or improves oneself and one's organization through collaboration with other insiders (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Conducting this inquiry provides valuable information to the district about reform practices and it is important that I carry out a cycle of consistent reflection and analysis to check for possible bias. An aspect of the 'role of the scholarly practitioner' worth considering is the idea of the observation effect that may take place during the classroom walkthroughs. It is very possible that an observation effect will have an impact on the classroom instructional practices taking place during the classroom walkthroughs. Due to the high frequency of the visits, the change, if indeed observed, may have started due to the observer effect and not leadership practices.

Summary

The purpose of this exploratory mixed-methods inquiry is to examine the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools. If classroom walkthrough practices are effective then it will be important to identify how they impact principal leadership skills. Additionally, it will be critical to determine the level of which the process impacts lesson planning and delivery. If the classroom walkthrough process will be useful and valued, it will be important to explore how principals used the data to plan improvement keeping Restart flexibilities in mind. Chapter 4 includes the findings of the inquiry study and presented based on the analysis of collected data. In Chapter 5, I will present and interpret the findings of the inquiry. I will discuss what the data, analysis, and results reveal about leadership practices in Restart schools. I will compare the findings with the literature and inquiry questions. I will reflect on my experiences and challenges encountered during the inquiry

process and conclude with a comprehensive interpretation of the findings, their implications, and their significance in the broader context of the field of school improvement.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter provides analysis of the data collected and themes that arose in relation to this inquiry. The analysis served to help better understand the complexities of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools. Examining leadership practices to implement a monitoring plan, which includes regular classroom walkthroughs to provide teachers with feedback on how well they deliver instruction, can play a crucial role in improving school performance. These walkthroughs give school leaders valuable insights into what is happening in the classroom, allowing them to identify strengths, areas for improvement, and patterns in teaching practices. By using this feedback, school leaders can design more effective processes for monitoring instruction, ensuring that teaching methods align with the school's goals for student learning.

In this inquiry, I employed improvement science methodology with an explanatory sequential, mixed methods design. Working with collaborative inquiry partners, I investigated how implementing a systematic monitoring plan using classroom observation walkthroughs would improve institutional leadership decisions in Restart schools. Data collection included principal inventory results, classroom observation walkthroughs, teacher focus groups responses and principal interview responses. Data collection also included individual school Restart flexibility summary documents and school improvement plans.

This chapter explains the purpose of the inquiry, the inquiry questions, and how the inquiry was conducted. It also describes how participants were chosen for surveys and interviews, with details about their characteristics and backgrounds. Focus groups were used in this inquiry. Information about the group characteristics is provided. The chapter gives an overview of how surveys were distributed, the interviews were structured, classroom observation

walkthrough data was collected and how focus groups were structured. The inquiry's results are in the findings section of each instrument. The results are also organized around the four inquiry questions. Key themes and subthemes are connected to these questions. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and includes quotes from the interviews with participants.

Problem of Practice Guiding Questions

The inquiry examined the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools by addressing the following questions:

1. How do principals perceive restart flexibilities around strategic and instructional leadership?
2. How are administrators using Restart Flexibilities in the school?
3. What effect does a systematic instructional monitoring plan have on principal instructional leadership behaviors in Restart schools?
4. How can a systematic monitoring process using classroom walkthroughs influence how principals plan for school improvement using Restart flexibilities?

Demographics

This inquiry was implemented in three Restart schools in a rural district, Fairview County, in North Carolina; two elementary schools and one middle school. The three schools were recurring low-performing and was designated 'Restart'. The Restart program is a reform model in North Carolina that allows schools to have charter-like flexibility and operate with exemptions from specific statutes and rules. Restart allows low-performing schools bottom-up, autonomous provisions such as extending the school day, changing the school calendar, flexibility in hiring teachers, and financial flexibility (NCDPI, n.d.h). The principals of the three Restart schools in Fairview County were invited to participate in the inquiry. One elementary

principal was serving their first year in the district. The other elementary principal was serving as the interim principal for the year. The middle school principal was serving in their second year at the school.

Principal 1 of Bunker Elementary was a female with 19 years of experience in education, 10 of those years in school administration. Principal 1 was new to the district and in her first year as principal of Bunker Elementary. Principal 1 was a successful school principal in a different district for over five years. Her prior school was primarily a B school, half the size of Bunker, and was not a Title 1 school. Principal 2 of Mulligan Elementary was a female with 28 years of experience in education. Principal 2 served as a principal in the district until personal life circumstances required her to step down to assistant principal. She served the district in that capacity for eight years until being asked to serve as Interim Principal of Mulligan Elementary. She served as interim from March until June after the principal of the 2021-2022 school year retired. She stepped in again in October 2022 as interim after the resignation of the 2022-2023 principal. Principal 3 of Hook Middle was a male with over 20 years of experience in education. He became an administrator for the district in 2014. He served at many schools in the district until being asked to move to Hook Middle. He was principal of the alternative high school and a B rated elementary school. This was his second year as the school principal of Hook Middle.

Data Collection

Data collection for this inquiry took place in the second semester of the 2023-2024 school year. I began the data collection process after obtaining authorization to conduct the inquiry from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of East Carolina University and from the participating school district. Classroom walkthrough observation data was collected throughout the school day

as part of the regular duties of the principal. Inventories, focus groups, and interviews were conducted outside the normal school day. A timeline for data collection is shown in Table 6.

Quantitative Data Collection

Principal Inventory

The quantitative data collection process began by collecting inventory data from principals in each Restart school. The participants for the classroom walkthrough data collection were classrooms from three Restart schools: Bunker Elementary, Mulligan Elementary, and Hook Middle. Bunker Elementary had approximately 36 classrooms spanning grades K-5, Mulligan Elementary had 24 classrooms spanning grade K-5, and Hook Middle had 30 classrooms spanning grades 6-8 and in all content areas. The teachers in these classrooms ranged from beginning teachers to experienced veterans. The data collected focused on classroom walkthrough observations, providing insight into the teaching and learning practices occurring within these diverse educational settings.

The three principals from each Restart school were given a Principal Inventory in the beginning of phase 2 of the inquiry and again at the end of phase 2 as a pretest and posttest. As described earlier, the participants consisted of two White female principals and one White male principal with at least 19 years of experience in education or more.

The inventory survey was created using Qualtrics and was developed to assess instructional leadership perceptions of Restart school principals. The process started by adapting the Instructional Leadership Inventory (Alig-Mielcarek & Hoy, 2005; see Appendix C) to identify key leadership competencies and behaviors relevant to the inquiry, such as decision-making, communication, and instructional support. These competencies were translated into a

series of Likert-scale questions to capture the data. The inventory was designed using Qualtrics' survey-building tools. An informed consent form was embedded at the start of the survey to ensure participants understood the inquiry's purpose, confidentiality, and voluntary nature. Qualtrics' distribution features allowed for easy tracking of responses and follow-up emails, while the platform's data export tools facilitated analysis of the collected data.

The inventory (see Appendix D) was sent via email to the Restart school principals in Phase 2 of the inquiry. The initial page of the inventory included a letter that explained the informed consent process and enabled participants to agree or disagree to participate in the inquiry. The letter of informed consent also explained the purpose of the inquiry, its description, and procedures. The principals were informed about how much time the inventory would take to complete. Principals were assured that in no way would they or their schools be identified in the final report and that all responses would be completely confidential. A follow-up email explaining this and reminding principals to return the inventory was sent two weeks after the inventories were emailed.

During Phase 2 of the inquiry as a posttest, a copy of the leadership inventory using Qualtrics was sent out to gather post-data for comparison with the initial data collected from principals. This was done by duplicating the original inventory within the Qualtrics platform, ensuring that the questions remained identical to the pre-inquiry version to maintain consistency. By maintaining the same question structure, the posttest could be directly compared to the pretest data to measure changes in perceptions. This process allowed for a smooth collection of post-data, ensuring the reliability and validity of the inquiry's overall findings.

Classroom Observation Walkthrough

A classroom observation walkthrough tool was used in this inquiry to collect data on instructional practices in each of the Restart schools. The data was collected to see if the principal would reflect on the data and make any instructional leadership decisions based on what was observed. The classroom walkthrough tool, adapted from the Learning-Focused Instructional Framework, consisted of two sections: lesson curriculum and lesson instruction (see Appendix E). A Google form of the walkthrough tool was created and shared with each principal and his/her leadership team. The Google form could be opened on a phone, tablet, or laptop to collect data.

The three principals who participated in the inquiry attended the initial walkthrough training and on-going walkthroughs provided by the practitioner. The training included an explanation of the tool components, examples of evidence, and the process for conducting classroom observations. I regularly walked with the principal, and sometimes their assistant principal or other members of their leadership team, to collect walkthrough data during classroom visits. We entered classrooms once or twice a week, with each visit lasting 5-7 minutes. Depending on the day, we were able to cover between 5 and 15 classrooms. After each classroom observation, we would discuss our observations and share what we noted on the walkthrough tool. This allowed us to compare insights and reflect on instructional practices, helping to ensure that we captured a comprehensive picture of the classroom environment and teaching effectiveness.

Qualitative Data Collection

Focus Groups

The purpose of the focus groups was to gather perception data from the teachers on how the principal's leadership practices changed as a result of implementing classroom walkthrough observations. Focus groups were conducted in three Restart schools; Bunker Elementary, Mulligan Elementary and Hook Middle. The participants from Bunker Elementary consisted of 14 educators, predominantly female, with a single male teacher. Of the 14 participants, 13 were White and 1 was Black. The group ranged in age from 26 to 60 years old, with most teachers falling between their 40s and 50s. Specifically, there were two beginning teachers and 12 veteran educators. The veteran teachers primarily taught grades ranging from kindergarten to 5th grade, with a few serving in specialized roles such as literacy specialists and media instructors. One second grade teacher was hired using Restart employment flexibility. The group also included one resident teacher working in the specials area. This diverse cohort brought a variety of experiences, with most educators having many years of teaching experience in elementary school settings.

The participants from the Mulligan Elementary focus group included ten female educators, with eight identifying as White and two as Hispanic/Latino. Their ages ranged from 25 to 58 years old. The group comprised a mix of six veteran teachers, two beginning teachers, and two resident teachers. The veteran teachers taught across 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades, as well as in special education, reflecting a range of elementary experience. The beginning teachers worked in 2nd and 3rd grades, while the resident teachers were placed in 2nd and 4th grades. This cohort brought a blend of early career and experienced educators, with a focus on elementary education across multiple grade levels.

The focus group from Hook Middle consisted of five educators, all female, with four identifying as White and one as Black. Their ages ranged from 25 to 44 years old. The group included one beginning teacher and four veteran teachers. The beginning teacher worked in special education, while the veteran educators held roles such as instructional coach, as well as teaching core subjects like English Language Arts (ELA) in 6th and 7th grades, and math in 8th grade. While the group was small, this group represented a mix of special education, instructional leadership, and middle school teaching experience, bringing a diverse range of expertise to the group.

The focus group semi-structured questions consisted of twelve questions which were designed to be similar to the principal interview questions (see Appendix C). The questions were designed for open-ended responses. The interview was recorded using a digital device.

Focus groups were conducted at the three schools to gather teachers' perceptions of how the principal's leadership practices changed due to implementing classroom walkthrough observations. An email invitation was sent to all certified teachers, teacher assistants, and instructional support staff at each school, inviting them to participate in the focus groups. The email included a registration link to help plan for the number of participants. Information was provided about the focus group process, the time commitment involved, and assurances of confidentiality. By registering, participants were also acknowledging their consent to participate, as stated in the email. The number of participants varied by the size of each school, with 14 participants from Bunker Elementary, 10 from Mulligan Elementary, and 6 from Hook Middle. The focus groups were held after school in classrooms made available for this purpose.

On the day of the focus groups, the rooms was arranged so that participants sat in a circle, creating a comfortable and open environment for discussion. Understanding that teachers likely

had a long day of teaching, snacks and water was provided as a courtesy. I began by introducing myself, sharing my background, and setting the tone for the session. I explained the purpose of the focus group and informed participants that the session would be audio-recorded to accurately capture their experiences and ideas. I emphasized that confidentiality was a priority and reminded them not to share what others discussed outside of the group. I also reiterated the agenda and time boundaries of the focus group, including any planned breaks to ensure respect for their time.

Next, I reviewed the ground rules, making it clear that there were no right or wrong answers, and I encouraged participants to share their honest opinions and perspectives. I acknowledged that differing viewpoints were expected and valued, and I assured them that the focus group was not about promoting a particular agenda but about understanding their viewpoints. I also encouraged participants to speak one at a time and asked them to silence their cell phones, opening the floor for additional ground rules. To start the session, I asked participants to introduce themselves, sharing what they taught and how long they had been at the school. After introductions, I proceeded with the semi-structured questions.

Principal Interviews

As part of my inquiry, interviews were conducted with principals to gather perception data on how their leadership practices had changed due to implementing classroom walkthrough observations. The three principals interviewed brought extensive experience in education and leadership. Principal 1, with 19 years in education, was in her first year leading Bunker Elementary. Principal 2, with 28 years of experience, had stepped in as interim principal at Mulligan Elementary during two leadership transitions. Principal 3, with over 20 years in education, was in his second year as principal of Hook Middle. All three were serving as

principals at the district's Restart schools and consented to be interviewed about their leadership practices and experiences with classroom walkthrough observations.

The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight into how principals viewed the impact of walkthroughs on their leadership, focusing on areas such as instructional feedback, teacher support, and school improvement. Each interview consisted of twelve open-ended questions (see Appendix F), designed to encourage thoughtful reflection and detailed responses from the principals. The open-ended nature of the questions allowed for a deeper exploration of their experiences and perspectives.

The interviews were recorded using a mobile device, ensuring an accurate capture of the discussion for later transcription and analysis. The principals from the three Restart schools participated in these interviews as part of their end-of-year wrap-up discussions. To avoid scheduling conflicts and reduce stress during the busy end-of-year period, the interviews were held after the school year had ended, once summer break had begun. This timing allowed for a more relaxed conversation and ensured that principals could engage fully in the reflection process.

As we were accustomed to meeting weekly as part of our regular work, the interviews took place during our regularly scheduled meeting times, held in the principal's office. This familiar setting helped create a comfortable environment for the interviews. At the conclusion of each interview, I thanked the principals for their participation and offered to answer any questions they had about the inquiry. This closing conversation helped reinforce the collaborative nature of the research and provided an opportunity to clarify any final points.

School Improvement & Restart Documentation

In the inquiry process, observations and reflections were collected during weekly leadership planning meetings at each Restart school. The data was handwritten on a Rocketbook, then converted to a PDF and stored in digital folders for transcription. Additionally, any changes made to the school improvement plans in response to the walkthrough data was identified from NCStar and copied into a table within each school's digital folder. Restart monitoring documents and annual reports were also housed in these folders, with any Restart flexibilities used as a result of the walkthrough observations being coded in the documents. This process ensured a systematic approach to data collection and its impact on school improvement efforts. The observations and reflections represented perceptions and interpretations about the thinking that each principal underwent during the classroom walkthrough observations.

Data Analysis

In this section, I will present how I conducted the data analysis. During Phase 3 of the inquiry, data analysis was conducted in two stages. The first stage involved a statistical analysis of the principal inventory and classroom walkthrough observation data to compare the impact over time. The second stage focused on coding various data sources, including focus groups, principal interviews, school improvement and Restart documents, and observation transcriptions. Descriptive analysis of walkthrough data was also used to provide deeper insights into leadership practices. Each type of analysis was selected to address each inquiry question about how principals perceive and use Restart flexibilities, how systematic instructional monitoring affects leadership, and the influence of walkthroughs on school improvement planning. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data provided a comprehensive understanding of the results and their implications.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The data analysis process for the quantitative data involved breaking down both the principal inventory and classroom walkthrough data to make comparisons that helped answer the inquiry questions. The purpose was to assess how leadership practices influenced instructional outcomes across the three Restart schools and to identify any trends or patterns that emerged as a result of the walkthrough observations. The data analysis included the use of descriptive statistics to analyze leadership inventory results and classroom walkthrough data.

In the ‘study’ part of the Phase 3 cycle, the data collected from the principal leadership inventories was analyzed. The inventory responses were analyzed to compare perceptions of leadership practices before and after the implementation of the classroom walkthrough observations. The inventory data from all three principals were compiled into a spreadsheet for easy comparison. Each inventory item, which assessed leadership behaviors such as decision-making, instructional support, and feedback mechanisms, was assigned a numerical value based on a Likert scale. Descriptive statistics, such as means and frequency and a paired T test, were calculated to measure the overall trends in leadership perceptions. This provided a snapshot of how principals viewed their leadership practices in areas like classroom observations, teacher feedback, and instructional planning both before and after the walkthroughs were implemented.

To assess any changes, I conducted a pre-post comparison of leadership practices using the inventory data. For each leadership category, the score before the walkthrough implementation was compared to the score following the walkthroughs. This comparison highlighted any shifts in how principals perceived their leadership practices over time.

The second part of the ‘study’ cycle in Phase 3 of analysis involved coding and interpreting the quantitative data collected during the classroom walkthroughs. This data focused

on student learning, instructional planning, and teaching practices. The classroom walkthrough data were transcribed from the digital walkthrough forms. I created graphs from the classroom walkthrough data to visually represent the observations, making it easier to identify trends and patterns across different classrooms. After graphing the data, my collaborative inquiry partners and I were able to clearly see recurring instructional practices and gaps in implementation. This visual representation allowed us to quickly assess which areas of instruction were consistently strong and which needed improvement. By organizing the data in this way, we were able to streamline our analysis, facilitating more effective discussions around instructional leadership strategies and how to target specific areas for professional development. Themes such as the level of student engagement, differentiation in instruction, and adherence to curriculum standards emerged as significant focal points across all three schools.

The overall results indicated that implementing classroom walkthroughs positively influenced principal leadership practices and instructional outcomes across the three schools. Principals perceived themselves as providing more effective instructional feedback and support to teachers, which was reflected in improved student engagement and instructional planning in many classrooms. However, the data also revealed areas for further improvement, where variability in instructional practices suggested the need for additional leadership support. The comparison between pre- and post- inventory data highlighted that principals' perceptions had slight decreases in confidence in many of the leadership practices. The walkthrough data highlighted many areas for instructional improvement that shows the importance of monitoring instruction and providing feedback.

Principal Inventory Findings

The leadership inventory was developed with three components; leading school-wide professional development, communicating shared goals, and monitoring teaching and learning. The responses from the participants in the pre- inventory showed their perceptions of their leadership behaviors with those critical areas of monitoring instruction to determine areas of support for improvement. The post- inventory results reflected if any of their perceptions changed as they implemented instructional monitoring processes using classroom walkthrough observations. The results of the first section of the inventory are seen in Table 8.

Analyzing the pre- and post-inventory survey results on leadership practices related to promoting professional development revealed several insights regarding changes in agreement levels. Encouraging teachers to attend professional development aligned with school improvement goals saw no change, with respondents maintaining that they agreed or strongly agreed, as indicated by consistent responses across the pre- and post-inventories. Planning professional development around teacher needs and wants and providing useful professional materials and resources showed no change, with responses staying consistent. Supporting individualized professional development plans saw a slight increase, with one respondent shifting from "Neither Agree nor Disagree" to "Agree," indicating more positive perceptions about this practice. Providing in-house professional development opportunities around instructional best practices showed a slight decrease, with a shift from two respondents marking "Strongly Agree" in the pre-inventory to only one in the post-inventory. Additionally, the practice of planning professional development and scheduling time for collaboration experienced a slight decrease, with one fewer participant selecting "Strongly Agree" in the post- survey. These decreases connect to the focus group data that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Table 8

Leadership Inventory – School-Wide Professional Development

My leadership practices promote school-wide professional development that:	Pre-Inventory			Post-Inventory			Change (Post-Pre)	Interpretation
	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree		
Encourages teachers to attend professional development activities that are aligned to school improvement goals.		2	1		2	1	0	No change in agreement
Provides for in-house professional development opportunities around instructional best practices.		1	2		2	1	-1	Slight decrease in agreement
Plans professional development around teacher needs and wants.		3			3		0	No change in agreement
Supports individualized professional development plans.	1	2			3		+1	Slight increase in agreement
Plans professional development in-service with teachers.		1	2		2	1	-1	Slight decrease in agreement

Table 8 (continued)

My leadership practices promote school-wide professional development that:	Pre-Inventory			Post-Inventory			Change (Post- Pre)	Interpretation
	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree		
Furnishes useful professional materials and resources to teachers.		2	1		2	1	0	No change in agreement
Schedules time during in- service for collaboration among teachers.		1	2		2	1	-1	Slight decrease in confidence

Note. (Survey Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree).

The inventory section on shared goals showed overall stability in the perception of leadership practices, with a few shifts in agreement levels between the pre- and post-inventory results. Table 9 shows the comparison of results. Using data on student achievement to guide faculty discussions and encouraging teachers to use data analysis of student progress showed no change, with all participants consistently agreeing with these practices in both pre- and post-surveys.

Practices such as developing data-driven academic goals in collaboration with teachers and communicating the school's academic goals to teachers also remained stable, with no shift in agreement levels. These results suggested that participants maintained a consistent level of confidence in how leadership defined and communicated shared goals in those areas. There was a slight increase in agreement for working with teachers to interpret assessment data for instructional implications, with one respondent moving from "Agree" to "Strongly Agree," indicating improved perceptions of leadership collaboration in data interpretation over time. Conversely, the practice of using school goals when making academic decisions saw a slight decrease in agreement, with fewer respondents selecting "Strongly Agree" post-inventory. This could indicate some decline in confidence in how school goals influence academic decision-making. For developing school goals that promote high standards and setting high but achievable standards for all students, there was a slight increase in agreement post-inventory, suggesting that respondents felt more confident in leadership practices that try to elevate academic expectations.

The section for the teaching and learning process reflected both stability and shifts in leadership practices related to monitoring and providing feedback on instruction. Table 10 shows the comparison of the results. Several practices showed no change in agreement levels between

Table 9

Leadership Inventory – Shared Goals

		Pre-Inventory			Post-Inventory			Change (Post-Pre)	Interpretation
My leadership practices promote school-wide professional development that:		Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree		
131	Use data on student achievement to guide faculty discussions on the instructional program.		3			3		0	No change in agreement
	Encourage teachers to use data analysis of student academic progress.		3			3		0	No change in agreement
	Develops data-driven academic goals in collaboration with teachers.		2	1		2	1	0	No change in agreement
	Communicates the school's academic goals to teachers.		2	1		2	1	0	No change in agreement
	Works with teacher to interpret assessment data for instructional implications.		3			2	1	+1	Slight increase in agreement
	Uses school goals when making academic decisions.		1	2		2	1	-1	Slight decrease in agreement

Table 9 (continued)

My leadership practices promote school-wide professional development that:	Pre-Inventory			Post-Inventory			Change (Post-Pre)	Interpretation
	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree		
Develops school goals that promote high standards and expectations for all students.		3			2	1	+1	Slight increase in agreement
Sets high but achievable standards for all student's		3			2	1	+1	Slight increase in agreement

Note. (Survey Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree).

Table 10

Leadership Inventory – Teaching and Learning Process

	Pre-Inventory			Post-Inventory			Change (Post-Pre)	Interpretation
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree		
My leadership practices to monitor and provide feedback on the teaching and learning process includes:								
Visiting the classroom to ensure classroom instruction aligns with school goals.				2	1		2 1 0	No change in agreement
Monitoring classroom practices for alignment to district curriculum.				2	1		1 2 -1	Slight decrease in agreement
Working with students on academic tasks.			3				1 1 +2	Significant increase in agreement
Staying in the office all day.	2	1			1	2	+1	Slight increase in agreement
Observing teachers for professional development instead of evaluation.				2	1		2 1 0	No change in agreement
Evaluating teachers to improve instructional practice.				1	2		2 1 -1	Slight decrease in agreement

Table 10 (continued)

My leadership practices to monitor and provide feedback on the teaching and learning process includes:	Pre-Inventory					Post-Inventory					Change (Post-Pre)	Interpretation
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree		
Providing private feedback of teacher effort.				2	1				2	1	0	No change in agreement
Providing private feedback of student effort.			2	1			1	2			+1	Slight increase in agreement
<i>Note.</i> (Survey Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree).												

the pre- and post-inventory results. For example, visiting the classroom to ensure instruction aligns with school goals, observing teachers for professional development instead of evaluation, and providing private feedback on teacher effort all remained consistent, with respondents maintaining their level of agreement. A slight decline was noted in monitoring classroom practices for alignment to district curriculum and evaluating teachers to improve instructional practice, with respondents showing a minor decrease in these areas. This shift may indicate some reduced perceived effectiveness in these leadership actions. On the other hand, there were increases for working with students on academic tasks. Participants moved from "Neither Agree Nor Disagree" to higher levels of agreement, suggesting that they became more engaged in academic interactions with students, possibly trying to take a more hands-on approach to instructional support. Interestingly, there was a slight increase in agreement in the item about staying in the office all day. This item was meant to be a reverse-code item to make sure participants weren't just answering what was expected. The slight increase in the item could imply recognition that they sometimes got caught up in managerial tasks instead of instructional leadership.

Analyzing the pre- and post-inventory results on leadership perceptions showed some shifts in confidence and priorities. Overall, there was notable consistency in areas related to professional development and shared goals, suggesting that participants maintained a stable belief in their ability to implement those practices. However, there were slight decreases in agreement regarding monitoring classroom practices, which may suggest a new understanding about monitoring instruction. The comparison suggests that while some aspects of leadership perceptions remained solid, certain areas slightly decreased based on new knowledge.

In an action research study, a paired T-test is often applied to pre- and post-survey data to determine if a particular intervention or change has had a statistically significant effect (Mertler, 2019). The primary reason for using a paired T-test is to assess whether there has been a significant change between two related measurements (e.g., "pre" and "post" intervention scores). In action research, educators often implement a strategy or intervention and want to see if it impacts participants' attitudes, knowledge, skills, or behaviors. The pre-survey captures a baseline measurement, and the post-survey measures outcomes after the intervention.

In this inquiry, only three principals participated in the inventory process. Due to the small sample size, maintaining the confidentiality of individual participants proved challenging. As a result, I was unable to differentiate or analyze the data based on individual participants without risking the identification of specific principals. This limitation restricted my ability to draw conclusions about individual variations in leadership practices or the specific impacts of the systematic instructional monitoring plan on each principal's approach. I could instead analyze the difference by the questions. Using a Paired T-test, I analyzed the data by inventory sections; School-based PD questions (7), Shared Goals questions (8), and Teaching and Learning questions (8). I assigned values to the Likert scale responses for easier statistical analysis. The score values are listed as follows:

- Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point
- Disagree (D) = 2 points
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree (N) = 3 points
- Agree (A) = 4 points
- Strongly Agree (SA) = 5 points

Action research studies are often conducted with relatively small sample sizes (e.g., a single school or classroom), where variability can be a challenge (Mertler, 2019). A paired T-test is well-suited for smaller groups since it increases the power of the test by utilizing the dependency between pre- and post-measures. One of the inquiry goals was to evaluate the effect a systematic instructional monitoring plan had on principal instructional leadership behaviors in Restart schools. A paired T-test can provide evidence to support or refute the effectiveness of the intervention.

Using the process described, the first section of the Principal Inventory with corresponding Likert points is represented in Table 11. From the results of the school-wide professional development statements, the paired samples t-test revealed a mean difference of -0.29 with a standard deviation of 0.76. The t-value was -1.0, with 6 degrees of freedom. The one-sided p-value was 0.178, while the two-sided p-value was 0.356. The p-values were relatively high, suggesting that there is no statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-scores. The data did not provide sufficient evidence to indicate a meaningful change in scores after the intervention.

The second section of the Principal Inventory was about defining and communicating shared goals. The second section of the Principal Inventory with corresponding Likert points on Shared Goals is represented in Table 12. From the results of the shared goals statements, the paired samples t-test revealed a mean difference of 0.25 with a standard deviation of 0.71. The t-value was 1.0, with 7 degrees of freedom. The one-sided p-value was 0.175, while the two-sided p-value was 0.351. The p-values were above the standard significance threshold (0.05), indicating no statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-scores. This means the data did not provide strong evidence of a meaningful change in scores after the intervention.

Table 11

Principal Inventory: School-Wide PD

<u>My leadership practices promote school-wide professional development that:</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>
Encourages teachers to attend professional development activities that are aligned to school improvement goals.	13	13
Provides for in-house professional development opportunities around instructional best practices.	14	13
Plans professional development around teacher needs and wants.	12	12
Supports individualized professional development plans.	11	12
Plans professional development in-service with teachers.	14	13
Furnishes useful professional materials and resources to teachers.	13	13
<u>Schedules time during in-service for collaboration among teachers.</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>13</u>

Table 12

Principal Inventory: Shared Goals

<u>My leadership practices define and communicate shared goals that:</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>
Uses data on student achievement to guide faculty discussions on the instructional program.	12	12
Encourages teachers to use data analysis of student academic progress.	12	12
Develops data-driven academic goals in collaboration with teachers.	13	13
Communicates the school's academic goals to teachers.	13	13
Works with teachers to interpret assessment data for instructional implication.	12	13
Uses school goals when making academic decisions.	14	13
Develops school goals that promote high standards and expectations for all students.	12	13
<u>Sets high but achievable standards for all students.</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>

The third section of the Principal Inventory was about the teaching and learning process. The third section of the Principal Inventory with corresponding Likert points on Shared Goals is represented in Table 13.

From the results of the teaching and learning statements, the paired samples t-test revealed a mean difference of -0.62 with a standard deviation of 0.42. The t-value was 1.4, with 7 degrees of freedom. The one-sided p-value was 0.090, while the two-sided p-value was 0.180. The p-values were above the standard significance threshold (0.05), indicating no statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-scores. This means the data did not provide strong evidence of a meaningful change in scores after the intervention.

The paired T-tests across the three inventory sections suggested that instructional monitoring did not produce statistically significant changes in the principals' leadership perceptions of their behaviors. The mean differences in scores, while present in some areas, were not substantial enough to indicate a meaningful impact based on the conventional significance level ($p < 0.05$). This suggested that the classroom walkthroughs did not effectively influence the leadership behaviors or that the small sample size limited the ability to detect subtle changes. It could also mean that the inventory was not specific enough about how their perceptions over time were impacted by classroom walkthroughs. Further study with larger samples or a different survey tool may be needed to explore the perceptions of principal leadership practices more thoroughly.

Another way to view the results of the Principal Inventory was to look at the overall Likert scale counts from the pre- and post- responses. Figure 17 shows the Likert scale counts for each option; Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither Agree Nor Disagree (N), Disagree (D),

Table 13

Principal Inventory: Teaching and Learning Process

My leadership practices to monitor and provide feedback on the teaching and learning process includes:	Pre	Post
Visiting the classroom to ensure classroom instruction aligns with school goals.	13	13
Monitoring classroom practices for alignment to district curriculum.	13	14
Working with students on academic tasks.	9	12
Staying in the office all day.	4	5
Observing teachers for professional development instead of evaluation.	13	13
Evaluating teachers to improve instructional practice.	14	13
Providing private feedback of teacher effort.	13	13
Providing private feedback of student effort.	10	11

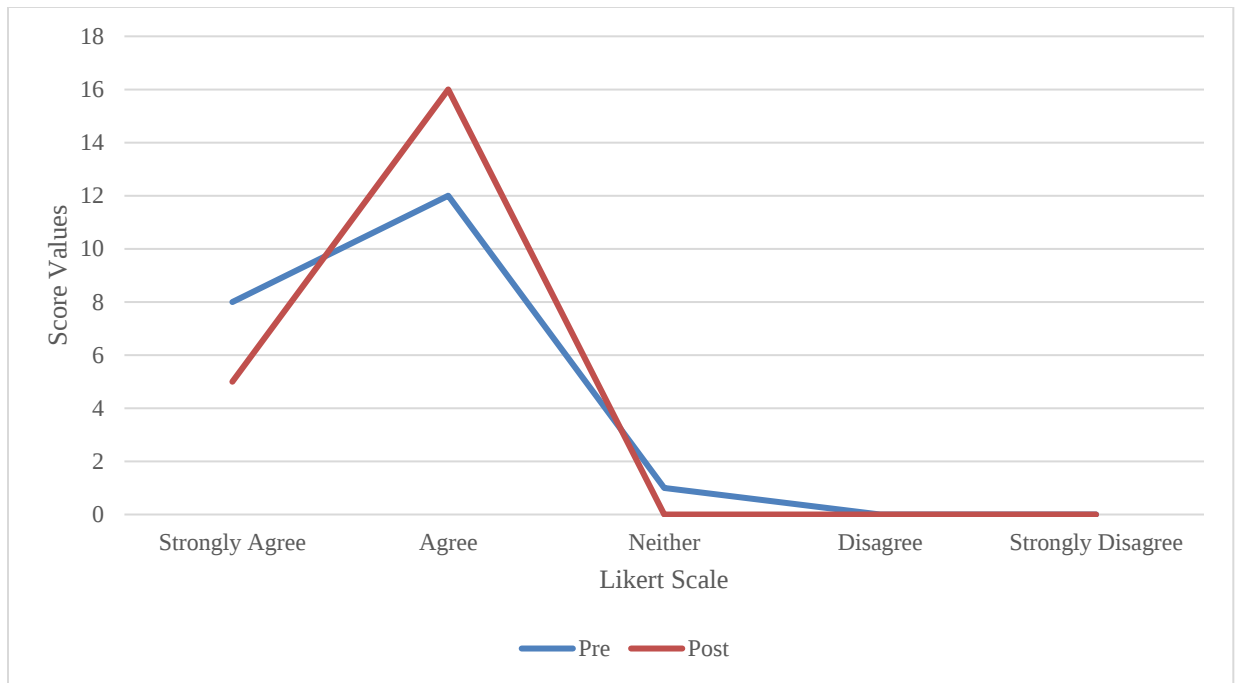


Figure 17. Principal inventory – School-wide professional development

Strongly Disagree (SD). The line graphs provided a visual representation of a slight decrease in agreement with the statements that the ‘principal planned and provided professional development at the school (in house) for teachers’. There was a slight increase for the response ‘supports individualized professional development plans’.

Figure 18 shows no change in responses from pre- to post- inventory responses for shared goals; ‘uses data on student achievement to guide faculty discussions on the instructional program’, ‘encourages teachers to use data analysis of student academic progress’, ‘develops data-driven academic goals in collaboration with teachers’, and ‘communicates the school's academic goals to teachers’. The graph also shows slight increases for responses of ‘works with teachers to interpret assessment data for instructional implications’, ‘develops school goals that promote high standards and expectations for all students’, and ‘sets high but achievable standards for all students’.

Figure 19 represents the responses from pre- to post- inventory for the ‘teaching and learning process’. The line graph shows an overall change from the pre- inventory to the post- inventory. There were increases in agreement from the statements about observing student behaviors and alignment to professional development. There were decreases aligned to monitoring and evaluating instruction. The line graph shows the influence of individual responses and their individual experiences.

Classroom Walkthrough Observations

The findings from the classroom observation walkthrough data collected as part of this inquiry, provided a view of classroom instruction, planning, and teaching practices across the three Restart schools. The data gathered from these observations showed patterns and trends in instructional planning, delivery, and student learning. This section will present an overview of

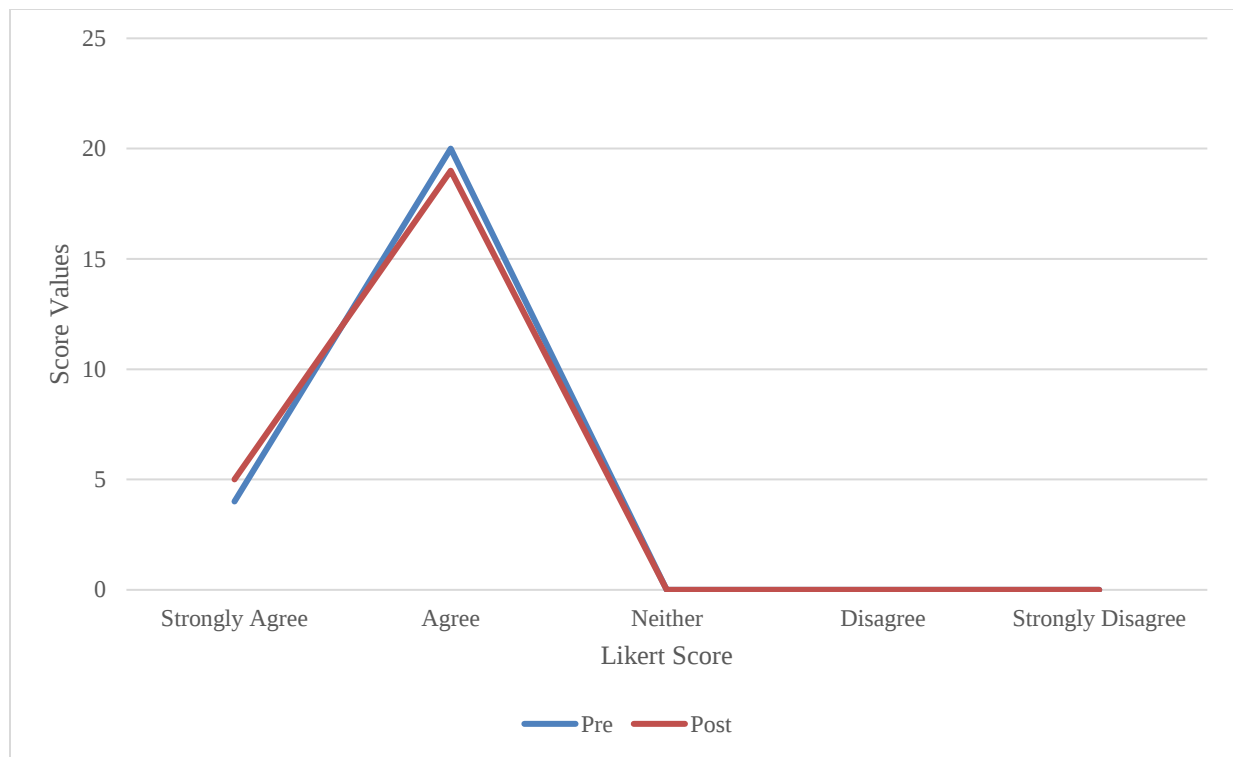


Figure 18. Principal inventory – Shared goals.

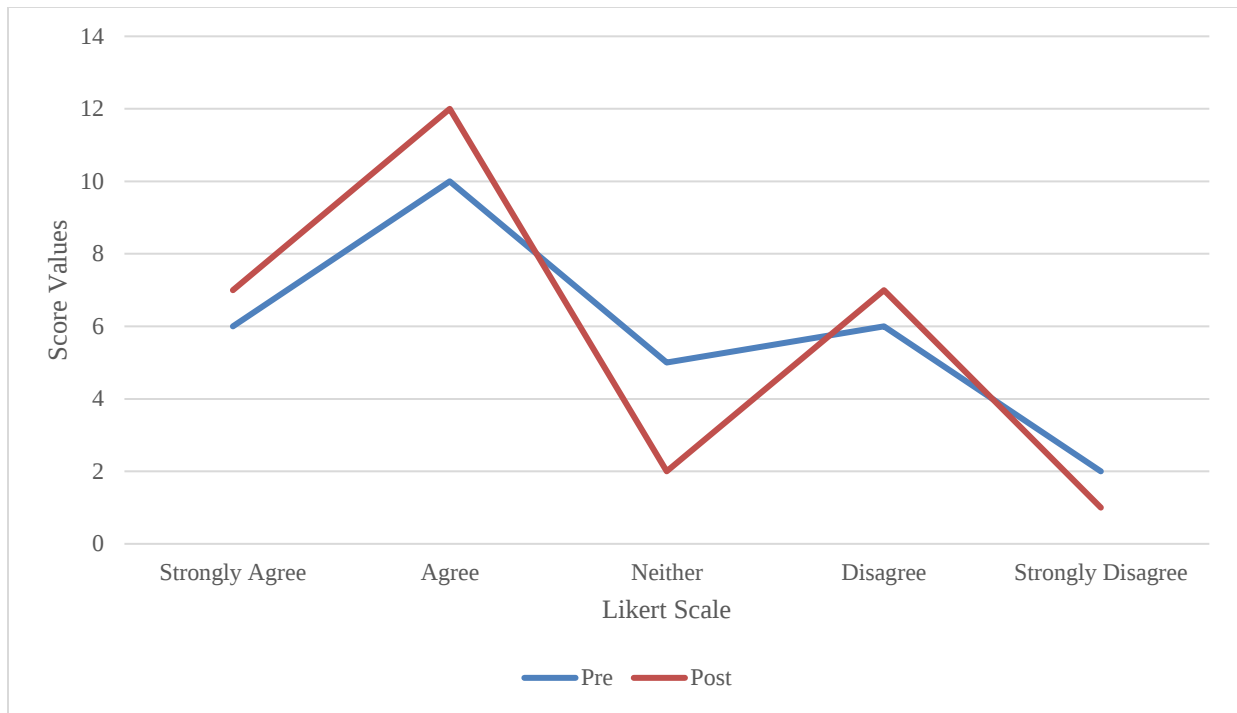


Figure 19. Principal inventory – Teaching and learning process.

the key findings from the walkthrough data. The data analysis section will identify a deeper exploration of how these findings related to instructional leadership decisions. By providing these findings, the walkthrough data offered valuable insights into the changes in leadership practices and their effects on classroom instruction.

Over the course of the inquiry, 105 classroom observation walkthroughs were conducted. Figures 20-23 show the data for classroom walkthroughs by school, by day, by grade, and by subject. More classroom walkthroughs were conducted at the elementary than the middle school. Classroom walkthroughs were conducted weekly with no walks on Fridays because those days were reserved for testing and make-up assignments. Elementary schools represent grades Kindergarten through fifth grade while the middle school represents grades 6-8. Of the walks conducted, most were in tested grades during ELA and Math.

The classroom walkthrough tool was designed to collect data aligned to the district walkthrough tool, focus areas of the district and professional development that school administrators received to build their leadership capacity. Based on the data shown in Table 14, learning targets were visible to students somewhere in the classroom two-thirds of the time, but they were aligned to the standard only half of the time. During most of the lessons observed, there was little evidence that learning targets were unpacked in student friendly language and referred to during the lesson.

The data collected from the classroom walkthrough observations showed the instructional components most evident during instruction. Whole group instruction was the most commonly observed method, present in 71.2% of classrooms, suggesting that the teachers were not implementing as much small-group instruction as expected. Direct instruction was also prevalent, with 66.3% of classrooms using this strategy. However, more interactive or student-

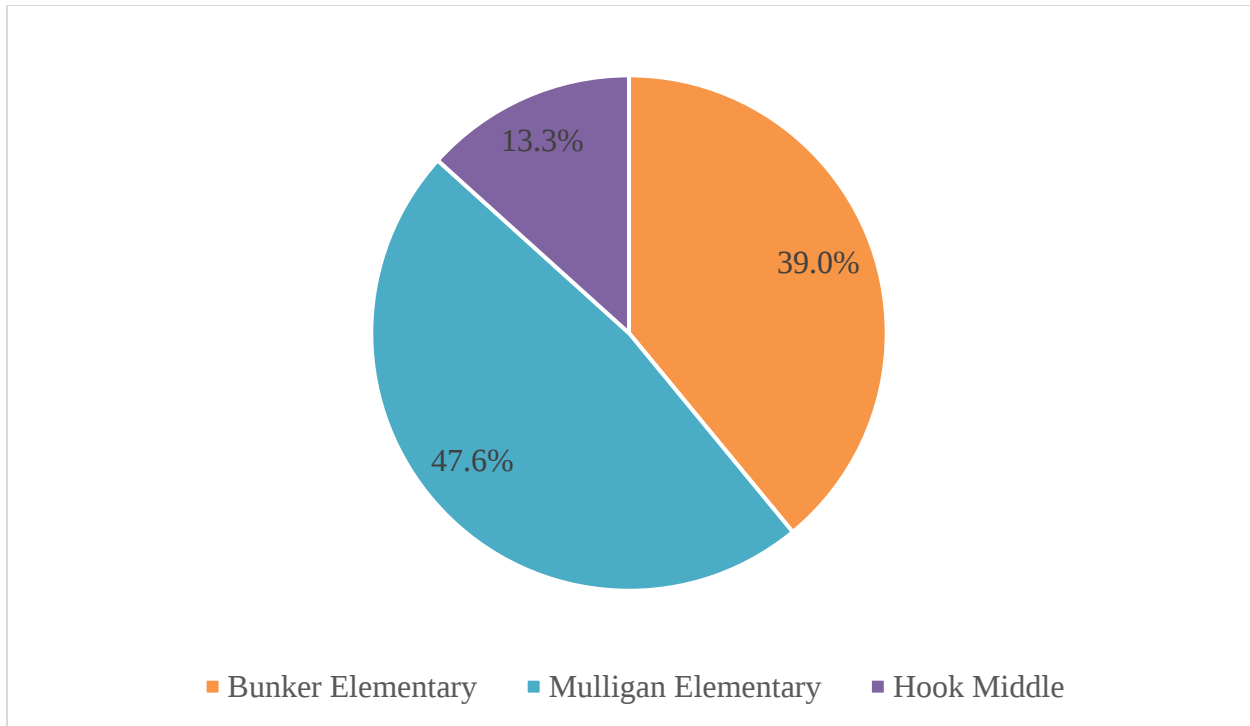


Figure 20. Classroom walkthrough by school.

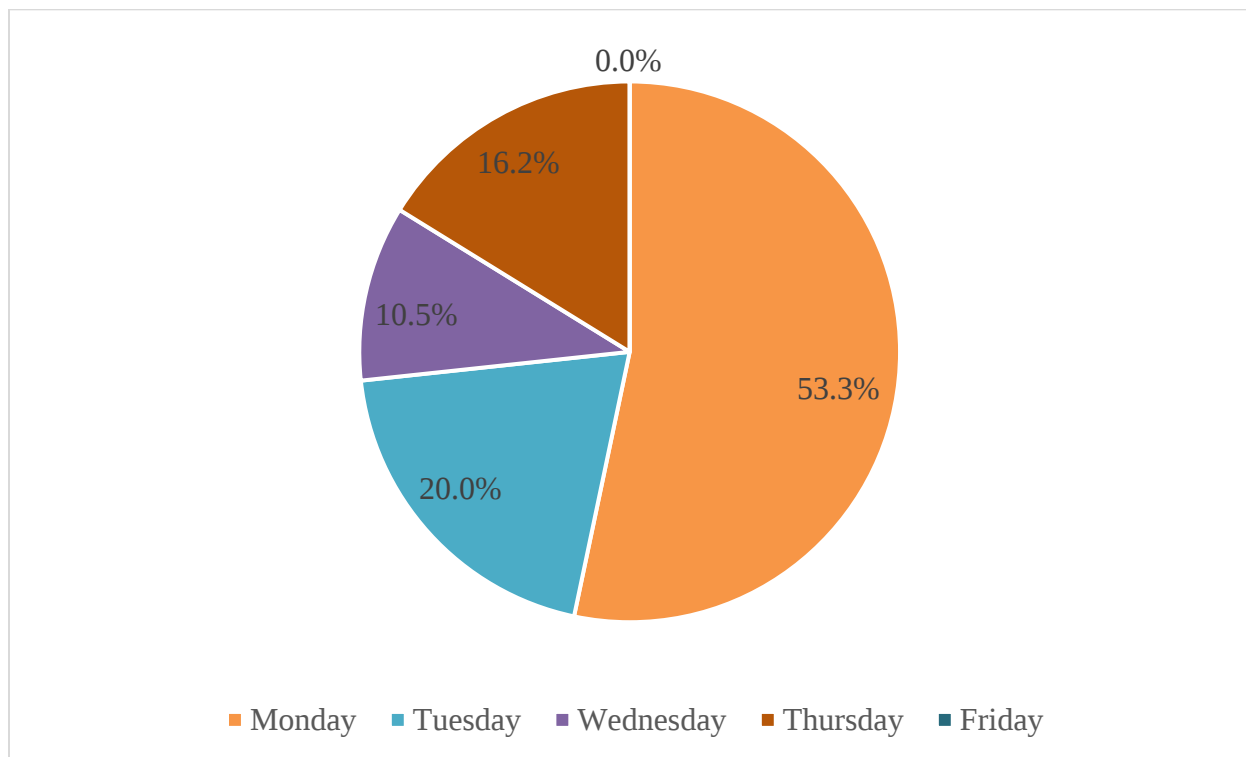


Figure 21. Classroom walkthrough by weekday.

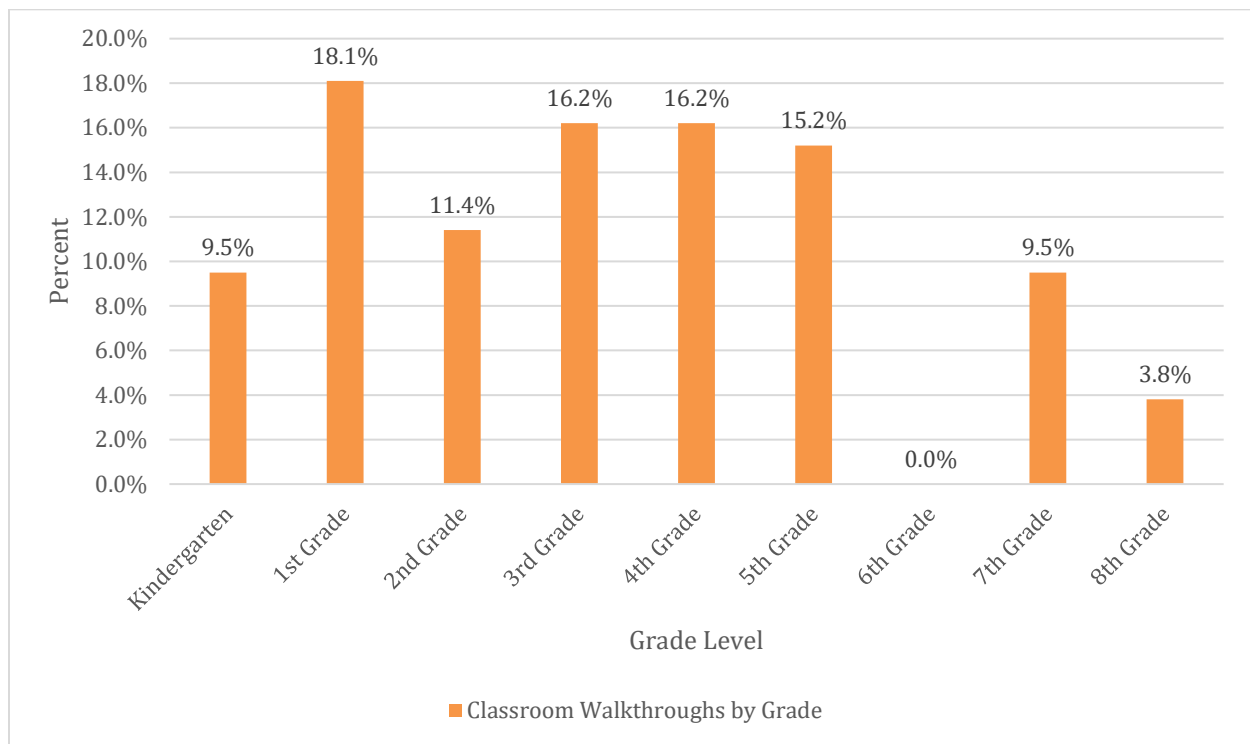


Figure 22. Classroom walkthrough by grade.

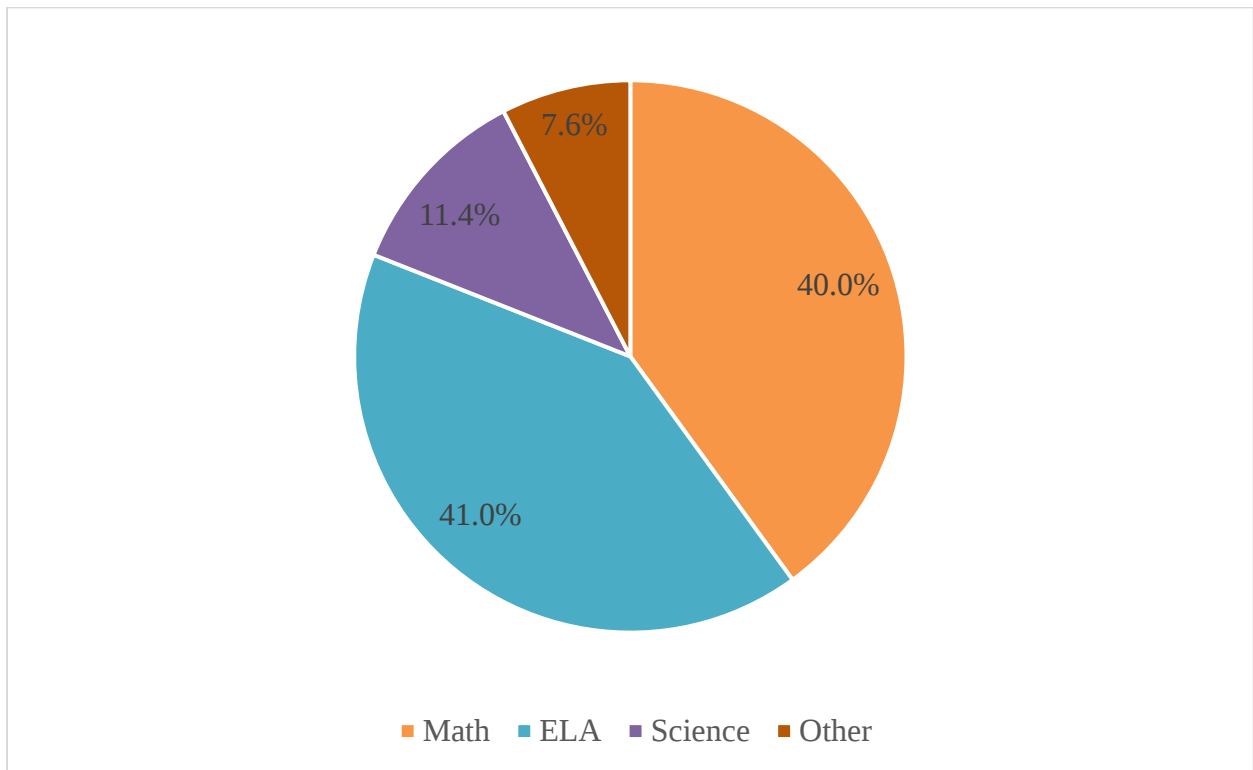


Figure 23. Classroom walkthrough by subject.

Table 14

Lesson Curriculum - Learning Targets

Learning Target	Yes	No
Visible to students	68.6%	31.4%
Unpacked in student friendly language	26.7%	73.3%
Aligned to standard/learning target	55.2%	44..8%
Mentioned during the lesson	20.0%	80.0%

centered components, such as activating learning (39.9%) and independent work (47.1%), were less evident. The low use of formative assessments aligned to standards (18.6%) and student assignments aligned to standards (21.0%) raised concerns about how often instructional activities were directly tied to learning targets. These percentages suggested gaps in ensuring that students were regularly assessed in alignment with standards and received assignments that support targeted learning outcomes. The low percentage of closing/summarizing activities (1.9%) revealed that only a minimal number of lessons were concluded with reflective or summarizing activities or that the walks conducted did not happen during the end of a lesson. The limited presence of graphic organizers (23.8%) and tech-enhanced activities (29.8%) further indicates that tools for scaffolding student learning and incorporating technology were underutilized.

Overall, the data suggested that while traditional instructional approaches like whole-group and direct instruction were present, there is a significant need for greater emphasis on student-centered strategies, formative assessment practices, and small-group instruction to enhance learning. Improving the alignment between activities and standards may benefit student outcomes (see Table 15).

During the inquiry, I accompanied the principals during classroom walkthroughs to collect observation data. After each visit, we discussed our observations and completed the walkthrough tool together. These conversations revealed the principals' thoughts on next steps based on the data. For instance, Principal 1 noticed increased use of Capturing Kids' Hearts, a strategy that had been an expressed expectation. During another walkthrough, Principal 1 referenced the pacing guide after observing that first-grade teachers were not aligned and directed the assistant principal to address this in Professional Learning Teams (PLTs). Principal

Table 15

Classroom Walkthrough Observation Tool – Instructional Components

Instructional Components	Percent Evident
Activate Learning	39.9%
Graphic Organizers	23.8%
Learning Activity Aligned to Standard	58.3%
Direct Instruction	66.3%
Whole Group	71.2%
Independent Work	47.1%
Formative Assessment Aligned to Standard	18.6%
Student Assignment	31.4%
Student Assignment Aligned to Standard	21.0%
Worksheets	44.7%
Tech Enhanced	29.8%
Closing/Summarizer	1.9%

2 focused on the need for more standards-based instruction and made notes to bring up differentiation in the next PLT meeting. In another instance, Principal 2 observed a teacher not using the required math curriculum manual and planned a follow-up with the assistant principal to model proper instruction. Principal 2 also expressed concern over lost instructional time during transitions, vowing to gather more data on this issue. Similarly, Principal 3 noticed a beginning teacher in need of support and immediately spoke to the instructional coach in the hallway to develop a follow-up plan. Principal 3 also noted that he wasn't seeing the desired impact from the latest professional development (PD) session, which raised concerns for further action. These observations captured how these walkthroughs allowed the principals to connect their observations to actionable next steps.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The analysis of the qualitative data from the focus group responses and principal interviews followed a systematic process identifying recurring themes and patterns related to leadership practices and classroom instruction. The data was first transcribed from audio recordings and then coded by hand, aligning the responses with the overarching inquiry questions. A preliminary coding scheme, developed in collaboration with inquiry partners, which was refined through review of the transcriptions, and inter-rater reliability was documented to ensure consistency in the coding process. Each focus group and interview transcript was carefully examined to highlight key phrases, topics, and ideas that provided insight into how principals' leadership practices evolved as a result of implementing classroom walkthrough observations.

The focus group data, collected from teachers, teaching assistants, and support staff, was sorted by school and analyzed for patterns related to instructional feedback, leadership support,

and the impact of classroom walkthroughs on teaching practices. Basic results indicated that, overall, principals believed their leadership practices had improved, particularly in providing instructional feedback and fostering a collaborative environment. Teachers generally appreciated the increased visibility of principals in classrooms, though some expressed a need for more consistency in feedback.

In the ‘study’ part of the cycle in Phase 3 of this inquiry, data was analyzed from the teacher focus group responses and the principal interviews. The focus group discussions and the principal interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed for coding. The second part of the ‘study’ cycle in Phase 3 of analysis involved coding and interpreting the focus group and principal interview responses.

The inductive coding process for the teacher focus group data involved several structured steps to ensure systematic analysis. The coding process began by organizing focus groups and interview questions with overarching inquiry questions. A preliminary coding scheme was developed in collaboration with inquiry partners and involved identifying recurring themes or issues that were prevalent in the responses, which informed the codes to be used. Codes were assigned to meaningful units of data based on patterns and recurring themes like feedback, alignment with school improvement, professional development, and visibility.

The team applied the coding scheme to a small subset of the qualitative data collected, refining the codes to ensure clarity and consistency. The coding process was performed manually, and coded data was entered into a spreadsheet for analysis making it easier to identify patterns, trends, and emerging themes. Once all data was coded, it was sorted by code categories to identify larger patterns and trends. Key themes, such as the impact of walkthroughs on instructional practices and leadership behaviors, emerged from the data (see Table 16).

Table 16

Focus Group Coding

Theme	Category	Code	Example Quote/Excerpt	Frequency	Explanation
Impact on Instruction	Focus of Walkthroughs	Curriculum	"It was to make sure that what I was teaching was aligned with the pacing guide as well."	9	Ensuring that curriculum and pacing are followed is a key focus during walkthroughs.
	Focus of Walkthroughs	Lesson planning	"What level are they going to have to reach with this topic? How am I going to make sure I reach that level of rigor?"	10	Principals prioritize observing student engagement and ensuring high-quality instruction during walkthroughs.
	Focus of Walkthroughs	Purpose	"I never knew what somebody was there for... I didn't know if they were there for an official something or just to watch."	6	An area of communication about the purpose of walkthrough that can be improved
Leadership Practices	Impact on Culture	Frequency	"I would love to have more in and out... rather than assuming that I'm fine."	4	Need to increase the frequency and scope of walkthroughs
	Impact on Culture	Visibility	"Especially our hallway is so far away... admin, unless there's a reason for them to come down, we don't see them."	3	Increase the consistency of walkthroughs

Table 16 (continued)

Theme	Category	Code	Example Quote/Excerpt	Frequency	Explanation
157	Impact of walkthroughs	Professional Development	“Our administration has been really driving this professional development... they want us to do what that professional development is telling us to do.”	12	Walkthrough data is used to identify instructional areas that need additional professional development.
	Data-Driven Decision Making	Use of walkthrough data	Professional learning teams (PLTs)	10	Identifying areas for improvement in other school initiatives like PLTs
		Use of walkthrough data	Data Collection	3	Walkthrough data isn’t used to identify instructional areas that need additional professional development
	Feedback	Impact on instructional planning	Data Sharing	3	Principals use walkthrough data to identify trends across classrooms and guide discussions on areas for improvement.

Table 16 (continued)

Theme	Category	Code	Example Quote/Excerpt	Frequency	Explanation
158 Use of Restart Flexibilities	Impact on instructional planning	Quality of feedback	"The feedback was often too general, like 'I like the way you redirected your students,' rather than actionable suggestions."	6	Principals use walkthroughs to assess teaching effectiveness and the alignment with school-wide strategies.
	Impact on culture	Specificity	"He's always encouraging us to do better... He's going to touch base with you, come in and be like, 'This is what I saw. These are good things.'"	2	Principal uses walkthrough data to build and improve relationships
	Improving instructional capacity	Calendar Flexibility	"So I feel like one of the things that we adjusted was when we tried to improve math, we extended the school day and then also we're able to do flexible learning. Those are some things that we thought of because we were like, Oh well, we could do things differently because of Restart."	3	Restart flexibilities in scheduling allowed principals to provide targeted professional development.

Teacher Focus Group

An ‘Organization of Alignment between Focus Group, Interview and Inquiry Questions’ (see Table 17) was created to align the focus group questions and the principal interview questions with the overarching inquiry questions. This table organizes the focus group questions by categorizing them under each inquiry question and principal interview question, ensuring a clear connection between the data collected and the inquiry's questions. The table serves as a framework for analyzing the focus group responses to the principals' responses, allowing for an examination of how classroom walkthroughs influence the leadership practices, instructional strategies, and the use of Restart flexibilities in the schools as well as how the principals perceived their actions impacted teachers compared to how teachers felt about the leadership decisions made.

A member check was conducted after the focus group answers were transcribed and coded by collaborative inquiry partners. Mertler refers to member coding as a collaborative process where participants involved in the research (often those who provided the data, such as interviewees or focus group members) are given the opportunity to review the codes or themes that the researcher has developed (Mertler, 2022). Mertler highlights that member coding can help reduce researcher bias, ensuring that the analysis remains faithful to the data rather than reflecting the researcher's own assumptions or interpretations (Mertler, 2022). As part of the ‘study’ part of Phase 3, I invited the CIPs to a data analysis session. I reviewed the process that was implemented to conduct the focus groups. CIPs read through the transcripts and the coding charts to ask clarifying questions and point out themes or ideas that was not already noted. The answers were transcribed and coded for analysis. With assistance from the inquiry partners, a preliminary coding scheme was developed. The team looked for recurring or key

Table 17

Organization of Alignment: Focus Group, Interview and Research Questions

Inquiry Question	Interview Question	Focus Group Question
How do principals perceive restart flexibilities around strategic and instructional leadership?	Talk to me about how conducting classroom walkthrough observations has influenced your strategic and instructional leadership skills or practices?	• Describe your overall experiences with classroom walkthrough observations? • How do you know there is a particular practice or strategy that you should be using? • Describe how the walkthrough observation process has influenced your planning, staff meetings, PLTs, or professional development in your building? • How has the walkthrough process improved communication and alignment to the school improvement plan in the building?
How are administrators using Restart Flexibilities in the school?	• Describe how the walkthrough observation process has influenced your planning for professional development. • Talk to me about how conducting classroom walkthrough observations has influenced your strategic and instructional leadership skills or practices? • Have you used any Restart flexibilities based on the classroom walkthrough observation data collected? How? If not, what plans do you have for the future for using Restart flexibilities based on the data you collected?	• Describe how the walkthrough observation process has influenced your planning, staff meetings, PLTs, or professional development in your building? • How has the walkthrough process improved communication and alignment to the school improvement plan in the building?

Table 17 (continued)

Inquiry Question	Interview Question	Focus Group Question
What effect does a systematic instructional monitoring plan have on principal instructional leadership behaviors in Restart schools?	● Describe your overall experiences with classroom walkthrough observations? ● While the walkthrough has certain look-fors, what is most important for you, what are you looking for when you are conducting classroom walkthrough observations? ● How would you describe the purpose of your classroom walkthrough observations? ● Describe how the walkthrough observation process has influenced your planning for professional development. ● How has the walkthrough process influenced how you communicate and share the goals of the school improvement plan? ● Describe how the classroom walkthrough observation process has influenced how you provide feedback to teachers about their instructional practices? ● How has using classroom walkthrough observations influenced the NCEES formal evaluation process? ● How would teachers describe the purpose of the classroom walkthrough observation process?	● Describe your overall experiences with classroom walkthrough observations? ● How do you know there is a particular practice or strategy that you should be using? ● How would you describe the purpose of classroom walkthrough observations? ● Describe how the walkthrough observation process has influenced your planning, staff meetings, PLTs, or professional development in your building? ● How has the walkthrough process improved communication and alignment to the school improvement plan in the building? ● Describe how the classroom walkthrough observation process has changed the relationship you have with your principal? Please give examples.

Table 17 (continued)

Inquiry Question	Interview Question	Focus Group Question
How can a systematic monitoring process using classroom walkthroughs influence how principals plan for school improvement using Restart flexibilities?	● Tell me about any resistance you've felt from teachers in response to your classroom walkthrough observations? (Follow-Up) What actions have you taken to overcome this resistance? ● While the walkthrough has certain look-fors, what is most important for you, what are you looking for when you are conducting classroom walkthrough observations? ● How would you describe the purpose of your classroom walkthrough observations? ● Describe how the walkthrough observation process has influenced your planning for professional development. ● Tell me about any resistance you've felt from teachers in response to your classroom walkthrough observations? (Follow-Up) What actions have you taken to overcome this resistance? ● Have you used any Restart flexibilities based on the classroom walkthrough observation data collected? How? If not, what plans do you have for the future for using Restart flexibilities based on the data you collected?	● Describe how the walkthrough observation process has influenced your planning, staff meetings, PLTs, or professional development in your building? ● How has the walkthrough process improved communication and alignment to the school improvement plan in the building?

issues that informed what codes were necessary. At this stage, a coding symbol table was created. The team tested and refined the coding using a small subset of the qualitative data collected and documented inter-rater reliability. Coding was done by hand, with the data entered into a spreadsheet. Once all the data was coded, it was sorted by code to identify patterns, trends, and themes. Summary tables and charts were created to make the results easier to analyze.

Summary of the Bunker Focus Group Responses

The focus group discussion on classroom walkthrough observations highlighted a range of experiences, insights, and suggestions from educators on how these observations impacted their teaching, planning, and relationships with administrators. Participants expressed overall positive views about classroom walkthroughs, with a strong emphasis on the value of receiving feedback. One teacher shared that they appreciated the notes left during visits, which helped reduce any feeling of intimidation: “You don’t feel intimidated that someone’s walking into your room and get a nice little positive of something they caught you doing. That was nice” (Participant 2). This sentiment was echoed by others, who found that feedback was often constructive rather than punitive. Participant 3 noted, “They’re always looking for something that you know, not a gotcha. It’s like they’re listening for something.”

However, several participants expressed a desire for more frequent walkthroughs. Participant 4, for instance, commented, “I would love to have more in and out... rather than assuming that I’m fine.” This highlights a broader concern about the irregularity of these observations, with some teachers feeling that more presence from administrators would be beneficial not only for accountability but also for student engagement. The discussion also touched on the logistics of walkthroughs, with some educators noting the challenge of administration reaching all parts of the building regularly. Participant 5 stated, “Especially our

hallway is so far away... admin, unless there's a reason for them to come down, we don't see them." There was a consensus that more visibility from school leadership across the campus would improve both teacher support and student behavior.

The follow-up questions delved into how feedback from walkthroughs was shared, with most participants mentioning the use of sticky notes. Participant 5 mentioned that some feedback had surfaced during formal evaluations, but overall, the walkthrough process seemed more informal. Some participants in specialized areas like Encore (e.g., art, music, and PE) felt overlooked, as Participant 7 lamented that "walks don't happen very often in Encore," indicating a gap in the observation process for these subjects.

When asked about lesson planning, many teachers indicated that the walkthroughs did shape their approach, particularly in terms of ensuring that they met district expectations. Participant 1 mentioned, "Make sure you're trying to meet all the standards," while others pointed to the importance of aligning with pacing guides and curriculum documents. Participant 7 elaborated on the complexity of planning, noting the importance of breaking lessons into manageable chunks: "Real time piece in theory, referring to the curriculum piece to make sure that it is... chunked so that there are less behavior issues."

In terms of professional development, several participants felt there was insufficient time for collaborative planning and sharing strategies. Participant 2 remarked, "We're not getting to the strategy part... we're so data drilling," expressing a desire for more opportunities to discuss instructional techniques during Professional Learning Team (PLT) meetings. The sentiment was shared by others who felt that while data was important, it often overshadowed the time needed for deeper strategy discussions.

The focus group also explored the purpose of classroom walkthroughs, with teachers generally agreeing that the primary goal was to ensure that teachers were following directions, teaching effectively, and creating a safe environment. However, some educators felt that the walkthroughs could be more targeted and aligned with specific strategies being used in classrooms. As Participant 4 noted, the feedback was often too general, with comments like, “I like the way you redirected your students,” rather than offering actionable suggestions.

On the topic of how walkthroughs influenced their relationship with the principal, most participants spoke positively. Participant 1 appreciated seeing the principal regularly: “It’s just good to see her around and in the rooms.” Others mentioned how the principal was open to new ideas and flexible with teacher requests. Participant 4 described the principal as “open to trying new things,” and Participant 8 described her as a “beautiful soul” who trusted teachers to do their jobs. This sense of trust was a recurring theme, with several participants noting that the principal’s supportive approach had strengthened their relationship.

Overall, the focus group revealed that while classroom walkthroughs were generally appreciated for the feedback and support they provided, there was room for improvement in terms of frequency, targeted feedback, and the inclusion of all subject areas. Additionally, the discussions emphasized the importance of balancing data analysis with opportunities for collaboration and strategy sharing among teachers.

Summary of the Mulligan Focus Group Responses

In the focus group discussion, seven educators shared their experiences with classroom walkthrough observations, revealing a range of perspectives on the process, its purpose, and its impact on teaching practices. When asked to describe their overall experiences with walkthroughs, participants expressed frustration with the lack of personalized feedback. One

participant noted, "I feel like even last year we never really got any information about it... they did like a whole school thing of trends that they see, but not really anything personal"

(Participant 1). Others echoed this sentiment, with Participant 3 highlighting the confusion about the purpose of frequent visits, stating, "I had a lot of people in and out of my room, and I never knew what somebody was there for... I didn't know if they were there for an official something or other, or if they were just there to watch."

A recurring theme in the discussion was the inconsistency of walkthrough observations, especially following changes in administration. As Participant 2 pointed out, "I wondered if things would have been different... if we had had the same administrator since the beginning of the year." This sentiment was echoed by other participants, who noted that under previous leadership, the walkthrough process was more structured and aligned with specific goals, such as monitoring for vocabulary strategies or cooperative learning techniques. When discussing what was most important in planning lessons, several participants emphasized the need to focus on standards, engagement, and differentiation. Participant 1 mentioned that "Standards" were a priority, while Participant 2 highlighted the significance of "engagement and transitions." These elements were identified as foundational to effective lesson planning, though walkthroughs sometimes felt disconnected from these priorities.

The group also discussed how they became aware of strategies they should be using in the classroom. According to Participant 1, in the past, there was a clear focus, with teachers receiving feedback and collaborating on shared strategies. However, this year, the process felt less organized, with one participant noting, "It's much, much different than it was in the past as far as that goes" from Participant 1. Despite the walkthroughs' potential to foster alignment, several participants expressed frustration with mixed messages from different administrators.

Participant 4 highlighted the issue of conflicting instructions, saying, "Also hearing two different things from two different people... one person was telling me you don't have to follow it... and then someone's telling me back to correct." This lack of clarity seemed to undermine the effectiveness of the walkthrough process.

The walkthroughs' purpose, according to some participants, was to ensure consistency across classrooms. Participant 3 explained, "They work in my classroom, and they work in another classroom... you can see that we're teaching the same stuff," though others felt the purpose was less clear. This confusion extended to communication and alignment with the school improvement plan. Participant 5 shared that the first time they had even heard of the plan was when they were asked to approve it urgently: "The first time I ever heard the word school improvement plan was the day that we had to come in and approve it... and I was like, what is it?"

Overall, the focus group revealed a sense of dissatisfaction with the classroom walkthrough observation process. While some participants recognized the potential value in the practice, many felt it lacked clear communication, actionable feedback, and alignment with instructional goals. The inconsistency in administration and mixed messages further complicated the process, leaving many educators unsure of its purpose or impact on their teaching practices.

Summary of the Hook Focus Group Responses

The focus group transcript revealed rich insights into teachers' experiences with classroom walkthrough observations, their implications for lesson planning, and their overall impact on school improvement processes. Teachers expressed a range of feelings about the frequency and nature of these walkthroughs, highlighting both positive and negative aspects. Many teachers reported varying levels of exposure to classroom walkthroughs. Participant 1

noted, "Outside of my observations, I've had zero classroom walkthroughs," which underscores a sense of isolation in their teaching practice. In contrast, Participant 2 shared a more extensive experience, saying, "75% of the walkthroughs have been during lessons... some were with people from the county office." This participant pointed out that external observers sometimes caused anxiety for students: "They didn't introduce themselves at first... students were like, 'Who are you and why are you asking these questions?'" This illustrates the potential disruption caused by outside observers, as well as the need for observers to establish rapport with students.

When discussing lesson planning, participants emphasized the importance of aligning lessons with standards. Participant 3 articulated, "What level are they going to have to reach with this topic? How am I going to make sure I reach that level of rigor?" This focus on academic rigor was complemented by Participant 2, who emphasized the necessity of fostering early student success: "How can I help them feel success in the very beginning so that they will want to take it a step further?" This dual focus on high expectations and student confidence reflects a nuanced understanding of effective teaching practices.

Professional development emerged as a critical theme in teachers' responses about strategies and approaches. Participant 1 noted, "Our administration has been really driving this professional development... I think they want us to do what that professional development is telling us to do." However, Participant 2 pointed out the value of teacher autonomy, stating, "They leave the strategies up to us. Teacher flexibility. I cannot read from a script." This balance between guidance and flexibility highlighted the complexities teachers face in implementing new strategies while maintaining their individual teaching styles. Participant 4 added that experience plays a crucial role, stating, "You kind of learn what works, what doesn't work." This iterative process of trial and error fosters a culture of continuous improvement among educators.

The purpose of walkthroughs also elicited varied responses. Participant 2 explained that formal observations were focused on ensuring pacing and behavior checks, while unannounced walkthroughs aimed to verify alignment with the pacing guide: "It was to make sure that what I was teaching was aligned with the pacing guide as well." Additionally, Participant 3 mentioned the role of walkthroughs in gathering data for school improvement goals: "With the Learning-focused walkthroughs, they have specific goals... they were keeping data on how many people have I CAN statements." This highlighted the dual purpose of walkthroughs as both evaluative and formative tools.

Teachers expressed that walkthrough observations significantly influenced their planning and professional development decisions. Participant 1 noted, "It kind of helps them identify the future needs. Do we need to move onto the next strategy?" Participant 3 further elaborated that walkthroughs guided decisions about professional development: "When they've done walkthroughs, they will decide things that they feel like we might need help with." This feedback loop illustrated the critical role of observations in informing administrative decisions. The relationship between teachers and administration also emerged as a crucial factor in the walkthrough process. Participant 1 felt a strong sense of support from their principal, stating, "He really puts his effort into those guys... you know that you're cared for." In contrast, Participant 3 noted that the principal's encouragement was motivating, saying, "He's always encouraging us to do better... He's going to touch base with you, come in and be like, 'This is what I saw. These are good things.'" This supportive leadership fosters an environment conducive to professional growth.

In summary, the focus groups provided a comprehensive view of teachers' experiences with classroom walkthrough observations. While there were diverse perspectives on the

frequency and impact of these observations, participants generally recognized their value in enhancing teaching practices and supporting professional development. The interplay between guidance from administration, teacher autonomy, and the collaborative nature of walkthroughs emerged as vital elements in fostering a culture of continuous improvement within the school.

In collaboration with my inquiry partners, further analysis of the three Restart schools findings were aggregated together to look for major themes consistent across schools. Across all three focus groups, teachers consistently emphasized the importance of purpose, alignment to school improvement goals, feedback, and professional development support. While many appreciated the small notes of praise they received after classroom walkthroughs, they expressed a desire for more meaningful and actionable feedback. Several teachers mentioned that they often did not know what administrators were specifically looking for during walkthroughs, wishing they had been involved in creating the walkthrough tool to ensure clarity and shared expectations. Furthermore, teachers strongly advocated for connecting the data collected during walkthroughs to monthly professional development sessions, so that the focus of PD would directly address areas identified in the observations. They also requested time to collaborate with colleagues, enabling them to discuss effective strategies and plan together, ensuring that professional development was practical and aligned with the school's improvement goals. This feedback shows the need for greater transparency, alignment, and collaborative input in the walkthrough and feedback processes.

Principal Interview

An ‘Organization of Interview and Inquiry Questions’ table (see Table 18) was created to align the interview questions with the overarching inquiry questions. This table organizes the interview questions by categorizing them under each inquiry question, ensuring a clear

Table 18

Organization of Interview and Research Questions

Inquiry Question	Interview Question
How do principals perceive restart flexibilities around strategic and instructional leadership?	• Talk to me about how conducting classroom walkthrough observations has influenced your strategic and instructional leadership skills or practices?
How are administrators using Restart Flexibilities in the school?	• Describe how the walkthrough observation process has influenced your planning for professional development. • Talk to me about how conducting classroom walkthrough observations has influenced your strategic and instructional leadership skills or practices? • Have you used any Restart flexibilities based on the classroom walkthrough observation data collected? How? If not, what plans do you have for the future for using Restart flexibilities based on the data you collected?
What effect does a systematic instructional monitoring plan have on principal instructional leadership behaviors in Restart schools?	• Describe your overall experiences with classroom walkthrough observations? • While the walkthrough has certain look-fors, what is most important for you, what are you looking for when you are conducting classroom walkthrough observations? • How would you describe the purpose of your classroom walkthrough observations? • Describe how the walkthrough observation process has influenced your planning for professional development. • How has the walkthrough process influenced how you communicate and share the goals of the school improvement plan? • Describe how the classroom walkthrough observation process has influenced how you provide feedback to teachers about their instructional practices? • How has using classroom walkthrough observations influenced the NCEES formal evaluation process?

Table 18 (continued)

Inquiry Question	Interview Question
How can a systematic monitoring process using classroom walkthroughs influence how principals plan for school improvement using Restart flexibilities?	• How would teachers describe the purpose of the classroom walkthrough observation process? • Tell me about any resistance you've felt from teachers in response to your classroom walkthrough observations? (Follow-Up) What actions have you taken to overcome this resistance? • While the walkthrough has certain look-fors, what is most important for you, what are you looking for when you are conducting classroom walkthrough observations? • How would you describe the purpose of your classroom walkthrough observations? • Describe how the walkthrough observation process has influenced your planning for professional development. • Tell me about any resistance you've felt from teachers in response to your classroom walkthrough observations? (Follow-Up) What actions have you taken to overcome this resistance? • Have you used any Restart flexibilities based on the classroom walkthrough observation data collected? How? If not, what plans do you have for the future for using Restart flexibilities based on the data you collected?

connection between the data collected and the inquiry's questions. The table serves as a framework for analyzing the principals' responses, allowing for an examination of how classroom walkthroughs influence leadership practices, instructional strategies, and the use of Restart flexibilities in the schools.

The responses to the interview questions were transcribed and coded for analysis of emerging themes and patterns. According to Mertler, a coding scheme refers to a systematic approach to categorizing qualitative data by assigning labels (codes) to specific segments of the data. The purpose of this coding process is to identify patterns, themes, or concepts within the data. Mertler explains that coding is an essential step in analyzing qualitative data, as it helps researchers break down complex information into manageable parts, organize data into meaningful categories, and ultimately draw conclusions based on observed patterns. The coding process involved several key steps that guide the systematic organization and interpretation of data collected from interviews, observations, or other qualitative sources (Mertler, 2022) First I looked for initial data familiarization. After transcribing the interview data from principals, I read through all transcripts to note any general themes or recurring ideas about leadership practices before attempting to code the data with support from my CIPs. The next step is initial coding or 'open coding'. Mertler suggests starting with open coding, which involves breaking down the data into smaller units (words, phrases, or sentences) and assigning descriptive labels or "codes" to them. In the interviews, phrases like “data-driven decisions” and “feedback” emerged from principals describing their leadership changes after implementing classroom walkthroughs. After generating the initial codes, relationships were identified known as axial coding. This step involved grouping related codes together to begin forming meaningful patterns or categories that reflect the research question (Mertler, 2022). After identifying initial codes,

then I refined the codes and categories into broader, overarching themes that aligned with the focus of the inquiry. Selective coding focuses on identifying the central themes that identify the key findings from the data. Selective coding helped identify themes such as "Impact on Instructional Leadership," "Teacher Receptivity to Feedback," and "Barriers to Effective Walkthrough Implementation." These themes reflect the core elements of leadership change as a result of classroom walkthrough observations. Once themes were identified, the data was interpreted and analyzed to form a narrative that explains the data. This step involved interpreting the coded data to draw conclusions and make meaning of the findings in the context of the study (Mertler, 2022).

With assistance from the inquiry partners, an inductive coding scheme was developed. The team looked for recurring or key issues that informed what codes were necessary. Coding was done by hand, with the data entered into a spreadsheet. Once all the data was coded, it was sorted by code to identify patterns, trends, and themes. Table 19 was created to make the results easier to analyze.

A member checking process was applied to the principal interview data. After the interviews were transcribed and coded, I once again invited the collaborative inquiry partners (CIPs) to review the analysis. This time, the CIPs were asked to examine the codes and themes that emerged from the interview responses, ensuring that the voices of the principals were accurately captured. The CIPs carefully reviewed the transcripts and coding charts for the interviews, asking clarifying questions and suggesting adjustments or additional themes where necessary. By incorporating the CIPs' feedback, I was able to refine the coding structure and ensure consistency in the interpretation of both interview and focus group data.

Table 19

Principal Interview Coding

Theme	Category	Code	Example Quote/Excerpt	Frequency	Explanation
Instructional Improvement	Focus of Walkthroughs	Student Engagement	"I'll also make sure to reinforce that consistency across all classrooms by revisiting the expectation in team meetings or PLTs."	6	Principals prioritize observing student engagement and ensuring high-quality instruction during walkthroughs.
	Focus of Walkthroughs	High-Quality Instruction	"To ensure high-quality instruction is taking place and that our teaching practices align with the Learning-Focused strategies we've prioritized as a school."	14	Principals use walkthroughs to assess teaching effectiveness and the alignment with school-wide strategies.
	Focus of Walkthroughs	Adherence to Curriculum & Pacing	"We're looking at pacing guides, learning targets, and making sure the curriculum is being followed."	5	Ensuring that curriculum and pacing are followed is a key focus during walkthroughs.
	Professional Development Alignment	Walkthrough Data Guides PD	"We revisited essential questions because we weren't seeing it in lessons as much as we should have."	19	Walkthrough data is used to identify instructional areas that need additional professional development.
Leadership Practices	Impact of Walkthroughs on Leadership	Collaborative Leadership	"What I really liked about the walkthroughs...was that it was collaborative, and that we discussed what we saw after each visit."	6	Walkthroughs foster a collaborative leadership approach, involving both teachers and administrative teams.

Table 19 (continued)

Theme	Category	Code	Example Quote/Excerpt	Frequency	Explanation
	Leadership Reflection	Intentional Leadership	"I've realized I sometimes get caught up in administrative tasks...I need to be more intentional about prioritizing walkthroughs."	12	Principals reflect on the need to prioritize instructional leadership over administrative tasks.
Data-Driven Decision Making	Use of Walkthrough Data	Identifying Instructional Trends	"I was also keeping in mind the trends of, I'm trying to kind of collectively in my mind think, 'Okay, who is, which grade levels are really doing a good job with the fidelity,' so that when the data comes out, I could compare."	9	Principals use walkthrough data to identify trends across classrooms and guide discussions on areas for improvement.
	Planning School Improvement	Walkthroughs Inform Strategic Goals	"Doing those walks reminded me, 'Oh gosh, we have collaborative pairs,' so it's helped shape our school improvement goals."	5	Walkthroughs provide insights that shape strategic school improvement goals, such as revisiting specific teaching strategies.
Teacher Feedback	Types of Feedback Given	Informal Feedback	"After each walkthrough, I usually send a quick email to the teacher with some general comments."	7	Principals provide informal feedback after walkthroughs, often in the form of quick emails or notes.

Table 19 (continued)

Theme	Category	Code	Example Quote/Excerpt	Frequency	Explanation
Use of Restart Flexibilities	Challenges with Feedback	Limited Use of Walkthrough Data	"We didn't talk about the overall data from the walkthroughs with teachers."	3	Principals recognize the missed opportunity of not sharing aggregated walkthrough data with teachers for collective learning.
	Trust and Collaboration with Teachers	Building Trust to Avoid Punitive Perception	"We worked hard to make sure walkthroughs didn't feel punitive so that teachers felt comfortable taking risks in their instruction."	4	Principals emphasized building trust with teachers to ensure walkthroughs are seen as supportive rather than evaluative.
	Professional Development Funding	Flexibility in Budget for Training	"We're going to send a team to Solution Tree to learn about effective PLTs based on what we saw in the classrooms."	10	Restart flexibilities are used to fund professional development opportunities such as PLT training.
	Adjusting Curriculum Based on Data	Revising Summer Curriculum Plans	"We did change some of the content for the summer planning...we're picking up core phonics based on what we saw in the classrooms."	2	Walkthrough data led to changes in summer curriculum planning and program adoption.
	Calendar Adjustments	Early Release Days for Targeted PD	"The calendar flexibility allowed for four additional early release days so that staff could be provided additional targeted professional development."	1	Restart flexibilities in scheduling allowed principals to provide targeted professional development.

Summary of Responses

The first interview question was “Describe your overall experiences with classroom walkthrough observations?” The principals expressed a desire for a more focused and connected approach to classroom walkthroughs, emphasizing the need for specific objectives and actionable follow-up based on observations. They highlighted their experience as an administrator, noting that walkthroughs typically involve brief observations to identify effective teaching components and provide feedback through sticky notes. Principal 3 viewed classroom walkthroughs as essential to their leadership skills, especially in improving low-performing schools, as they help identify strengths and areas for improvement; “walkthroughs have become an integral part of my leadership strategy”. Each answer from the three principals referenced a desire for walkthroughs to be linked with professional development. Principal 1 expressed a wish for a more targeted focus during observations, while Principals 2 and 3 mentioned the role of professional development in guiding what was observed. An overarching theme emerged; intent to improve instructional practices. Principal 1 highlighted a need for more structured connections between observations and actionable outcomes. Principal 2 emphasized sharing good practices among schools, while Principal 3 pointed out the role of walkthroughs in identifying strengths and areas for growth.

The second interview question was “While the walkthrough has certain look-fors, what is most important for you, what are you looking for when you are conducting classroom walkthrough observations?” The principals discussed their approach during classroom walkthroughs, sharing the importance of checking for specific practices that had been discussed in professional learning team (PLT) meetings, such as revisiting social contracts and enhancing student engagement. Principal 1 said they took mental notes during observations to identify

trends across grade levels, while Principal 2 highlighted the importance of observing learning targets, student engagement, and adherence to pacing guides and curriculum materials. If they didn't see those things during walkthroughs, they addressed those issues in professional learning teams (PLTs). The third principal said their primary focus was on student engagement and quality instruction; "I'll also make sure to reinforce that consistency across all classrooms by revisiting the expectation in team meetings or PLTs." All three principals focused on specific expectations, evidence from PLTs or what was expected in lesson planning; which happens in PLTs and mentioned providing follow and support.

When asked to describe the purpose of classroom walkthrough observations, the three principals discussed the role of classroom walkthroughs in assessing instructional practices and student engagement. Principal 1 emphasized the need to "get a pulse on how the student engagement is" to determine what strategies the school should focus on, suggesting that walkthroughs help identify areas for improvement and inform professional development. Principal 3 highlighted the purpose of these observations was "to ensure high-quality instruction is taking place and that our teaching practices align with the Learning-Focused strategies we've prioritized as a school." Several key ideas emerged; looking for student engagement, identifying areas for improvement and support, and ensuring high quality instruction. The responses showed the principals believed the walkthroughs helped recognize areas for professional development.

The three principals shared their insights on how the walkthrough observation process influenced their planning for professional development. Principal 1 suggested, "I think if we can keep it connected to [what they] focus on in PLTs," indicating a need for a systematic approach to monitoring specific teaching practices. Principal 3 emphasized the value of data collection, stating, "Identifying trends through walkthroughs," which allowed for evidence-based

discussions about school improvement. Principal 2 noted the need for rigorous evaluation, saying, “The walkthrough tool was looking for a more rigorous level of teacher behaviors,” which aligned with ongoing professional development initiatives. They stressed the importance of using walkthrough data to identify trends and collaborate with instructional coaches to create targeted professional learning opportunities.

The three principals collectively recognized the significance of gathering walkthrough data to inform their planning for future professional development (PD). By connecting walkthroughs to specific focus areas established in professional learning teams (PLTs), they discussed revisiting effective practices from the past while emphasizing the importance of providing feedback to teachers. This showed a collective understanding of using walkthroughs to identify instructional effectiveness and highlights areas that need attention. They identified a clear need for more PD centered around high-yield strategies, whether derived from the district PD on Learning-Focused methodologies, or other best practices.

The next question was on the important role that walkthroughs played in shaping communication around school improvement goals. Principal 1 noted, “Doing those walks reminded me, ‘Oh gosh, we have collaborative pairs,’” indicating that classroom observations provided a baseline for assessing the implementation of the collaborative pair strategy that was a focus of district-wide school administrator professional development. Principal 2 highlighted the integration of specific tools like i-Ready into their school improvement plan, stating, “We collect that data during PLTs and talk about it during our school improvement team meetings,” which fostered collaborative discussions on supporting grade levels effectively. Additionally, Principal 2 observed, “It’s helped strengthen those conversations during PLTs when we talk about how i-Ready is used,” illustrating how walkthroughs have enhanced the dialogue surrounding

instructional practices. Collectively, these insights reflected a focused effort to align instructional goals with data-driven discussions among staff that are indicated in the school improvement plans.

The findings related to communicating school improvement goals revealed some intention to enhance instructional effectiveness. Evaluating current instructional practices allowed the principals to identify specific areas for improvement, particularly in the implementation of high-yield strategies. A significant focus had been placed on monitoring the effective use of i-Ready interventions, with data collected during PLTs to inform discussions on how to better support grade-level implementation. This evidence of data-driven decision-making not only facilitated targeted interventions but also fostered collaborative conversations about instructional practices among staff. By encouraging these discussions, principals communicated a culture of collaboration that focused on student learning outcomes, ensuring that all educators aligned their efforts to enhance classroom instruction and support student success.

When asked how classroom walkthroughs influenced their approach to providing feedback to teachers, the principals shared what they did after the walks. Principal 1 noted, “Once we put all that together, that actually helped us determine that we needed to have the TAs better trained to do small group instruction,” reflecting on the walkthrough data to identify training needs based on walkthrough observations. Principal 2 emphasized the importance of feedback, stating, “We provided some feedback with sticky notes or little cards that gave teachers two or three things that they did really well during the lesson.” Principal 3 said, “After each walkthrough, I usually sent a quick email to the teacher with some general comments, like whether I noticed they were following the lesson plan or if the classroom seemed on-task,” indicating that something in writing was provided to teachers. Finally, Principal 2 explained the

ongoing nature of feedback: “We talked about the evidence the teacher wanted to give for their NCEES rubric, and then we were able to talk about what we also saw in walks,” illustrating how walkthroughs served as a foundation for setting growth goals and facilitating meaningful conversations about instructional improvement.

Despite these positive steps, the principals acknowledged limitations in their feedback processes. For instance, Principal 2 remarked, “We didn’t talk about the overall data from the walkthroughs with teachers,” highlighting a missed opportunity for deeper discussions about collective classroom data. Additionally, Principal 3 noted their reluctance to provide individualized feedback based on single observations, saying, “I never liked to have the feedback and coaching conversations based off of one snapshot observation.” Lastly, Principal 3 expressed that their feedback often remained general, focusing on immediate observations rather than linking them to specific goals, stating “I don’t really connect it back to any specific goals or strategies.” Overall, while the walkthroughs informed their understanding of instructional practices, the principals recognized the need for more structured and focused feedback processes.

With the question about how the classroom walkthrough influenced the formal evaluation process, the principals emphasized how classroom walkthroughs enabled them to provide more informed feedback and support for teachers. Principal 1 noted that mental notes taken during walkthroughs helped identify "patterns and areas of strength or growth," which could then be integrated into formal evaluations. For example, they mentioned being able to highlight effective engagement strategies observed across classrooms in post-observation feedback, while also addressing areas where effective practices were lacking. Principal 2 highlighted that the walkthroughs offered "more evidence to support the ratings on the rubric for the evaluation process," making the evaluation process more data-driven. Principal 3 stated, “I don’t need a

formal observation to tell me what's happening, I've already seen enough to make a judgment," indicating that the evidence gathered during walkthroughs aligned with the overall assessment of teachers' performance. The responses suggest that principals use the data collected from classroom walkthroughs in their formal feedback to teachers.

The responses to how teachers perceived classroom walkthroughs indicated that while teachers had mixed feelings about classroom walkthroughs, ranging from appreciation for feedback and support to concerns about added pressure, principals wanted to improve communication and collaboration to enhance their effectiveness. Principal 1 noted, "I think the teachers were more alert... they got more accustomed to it. So then it was a, 'Come on in! You're going to come in anyway, so you might as well come in.'" This reflected how regular walkthroughs created a sense that it was standard practice among teachers. The same principal remarked, "I don't think the teachers minded; I really don't. They may have wanted more feedback, actually." This indicated that teachers appreciated the walkthroughs and were open to more constructive feedback, suggesting that the process improved relationships. Principal 3 stated, "Teachers appreciated that the walkthroughs weren't just about evaluating their teaching but also about creating a more focused and well-managed learning environment," suggesting that the walkthroughs served multiple purposes that could influence a teacher's perception of how the data was used.

The findings indicated some areas for improvement regarding the perception of classroom walkthroughs for teachers. Some teachers expressed skepticism, viewing walkthroughs as an additional administrative burden. Principal 2 noted, "I think the teachers thought that the walkthroughs were just one more thing... We needed to talk about the purpose of the walkthroughs." This highlighted the need for clear communication about the intent behind

walkthroughs and their connection to professional development. Additionally, Principal 2 emphasized the importance of collaboration in designing walkthrough tools aligned with the school improvement plan, mentioning plans to engage in monthly discussions about data and next steps to enhance transparency and relevance in the process.

Teachers described the purpose of classroom walkthroughs with mixed perceptions, as shared by the three principals. Principal 1 noted that teachers "didn't know" the purpose, suggesting a lack of clarity. Principal 2 shared that teachers might have perceived the walkthroughs as a way to identify mistakes, believing the district saw them as failing in their classrooms, even though they felt they were working hard without being recognized. This showed disconnection between the intended support and how it was perceived. On a more positive note, the third principal indicated that some teachers saw walkthroughs as part of the school improvement process, particularly when they had been involved in creating tools like the Learning-Focused continuums. These teachers understood that feedback from walkthroughs helped identify areas for further professional development. The principals noted minimal resistance from teachers regarding classroom walkthroughs, with one stating there was "no resistance, just apathy." Another principal emphasized the need to revisit the purpose of walkthroughs and make them more relevant to teachers by discussing data and aligning the process with professional development. A key challenge mentioned was ensuring walkthroughs did not feel punitive; one principal worked hard to build trust so teachers understood that the observations focused on professional growth rather than criticism. This trust helped foster a more collaborative and risk-taking instructional environment.

In reference to the question of how conducting classroom walkthrough observations had influenced their strategic and instructional leadership skills or practices, the three principals

highlighted how classroom walkthroughs influenced their leadership practices in several ways. Principal 1 reflected on planning to "do something differently with walks" by making them more of a monthly focus. Principal 2 emphasized the value of collaboration during walkthroughs, stating, "What I really liked about the walkthroughs...was that it was collaborative and that we discussed what we saw after each visit." They planned to continue this collaborative approach with both administrative teams and teachers. Principal 3 recognized the need to prioritize walkthroughs, noting, "I've realized I sometimes get caught up in administrative tasks...I need to be more intentional about prioritizing walkthroughs." These insights underscore the role of walkthroughs in shaping leadership practices and fostering collaboration.

The final question of the structured interview asked, "Have you utilized any Restart flexibilities based on the classroom walkthrough observation data collected? If not, what plans do you have for using Restart flexibilities in the future based on the data you've gathered?" Principals highlighted how classroom walkthroughs influenced various aspects of school improvement. Principal 1 noted that walkthroughs led to adding consistent rules and PBIS matrices to classrooms as part of a branding project using Restart budget flexibility. They also mentioned revisiting PLTs, saying, "We are kind of refocusing on PLTs and thinking about doing that training," referencing using Restart budget flexibility to pay for teachers to go to Solution Tree training based on what was observed during walkthroughs. The same principal mentioned adjusting summer curriculum planning, stating, "We did change some of the content for the summer planning...we're picking up 95 Core Phonics based on what we saw in the classrooms." The second principal said they also planned to send staff to a Solution Tree event for effective PLT training using Restart budget flexibility. The second principal also planned to use some Restart budget flexibility in future planning for Learning-focused professional

development on collaborative pairs and writing to learn. The third principal used walkthrough data to refine professional development, adding, "We revisited essential questions because we weren't seeing it in lessons as much as we should have," and planned to bring in a learning-focused consultant for leadership walks using Restart budget flexibility and the calendar flexibility for the additional PD days. These insights demonstrated how walkthroughs informed decisions on professional development, classroom practices, and school planning.

An analysis of the principals' responses to interview questions about classroom walkthroughs revealed several key themes related to leadership practices, instructional improvement, and the impact of Restart flexibilities. These themes highlighted how principals used walkthrough data to inform their leadership decisions and strengthened instructional practices at their schools.

One clear theme was the role of classroom walkthroughs in shaping principals' leadership strategies, especially when it came to improving instructional quality. Principals emphasized the need for walkthroughs to be more purposeful and connected to specific goals, such as professional development and school improvement initiatives. One principal described walkthroughs as "an integral part of my leadership strategy," especially in low-performing schools, reinforcing the belief that walkthroughs helped identify strengths and areas for improvement. The focus on targeted observations showed the need for walkthroughs to be systematic and aligned with instructional priorities, such as revisiting PLT topics and evaluating student engagement.

Walkthroughs also served as a foundation for professional development and data-driven decision-making, which was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. Principals noted that data collected during walkthroughs often informed school-wide discussions and professional

development plans. One principal highlighted the connection between walkthrough data and professional development goals, saying, "We revisited essential questions because we weren't seeing it in lessons." The principals collectively recognized the need for professional development focused on high-yield instructional strategies and used walkthroughs to identify where additional support was needed.

Another theme that emerged was the importance of building trust with teachers to reduce resistance to classroom walkthroughs. While principals acknowledged that some teachers might be apathetic or skeptical, they worked to create a culture where walkthroughs were seen as opportunities for growth rather than punitive evaluations. One principal highlighted the need to "make sure walkthroughs don't feel punitive," explaining how trust-building allowed teachers to feel empowered to take instructional risks. This emphasis on trust and collaboration helped ensure that walkthroughs were viewed as part of a supportive process aimed at professional growth.

The principals also discussed how classroom walkthroughs influenced their strategic planning and alignment with broader school improvement goals. A recurring theme was the use of walkthrough data to assess the implementation of key instructional practices, such as Learning-Focused strategies or i-Ready interventions. Walkthroughs provided a "baseline for assessing" whether these strategies were being effectively implemented, and the data was often used to refine ongoing school improvement initiatives. For example, one principal mentioned that walkthroughs reminded them of the importance of "collaborative pairs" in classroom instruction, reinforcing the need to align walkthrough observations with strategic goals.

Finally, the principals' responses highlighted how Restart flexibilities, such as flexible budgets and schedules, were used to implement changes based on walkthrough data. One

principal mentioned that walkthroughs led to the addition of consistent rules and PBIS matrices as part of a branding project. Another used the data to adjust summer curriculum planning, implement phonics programs, and schedule additional professional development. Principals also leveraged Restart flexibilities to refine PLT practices, align curriculum work with classroom observations, and bring in consultants to conduct leadership walks. This demonstrated how Restart flexibilities were critical in making adjustments to instructional practices and school improvement efforts based on real-time classroom data.

The principals' responses to these interview questions showed growth in a leadership approach that became increasingly data-driven, collaborative, and focused on professional development. Classroom walkthroughs were seen not just as observational tools but as integral parts of broader efforts to improve instructional quality, foster collaboration, and align with school improvement goals. By using the flexibility provided by the Restart model, principals were able to make strategic changes that directly impacted teaching practices, school planning, and professional development, ultimately working toward the goal of improving student outcomes.

Results

This section presents the connecting themes that aligned with the inquiry questions, drawing from all the data collection instruments used in the inquiry. These themes highlighted the key insights gathered from focus groups, principal interviews, and classroom walkthrough observations, providing a comprehensive understanding of how leadership practices and instructional strategies evolved in response to the implementation of systematic walkthroughs. This thematic analysis helped to clarify the alignment between the inquiry's findings and its core research objectives.

Analysis of Inquiry Question #1

The first inquiry question to consider was, "How did principals perceive Restart flexibilities around strategic and instructional leadership?" This inquiry question was critical because it sought to explore how principals leveraged the specific flexibilities granted by the Restart model to influence both strategic and instructional leadership. These flexibilities were unique to Restart schools and included adjustments to staffing, curriculum, and budgetary decisions. Understanding principals' perceptions offered insights into how they navigated these freedoms to improve teaching and learning outcomes, enhance decision-making processes, and drive school improvement.

Additionally, this question addressed a gap in the literature regarding how school leaders used these flexibilities to enact change in low-performing schools. By focusing on their perspectives, the inquiry shed light on the effectiveness of such policies and how they were practically applied in the school setting, which had implications for policy, leadership development, and educational reform.

Principals appeared to perceive Restart flexibilities as providing stability in supporting professional development. While most areas, such as encouraging participation in professional development aligned with school goals, remained consistent, there was a slight increase in support for individualized development plans. This suggested that some principals saw Restart flexibilities as enhancing their ability to tailor professional development to individual needs. However, the decrease in agreement about site-based professional development suggested that some principals perceived challenges in using Restart flexibilities to consistently provide internal resources.

Principals' perceptions of their ability to define and communicate shared goals remained largely unchanged, indicating that they believed Restart flexibilities did not dramatically alter these aspects of leadership. However, the slight decrease in using school goals for academic decisions suggested that some principals felt Restart flexibilities had not fully supported the integration of goals into decision-making processes, pointing to possible areas where further strategic alignment was needed.

The inventory data revealed mixed perceptions of Restart flexibilities in monitoring instructional practices. Stability in feedback and classroom visits reflected confidence in these leadership practices. Yet, the slight decline in monitoring for curriculum alignment indicated that some principals perceived Restart flexibilities as less effective in ensuring district-wide instructional consistency. This suggested a need for stronger strategic oversight.

Overall, while principals perceived Restart flexibilities as maintaining or slightly improving leadership practices in some areas, there were small shifts in confidence related to the strategic use of goals and classroom monitoring, suggesting room for further refinement. These insights provided a clearer view of how Restart flexibilities were perceived by principals.

Analysis of Inquiry Question #2

Inquiry question #2 is, "How are administrators using Restart Flexibilities in the school?" This question examined how principals adjusted their leadership decisions based on insights gained from classroom walkthrough observations. Analyzing Restart flexibility monitoring forms and school improvement plans revealed how principals leveraged these flexibilities to inform strategic actions, adapt instructional practices, and address school-specific needs. The data highlighted how Restart flexibilities influenced decisions in areas such as resource allocation,

professional development, and instructional support, aligning leadership actions with school improvement goals.

The analysis of the Restart flexibility monitoring forms and school improvement plans revealed that principals predominantly utilized Restart flexibilities to enhance professional development. A key finding was that professional development decisions were closely aligned with the data gathered from classroom walkthrough observations. Principals identified gaps in instructional practices during these walkthroughs, particularly focusing on components that were not frequently observed in classrooms. This data-driven approach allowed them to tailor professional development to address specific areas of need, ensuring that teachers received targeted support to improve instructional effectiveness.

Additionally, in the principal interviews, many principals highlighted the importance of using Restart budget flexibility to fund these professional development initiatives. They emphasized how this financial flexibility enabled them to provide high-quality, relevant training for teachers without the constraints of traditional funding sources. By leveraging Restart funds, principals could bring in external experts, offer specialized workshops, or provide other resources that directly addressed the instructional gaps identified through walkthroughs. This strategic use of Restart flexibilities showed how principals linked classroom data to professional development in ways that enhanced instructional leadership and fostered continuous improvement within their schools.

Analysis of Inquiry Question #3

Inquiry question #3, "What effect does a systematic instructional monitoring plan have on principal instructional leadership behaviors in Restart schools?" is important because it explored the direct impact of instructional monitoring on how principals lead instruction. Understanding

this effect is crucial because it highlighted how formal, data-driven processes, like classroom walkthroughs and observation data collection, influence the decisions principals make regarding instructional practices, professional development, and overall school improvement.

This question helped uncover whether a systematic instructional monitoring plan enhanced principals' ability to be more strategic and responsive leaders, enabling them to identify instructional gaps, provide targeted support to teachers, and foster a culture of continuous improvement. It also examined whether the monitoring plan encouraged principals to shift from purely administrative roles to more active instructional leaders, thereby improving teaching quality and student outcomes. Analyzing this provided valuable insights into how structured monitoring processes shaped leadership behaviors and contribute to the success of Restart schools.

Principal Inventory and Classroom Walkthrough Observations

The analysis of the principal inventory data and classroom walkthrough observations revealed several key findings about how leadership practices impacted instructional outcomes across the three Restart schools. The comparison focused on variations by school, leadership perceptions before and after the implementation of walkthroughs, differences between grade levels, and alignment between principal perceptions and actual classroom observations.

At Bunker Elementary, the classroom walkthrough data revealed a consistent implementation of student engagement strategies across classrooms. This consistency was also reflected in the alignment between instructional planning and delivery, with teachers regularly adhering to curriculum goals and effectively engaging students in the learning process. The strong alignment between leadership support and instructional delivery at Bunker indicated that the principal's focus on targeted feedback was effective in improving classroom practices.

In contrast, Mulligan Elementary demonstrated a greater emphasis on differentiated instruction, as noted during classroom walkthroughs. However, this focus on differentiation came with some inconsistencies in student engagement. While many teachers were adapting instruction to meet diverse student needs, the data suggested that engagement levels fluctuated across classrooms, pointing to areas where further leadership support might be necessary to sustain high levels of engagement alongside differentiation.

At Hook Middle, the data showed the most variability in instructional practices. Several classrooms struggled to meet curricular goals, and fewer instances of student-centered teaching were observed during walkthroughs. This variability indicated that Hook Middle's instructional practices were less consistent than those at the two elementary schools, reflecting a greater need for leadership interventions. The principal's leadership practices here required further adjustment to address these inconsistencies and provide teachers with the necessary support for improving instructional delivery and student engagement.

Comparison of Pre-and Post- Inventory

A key component of the inquiry was comparing principals' perceptions of their leadership practices before and after the implementation of classroom walkthroughs. This comparison shed light on how the walkthroughs influenced leadership behavior, particularly in terms of providing instructional feedback and teacher support.

In terms of instructional feedback, all principals reported an increase in both the frequency and quality of feedback provided to teachers after the walkthroughs were implemented. This shift was reflected in the inventory data and confirmed by the classroom walkthrough observations. The increased feedback contributed to improved classroom outcomes,

as teachers were better able to adjust their instructional strategies based on timely and targeted feedback from their principals.

Regarding teacher support, while all three principals noted improvements, the principal at Bunker Elementary reported the most significant shift. The support provided to teachers, particularly through ongoing feedback, directly contributed to the instructional improvements observed during classroom walkthroughs. At Mulligan and Hook, the data showed positive changes in leadership practices as well, but the results indicated that Bunker Elementary had made the greatest strides in providing robust support to its teachers.

Comparison of Walkthrough Observations vs. Principal Perceptions

Finally, a comparison was made between the classroom walkthrough observations and the principals' inventory responses to assess the alignment between leadership perceptions and actual classroom practices. In most cases, there was strong alignment between the principals' perceptions of their leadership effectiveness and the improvements observed in classroom instruction. Principals who rated themselves higher in providing instructional feedback also reported seeing positive changes in areas such as student engagement and lesson delivery during classroom walkthroughs. This correlation underscored the effectiveness of leadership interventions, particularly in cases where principals focused on improving feedback mechanisms. However, at Hook Middle, where classroom practices were more variable, the principal's self-reported effectiveness did not fully align with the walkthrough data, indicating a need for further reflection and adjustment in leadership strategies.

The overall results of the data analysis indicated that the implementation of classroom walkthroughs positively influenced principal leadership practices and instructional outcomes at the three Restart schools. Principals perceived themselves as providing more effective feedback

and support to teachers, which was reflected in improved student engagement and instructional planning in many classrooms. However, the data also revealed areas for further improvement, particularly at Hook Middle, where the variability in instructional practices highlighted the need for additional leadership support and more consistent interventions.

The pre- and post-walkthrough comparisons revealed a significant shift in leadership behaviors, with principals becoming more proactive in offering feedback and supporting instructional improvements. These changes were most notable at Bunker Elementary, where consistent instructional practices and strong teacher support resulted in a positive classroom environment. Mulligan Elementary also showed improvements, though inconsistencies in student engagement pointed to the need for ongoing leadership involvement. Hook Middle, while demonstrating some positive changes, required further attention to address the wide variability in classroom practices. These findings underscore the importance of classroom walkthroughs in fostering instructional improvement and enhancing leadership effectiveness across diverse school settings.

Focus Groups and Interviews

Based on the focus group responses and principal interview responses, several connections and disconnects emerged between teachers' and principals' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of walkthroughs, feedback, and professional development in the school improvement process.

One clear connection between the focus group responses and principal interviews was the shared understanding of the purpose behind classroom walkthroughs. Both groups recognized that walkthroughs were meant to gather data and provide feedback aimed at improving instruction. In the focus groups, teachers consistently referred to walkthroughs as a way to align

their teaching with instructional goals. For example, one teacher noted, “It was to make sure that what I was teaching was aligned with the pacing guide as well.” Similarly, in the principal interviews, one principal emphasized that walkthroughs were a key component of instructional leadership, stating, “Walkthroughs helped us ensure that the curriculum was being implemented as designed and allowed us to identify areas for further support.”

Another point of alignment was the use of feedback from walkthroughs to inform professional development. In focus groups, teachers acknowledged that feedback from walkthroughs often guided the professional learning they received. One teacher remarked, “When they did walkthroughs, they decided things that they felt like we might need help with.” This aligned with principals' perspectives, as principals reported using walkthrough data to identify trends across classrooms and tailor professional development accordingly. One principal mentioned, “The data we gathered from walkthroughs helped us prioritize our PD topics and areas where teachers may need more support.”

However, there were also disconnects between the two groups, particularly around the frequency and effectiveness of feedback. While principals expressed confidence in their use of walkthroughs to support teachers, focus group responses revealed that many teachers felt walkthroughs were not conducted consistently enough to be impactful. For example, a teacher shared, “Outside of my observations, I’ve had zero classroom walkthroughs,” indicating a lack of regular presence from the administration in their classroom. This contrasted with a principal stating that walkthroughs were a consistent and central part of their leadership practice. This gap suggested that, while principals may have intended for walkthroughs to be regular and impactful, this was not always the experience from the teachers’ perspective.

Another disconnect was evident in the nature of feedback provided after walkthroughs. Teachers in focus groups often described feedback as either too general or lacking in actionable steps. For instance, a teacher explained, “They gave some feedback, but it wasn’t always clear what I should do next.” This sentiment contrasted with principals’ assertions that their feedback was specific and designed to guide instructional improvement. One principal stated, “We focused on giving feedback that was immediately useful and helped teachers refine their practice.” This discrepancy highlighted a breakdown in communication or perhaps a difference in expectations between teachers and administrators regarding the feedback process.

While there were strong connections between teachers’ and principals’ perceptions regarding the purpose and potential benefits of walkthroughs and feedback, significant disconnects remained. These discrepancies, particularly around the frequency and usefulness of feedback, highlighted areas where school leadership could improve communication and implementation to better align with teachers’ experiences and needs.

Analysis of Inquiry Question #4

A systematic monitoring process using classroom walkthroughs significantly influenced how principals planned for school improvement using Restart flexibilities, as shown through both the teacher focus group data and principal interview data. The last inquiry question was, “How can a systematic monitoring process using classroom walkthroughs influence how principals plan for school improvement using Restart flexibilities?”

From the teacher focus group data, it was evident that regular walkthroughs provided principals with real-time insights into classroom practices, allowing them to identify instructional strengths and weaknesses. Teachers noted that principals used this information to tailor professional development, focusing on areas where teachers needed support, such as

differentiation or student engagement strategies. This targeted approach ensured that professional development directly addressed instructional gaps, making the process more relevant and impactful. Additionally, teachers expressed that principals were more proactive in supporting instructional shifts when they consistently used walkthrough data, aligning the school's improvement plans more closely with actual classroom needs.

In the principal interviews, principals emphasized that walkthrough data helped them make more informed decisions about resource allocation and strategic planning under Restart flexibilities. For example, they highlighted how the insights gained from walkthroughs allowed them to use Restart budget flexibilities to fund specific professional development opportunities that addressed the gaps observed in classrooms. They also noted that walkthroughs enabled them to prioritize key areas in their school improvement plans, ensuring that instructional improvements were not just reactive but based on data-driven observations. By aligning their school improvement strategies with the data from walkthroughs, principals more effectively used Restart flexibilities to foster teacher growth, improve instructional quality, and drive overall school performance.

Summary

This chapter provided an in-depth analysis of the data collected throughout the inquiry, focusing on how principals in Restart schools utilized flexibilities to enhance instructional leadership and improve school performance. The chapter began with an overview of the methodology, including the administration of pre- and post-inventories to principals to assess changes in their leadership practices. An analysis of classroom walkthrough data provided insights into instructional practices and helped identify areas for targeted improvement. Teacher focus groups and principal interviews further revealed how these data-driven insights influenced

leadership decisions, particularly in the use of Restart flexibilities for professional development and resource allocation. The chapter also examined school improvement and Restart documents, highlighting how principals aligned their school improvement plans with the observed needs from classroom walkthroughs.

The results showed that principals made strategic decisions based on the classroom walkthrough data, using Restart flexibilities to fund professional development in areas where instructional gaps were identified. Themes such as data-informed decision-making, strategic use of flexibilities, and the impact of monitoring on instructional leadership emerged from the analysis.

Looking ahead to Chapter 5, the findings are synthesized to discuss the implications of a systematic instructional monitoring process on principal leadership behaviors in Restart schools. The final chapter explores the broader impact of these practices on school performance, provide conclusions, and offer recommendations for future practice in Restart schools. Additionally, a reflection is provided on how my inquiry addressed the inquiry questions and suggests ways that schools can better leverage Restart flexibilities to drive continuous improvement.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This inquiry aimed to examine the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools. The role of school administrators has significantly evolved from the traditional focus on managing buildings to a more dynamic role that involves coaching, mentoring, and supporting teachers while striving to improve student achievement (Johnson, 2008). Today's principals are seen as instructional leaders who can have a greater impact by prioritizing capacity-building, effective pedagogy, and fostering collaboration (Fullan, 2010). To achieve this, principals should consider adopting successful strategies from other schools, including systematic instructional monitoring and providing constructive feedback (Fullan, 2010). One key element of instructional monitoring is conducting classroom walkthroughs to observe teachers' instructional practices. Research has consistently shown that teachers are the most significant school-related factor influencing student growth (Hattie, 2012), highlighting the importance of building teacher capacity. Classroom walkthroughs create a direct link between instructional leadership and teacher development. Effective school leaders focus on understanding and communicating best teaching practices, identifying evidence of these practices during classroom observations, and offering targeted support and resources to foster teacher growth. Walkthroughs are brief, frequent, and targeted visits designed to observe instruction and identify areas for improvement, thereby guiding ongoing professional development efforts.

This inquiry employed a mixed-methods approach, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to measure the perceptions, utilization, and impact of Restart flexibilities and systematic instructional monitoring plans on principal instructional leadership in Restart schools. The inquiry measured principals' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs regarding how Restart

flexibilities (such as staffing, funding, curriculum, and scheduling) influenced their ability to make strategic and instructional decisions. The inquiry measured the specific practices and strategies administrators implement to leverage Restart flexibilities. This includes the application to instructional planning, resource allocation, staffing, and overall school operations, as well as the extent to which these flexibilities align with school improvement goals. The inquiry measured changes in principal behaviors related to instructional leadership as a result of implementing a systematic monitoring plan, such as classroom walkthroughs, including whether the plan enhanced principals' abilities to monitor, guide, and support teaching and learning effectively. The inquiry also measured the relationship between classroom walkthrough data gathered through a systematic process and how principals used that data to inform and adjust their school improvement planning, including whether the walkthrough process helped principals identify areas for improvement and align Restart flexibilities to address those areas strategically.

Utilizing improvement science methodology, this inquiry occurred in three phases. Each phase was organized using a Plan-Do-Study-Act, or PDSA cycle. PDSA cycles are iterative mini-experiments during which educators articulate improvement changes, carry out the change, study the results, and decide how to proceed (e.g., adopt the change, adapt the change, or abandon the change) (Bryk et al., 2015). In Phase 1 of this inquiry, I collaborated with the inquiry partners (CIPs) through the first PDSA cycle to address the problem of practice and inquiry questions. Together, we used a Fishbone diagram to identify root causes and assets, analyzed school performance, discipline, attendance, TWC, and teacher evaluation data using a district protocol, and compared the district data to the Restart schools to pinpoint root causes. The team explored classroom walkthrough tools and practices and began developing a

professional learning plan, data collection instruments, and a pilot study for implementing classroom walkthroughs.

In Phase 2 of my inquiry, I worked with collaborative inquiry partners to develop and implement a professional learning plan for classroom walkthroughs. Data collection included walkthrough tools, teacher focus groups, principal surveys, interviews, and school improvement documents, with an emphasis on measuring the impact and perceptions of the walkthrough process. Using a mixed-methods approach, I analyzed quantitative and qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, and observations. This phase examined how principals used walkthroughs to influence school improvement planning and leveraged Restart flexibilities, integrating the data to assess their impact on strategic and instructional leadership practices.

In Phase 3 of my inquiry, I collaborated with the inquiry partners to collect and analyze outcome data, including principal actions documented in school improvement plans, walkthrough data, teacher and principal survey data, interview data, and Restart monitoring documents. This phase focused on measuring the impact and benefits of classroom walkthroughs, particularly their influence on the intentional use of Restart flexibilities and adjustments to school improvement plans. Together with the team, I analyzed the data to assess the effectiveness of the walkthrough process and its impact on leadership practices and school improvement. Finally, I shared the findings with stakeholders to determine whether to continue, expand, or modify the walkthrough processes in Restart schools.

The purpose of this inquiry was to examine the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan in improving instructional leadership in Restart schools. It explored how principals used classroom walkthrough observation data that resulted changes in leadership behaviors. The inquiry also examined how these changes influenced the use of Restart

flexibilities to support school improvement efforts. Additionally, it investigated how principals perceived Restart flexibilities related to strategic and instructional leadership, how administrators utilized these flexibilities in their schools, and the impact of the monitoring plan on principals' instructional leadership behaviors. Finally, the inquiry aimed to understand how a systematic monitoring process, particularly through classroom walkthroughs, shaped principals' school improvement planning using Restart flexibilities.

Summary of the Findings

The inquiry involved administering pre- and post-inventories to principals to measure shifts in leadership practices, gathering classroom walkthrough data to capture instructional trends, and conducting teacher focus groups and principal interviews to understand perceptions and experiences with the monitoring process. Additionally, Restart flexibility report documents and school improvement documents were analyzed to examine how principals used the systematic instructional monitoring plan to inform and leverage Restart flexibilities in their strategic planning. Data analysis included the use of descriptive statistics to examine leadership inventory and classroom walkthrough data, complemented by qualitative coding of focus groups, interviews, and document analysis. Graphs and visual representations were created to display patterns, making it easier for collaborative inquiry partners to review and discuss key themes.

Leadership Inventory

The leadership inventory given to the three Restart school principals focused on three key components: leading school-wide professional development, communicating shared goals, and monitoring teaching and learning. The components align to transformational leadership theory. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate staff by fostering a culture of continuous learning. They provide vision and encourage professional growth. Transformational leaders encourage

instructional excellence by monitoring teaching and learning. The pre-inventory captured principals' perceptions of their leadership behaviors 'before' implementing instructional monitoring through classroom walkthroughs. The post-inventory assessed any 'changes' in these perceptions following the implementation. The results showed overall stability in principals' perception responses across the three components.

The analysis of pre- and post-inventory results highlighted several trends related to these areas. The results of the leadership inventory reveal minimal overall change from pre- to post-survey, as indicated by the Paired t-test. The p-values are relatively high, suggesting no statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-intervention scores, indicating that the data does not support a meaningful change after the implementation of the systematic instructional monitoring plan. However, individual differences were noted, with some principals altering their responses, such as shifting from "strongly agree" to "agree" or vice versa. For instance, one principal increased their agreement level regarding support for individualized professional development plans from "agree" to "strongly agree."

The responses related to professional development showed consistency overall that the principals used the data gathered during instructional monitoring informed their decisions regarding the implementation of school professional learning; whole-group sessions and intentional conversations during PLTs. All three principals added Restart budget flexibility to their school improvement plan to purchase professional development services, provide funds for substitutes, and pay teachers to work in the summer to align curriculum documents to the professional development. There was a slight increase in the need to support individualized professional development plans. Perceptions around establishing and communicating shared goals remained relatively stable from pre- to post-survey. There was a minor decline on

agreement on using school goals for academic decision-making, hinting at a possible dip in confidence about how effectively these goals guide actions. In monitoring instruction, responses showed both stability and shifts. Practices such as classroom visits, observing teachers for professional development purposes, and giving private feedback remained consistent, reflecting sustained leadership behaviors in these areas. However, there were slight declines in monitoring classroom practices for curriculum alignment and evaluating instruction, which may suggest a deeper understanding of instructional monitoring complexities. Overall, the analysis suggests stability in leadership perceptions concerning professional development and shared goals, with slight shifts in monitoring teaching and learning practices.

The inventory section on teaching and learning showed more noticeable changes from pre- to post-survey, while there were slight decreases in agreement concerning the monitoring of classroom practices. This could suggest that principals have developed a deeper understanding of what it means to effectively monitor instruction. These individual variations are further supported and explored in the principal interviews discussed later in the chapter, providing additional insights into how principals are interpreting and applying Restart flexibilities in their schools.

Classroom Walkthrough Tool

The classroom observation walkthrough data collected provided a snapshot of classroom instruction in each of the three Restart schools. The data gathered from the observations was used with principals to analyze and discuss what was being seen in the classrooms and to determine if the principals used the information to make leadership decisions. Over the course of the inquiry, 105 classroom observation walkthroughs were conducted. More classroom walkthroughs were conducted at the elementary than the middle school. Classroom walkthroughs

were conducted Monday-Thursday. Of the walks conducted, most were in tested grades during ELA and Math.

As part of the data collection process, we conducted classroom walkthroughs together, marking observations using the tool. One of the most powerful aspects of this process was the discussion about the leaders' perception of what was happening in the classroom and subsequent leadership decisions based on the data. Accompanying the principals during these observations allowed for collaborative discussions about what was observed and what actions were needed. For example, Principal 1 used data from the walkthroughs to confirm that Capturing Kids' Hearts, a behavioral strategy, was being implemented as expected. In another instance, misalignment with the pacing guide led Principal 1 to direct the assistant principal to address the issue during Professional Learning Teams (PLTs). Principal 2 identified a need for stronger standards-based instruction and planned to emphasize differentiation in future PLTs, while also noticing inconsistent use of the math curriculum and setting up targeted follow-up coaching.

These walkthroughs also highlighted broader instructional concerns. Principal 2 observed inefficient transitions that were impacting instructional time, prompting a plan to collect additional data on the issue. Meanwhile, Principal 3 quickly identified a beginning teacher needing support and coordinated with the instructional coach for immediate intervention. Additionally, the lack of impact from a recent professional development session raised concerns for Principal 3, leading to considerations for adjusting future PD offerings. These examples demonstrate how classroom walkthroughs enabled principals to connect their observations directly to leadership decisions, guiding immediate actions and strategic planning to support teachers, improve instructional practices, and address school-wide needs.

Focus Groups

The focus group discussions highlighted several key themes that provided insight into teachers' experiences and expectations regarding instructional monitoring through classroom walkthroughs. These themes included the desire for more frequent walkthroughs, the importance of administrative presence, clarity around the purpose of walkthroughs, the need for targeted feedback, alignment with school goals, and the demand for consistency in leadership practices. Teachers across the three Restart schools consistently voiced a need for more frequent and regular walkthroughs. The teachers across all three schools felt that the walkthrough schedule was unpredictable, which affected their preparation and the overall effectiveness of instructional feedback. This irregularity created uncertainty, making it harder for teachers to anticipate when and how they would be evaluated or supported. More predictable and routine walkthroughs, according to teachers, would help them feel more prepared and provide a clearer picture of instructional progress over time.

Administrative presence emerged as a crucial factor in the effectiveness of walkthroughs. Teachers appreciated seeing administrators not only conducting walkthroughs but being visibly engaged in the daily life of the school. This visible presence in classrooms and hallways was interpreted as a sign of support and commitment to instructional improvement. The more administrators were seen in classrooms, the stronger the perception that they were invested in the school's success and willing to collaborate with teachers to meet instructional goals.

The focus group responses highlighted a common frustration that the purpose of walkthroughs was often unclear, and the feedback provided was sometimes too vague. Teachers wanted clearer communication about the goals of walkthroughs and how observations would be

used to support their instructional growth. There was a desire for walkthroughs to be more than a checklist or a formality.

Related to the clarity of walkthroughs was the need for more specific and actionable feedback. Teachers felt that feedback should be tied to concrete instructional practices rather than generalized comments. Additionally, a notable concern was the perception that specialized subjects like art, music, and physical education were often overlooked during walkthroughs. Teachers in these areas felt that walkthroughs should be more inclusive and tailored to the unique needs of all instructional areas, not just core subjects. Not showing the individualized consideration shows a lack of one of the principles of transformational leadership; fostering continuous improvement, motivation, individualized support, and reflective practice (Northouse 2001).

Another significant theme was that the walkthroughs seemed to be closely aligned with the school's broader goals and curriculum standards. Teachers emphasized the importance of using walkthroughs to ensure that instruction was in line with pacing guides and standards. There were comments that they wanted more support in PLTs and with PD on strategies and lesson planning when the instruction was not aligned to the school's instructional priorities.

Inconsistency in walkthrough practices, especially during times of administrative transition, was a major concern for teachers. Variations in expectations and feedback due to changes in leadership led to confusion and a lack of trust in the process. Teachers expressed that consistent leadership, with clear and stable expectations, was essential for walkthroughs to be perceived as fair and beneficial. They felt that consistency would help build trust and ensure that walkthroughs served as a reliable tool for instructional monitoring and professional growth.

The concern about inconsistency in walkthrough practices directly relates to the need for principals to establish a clear vision, mission, and goals that guide school practices; Standard 1 Strategic Leadership of the NC Executive Standards. The feedback highlights the importance of principals maintaining consistent instructional monitoring practices. The walkthrough process is a critical tool for instructional monitoring, providing opportunities for professional growth and improvement. Teachers' concerns about variable feedback and expectations emphasize the need for principals to implement reliable systems that align walkthrough practices with instructional goals, which falls under the Standard 2 Instructional Leadership domain. Building trust and ensuring fairness in walkthrough practices align with the human resource leadership standard, which calls for principals to develop trusting relationships with staff and provide clear, constructive feedback. Consistency in processes, such as walkthroughs, also ties into managerial leadership. The feedback highlights the importance of consistency, trust, and fairness, which are essential components of effective school leadership as outlined in the NC Principal Executive Standards.

Finally, the relationship between teachers and principals was a recurring theme in the discussions. Positive and supportive interactions during and after walkthroughs were seen as a positive for fostering trust. Teachers valued walkthroughs not just as a monitoring tool but as a way for principals to demonstrate their commitment to teacher development and instructional leadership.

The analysis revealed several recurring themes: clarity of purpose, consistency, frequency and targeted feedback. There was a strong need for better communication regarding the purpose of walkthroughs. Some teachers understood them as a way to align instructional practices, while others were unclear about the intended outcomes. They wanted a more structured approach that

clearly outlined what administrators were looking for. Some teachers thought that all the principals were looking for was program fidelity or keeping up with the pacing guides, while others thought that maybe there were looking for specific strategies that they had discussed in PLTs. Another recurring theme was the perception that instructional monitoring was sometimes disorganized. This led to confusion about how data was being used. There was hesitation and uncertainty in the responses from the teachers in all the groups about whether or not the data from the walkthroughs was used to guide the professional development plan or linked to restart flexibilities.

Principal Interviews

The principal interview, a critical component of the inquiry, was to gather data on how principals viewed the impact of walkthroughs on their leadership behaviors in areas of instructional feedback, teacher support, and school improvement using Restart flexibilities. The results from the three principal interviews in my inquiry highlighted several key findings about the role and impact of classroom walkthroughs in guiding instructional leadership and planning. All three principals expressed a desire to conduct more walkthroughs, noting that they found them valuable for making informed decisions about professional development and instructional support. They acknowledged the need to improve the way feedback from walkthroughs is shared with teachers to enhance clarity and effectiveness. During the walkthroughs, principals primarily focused on areas that had been discussed during Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) or professional development sessions, to identify strengths and areas for improvement based on established expectations.

The principals emphasized that the purpose of the walkthroughs was to identify areas for improvement, ensure alignment with school expectations, and plan professional development

accordingly. This led them to be more intentional in designing tools to guide what they looked for during observations. They paid particular attention to patterns and alignment with school initiatives, allowing them to use the data collected to reinforce instructional goals and communicate expectations clearly. Walkthroughs became a way to monitor the implementation of these goals and to determine where additional emphasis was needed to achieve alignment.

Walkthroughs also provided valuable evidence to support conversations about instruction, helping to identify specific areas where teachers needed additional support. The feedback gathered during these observations played a crucial role in strategic planning, enabling principals to be more intentional in their leadership practices. They noted that teacher perceptions of walkthroughs varied, often depending on the clarity of the process and the individual leadership style of each principal. However, they found that effective communication during walkthroughs helped to build trust with teachers.

Additionally, the principals indicated that the walkthrough process encouraged a more strategic and collaborative approach to planning. It showed the importance of working closely with teachers to meet instructional goals. Instructional monitoring data also informed the principals' use of Restart flexibilities, providing insights into the level of implementation of current strategies and guiding next steps. Each of the three principals planned to leverage Restart flexibilities to support professional development focused on Learning-Focused strategies, a key district initiative, demonstrating the use of data from walkthroughs to drive targeted professional growth and school improvement efforts. Additionally, the three principals utilized budget and calendar flexibilities to strategically improve teacher effectiveness through PLC practices, mentoring, school improvement planning days, curriculum planning days, recruitment bonuses, and instructional materials.

School Improvement and Restart Documentation

The instructional monitoring influenced the development of the school improvement plan during the inquiry and for the next year's plan. The three Restart schools demonstrated in their SIPs strategies utilizing Restart flexibilities to foster school improvement, enhance professional development, and address teacher effectiveness in their school improvement planning for the next school year. While each school articulated these strategies to meet their specific needs, they shared common themes of prioritizing professional development, teacher leadership, and ensuring both student and teacher success.

For their next school improvement plan using Restart flexibilities, all three Restart schools prioritized professional development, teacher recruitment and retention, and leadership capacity. Using calendar and budget flexibility, Hook Middle planned to use additional early release days for targeted professional development and offered stipends for summer curriculum planning and School Improvement Team (SIT) meetings. Using budget flexibility, Mulligan Elementary allocated funds for professional development opportunities, including covering substitutes and registration fees, and hosted a summer School Improvement Plan (SIP) Retreat on PLCs. Using budget flexibility, Bunker Elementary organized professional development planning days for both general and special education teachers, with a focus on collaboration through PLCs. In terms of teacher recruitment and retention using budget flexibility, Hook Middle offered a 'Math Recruitment and Retention' bonus to attract qualified math teachers, while Mulligan and Bunker Elementary provided Exceptional Children (EC) recruitment bonuses and referral programs to encourage staff to refer candidates for hard-to-fill EC positions. Each school planned to build leadership capacity by offering stipends using budget flexibility for teachers to provide coaching and mentoring support, as well as to participate in additional

training and planning. All three principals strategically allocated Restart funds to enhance leadership development, instructional planning, and school improvement initiatives to focus on improving instructional effectiveness and staff leadership.

The principals' leadership decisions were systematically documented and tracked in their school improvement plans, using tools like NCStar to log changes and monitor progress. The Restart monitoring documents and annual reports highlighted how each principal leveraged these flexibilities to focus on building teacher capacity, making it a core component of their school improvement plans.

The principals' reflections during weekly leadership planning meetings revealed that they were not only analyzing instructional practices but also thinking critically about how to support teachers in meeting expectations using Restart flexibilities. All three principals discussed using a variety of Restart flexibilities to support teachers based on the instructional monitoring such as using the calendar flexibility to increase professional learning days, budget flexibility to purchase instructional materials, budget flexibility to hire substitutes so that they can leave the building for training, and budget flexibility to increase mentoring opportunities. After conducting classroom walkthroughs, all three principals embedded professional development around high-yield strategies and prioritizing teacher capacity building in their school improvement plans for the next school year.

At the conclusion of the inquiry and the school year, all three principals incorporated classroom walkthroughs into their school improvement plans as a strategic method to monitor the implementation of Restart flexibilities meant to increase instructional practices, student achievement, and school climate. They developed clear action steps outlining how they would systematically collect walkthrough data to assess and support their school initiatives that were

implemented with Restart flexibilities like the calendar flexibility or budget flexibility. Each principal created a customized walkthrough tool tailored to their specific school context, ensuring a consistent and focused approach to instructional monitoring during the current school year.

At Bunker Elementary, the principal began actively sharing walkthrough data with teachers, fostering a culture of transparency and collaboration. As a result, the staff consistently achieved 100% implementation of targeted instructional practices. This success motivated the principal and teachers to set new bi-weekly walkthrough goals, maintaining a cycle of continuous improvement. At Mulligan Elementary, the principal created a walkthrough tool with the support of the school improvement team to monitor the implementation of the monthly PLT expectations. At Hook Middle, the leadership team uses a new walkthrough tool every month based on the Learning-Focused professional learning and level of implementation. By consistently reviewing data and setting achievable targets, the Restart schools established a process that promoted accountability, professional growth, and alignment with their school improvement goals. The commitment of all three principals to integrating walkthroughs into their improvement plans demonstrated a sustained effort to leverage systematic instructional monitoring for meaningful, data-driven school improvement.

Interpretation of the Findings

School improvement efforts are critical for enhancing underperforming schools and increasing student achievement. The Restart Reform model uses a systematic process involving the School Improvement Team (SIT), which includes school leaders, teachers, and parents, to collaboratively develop, monitor, and assess a data-driven School Improvement Plan (SIP). Effective leadership, especially distributed leadership where responsibilities are shared, is

essential to the SIT's success. Research by Leithwood et al. (2006) shows that such leadership can significantly improve student outcomes by empowering teachers to take ownership of their work. Leithwood et al. (2006) and Hallinger & Murphy (1986) underscore the impact of leadership practices on empowering teachers and fostering collaboration, both of which are central to my framework's emphasis on effective instructional monitoring and leadership. Principal leadership is particularly influential, as principals guide staff through the implementation of instructional strategies, establish a vision, and create a culture of collaboration, which is vital for staff buy-in and the successful execution of initiatives (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986).

Active instructional leadership, such as conducting classroom walkthroughs, allows principals to engage directly with teachers, gather data, and provide formative feedback to improve teaching practices (Bloom, 2007; Brown & Coley, 2011). Unlike traditional evaluations, walkthroughs emphasize growth, fostering a constructive environment for refining instruction (Fullan, 2007). Principals also enhance teacher efficacy by focusing on strengths and encouraging effective practices, thereby increasing the likelihood of successful instructional outcomes (Ross & Gray, 2006). Peer coaching and mentoring, coupled with walkthroughs, further support teacher development and foster collective efficacy (Bloom, 2007; Protheroe, 2009). The role of principals in guiding staff, establishing vision, and fostering collaboration reflects transformational leadership elements in my framework. Encouraging teacher efficacy aligns with practices that inspire a shared vision and collective efficacy; key components of transformational leadership theory. These leadership practices also reflect strategic actions that could be supported by Restart flexibilities, such as a focus on teacher development.

Effective instructional leadership requires a deep understanding of the factors that influence improvement and the ability to adapt to the dynamic and evolving nature of education (Fullan, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2008). Figure 24 shows the Leadership Framework in Restart schools that conceptualizes the leadership theories of practices and how they shape an effective instructional monitoring plan. This framework illustrates the interconnected components influencing instructional leadership within the context of the Restart model. The Restart model serves as the overarching structure for addressing school improvement, particularly in low-performing schools (NCDPI, 2020). It integrates various theoretical and practical elements to enhance instructional leadership and drive systemic change (Marzano et al., 2005). At the center of the framework are the factors that shape instructional leadership. These factors are informed by leadership theory (Bush, 2008), change theory (Kotter, 1996), and transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Leadership theory acts as the central pillar, connecting instructional leadership with research-based practices that are adaptable to the complexities of the school environment (Bush, 2008; Leithwood et al.). Change theory emphasizes the importance of implementing structured processes to guide systemic change in schools and suggests that effective change management is critical to sustaining improvements (Fullan, 2011; Kotter, 1996). Transformational leadership highlights the role of leaders as motivators and collaborators who inspire teachers and staff to work toward a shared vision, fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Marzano et al., 2005). At the base of the framework lies the ‘Systematic Instructional Monitoring Plan,’ which supports effective leaders to inform leadership decisions (NCDPI, 2020). This framework demonstrates a cohesive model for improving instructional leadership through the integration of theory, practice, and context. It highlights how the Restart

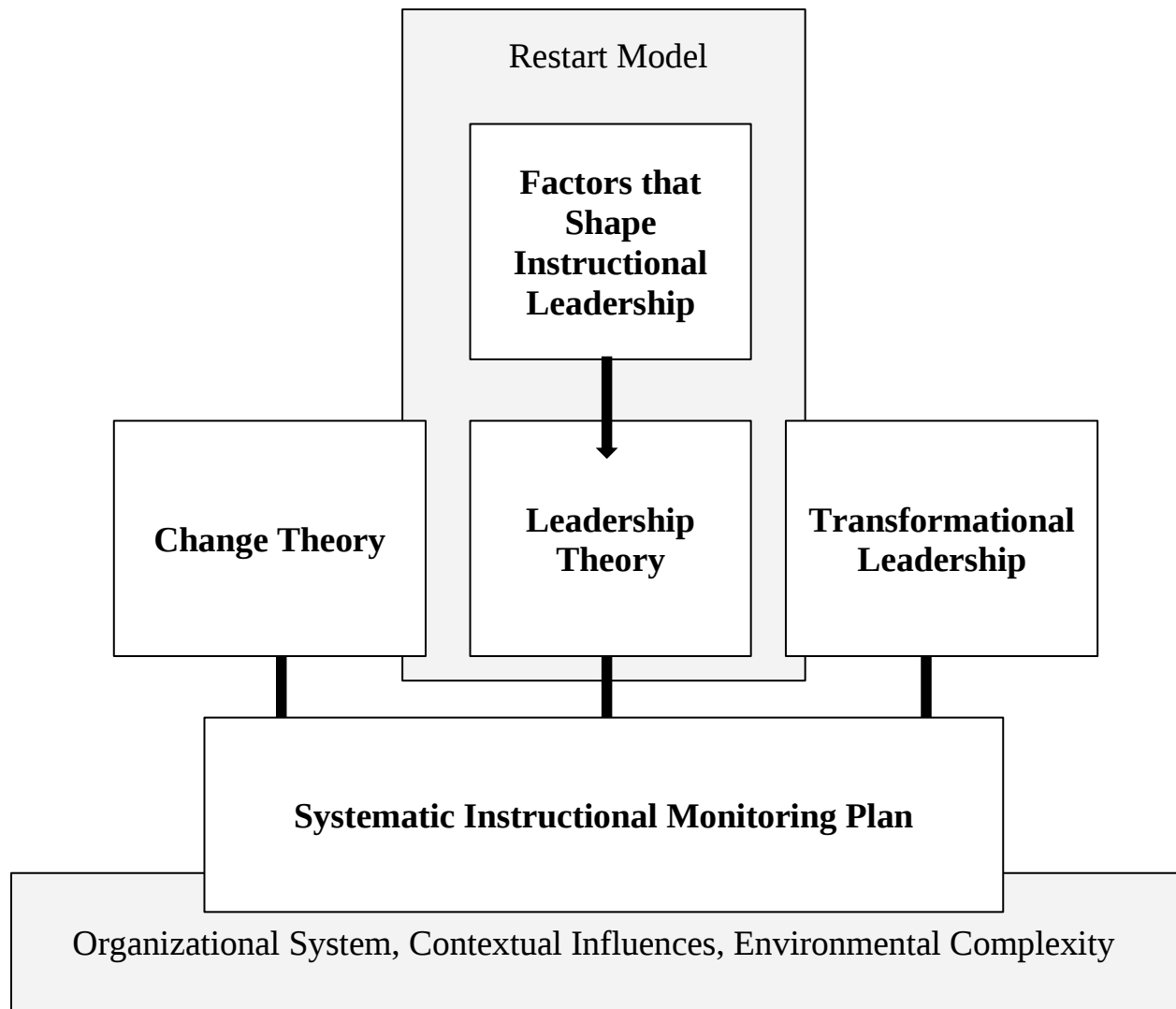


Figure 24. Leadership framework in Restart schools.

Model's flexibilities can be strategically leveraged to implement data-driven monitoring systems and foster transformational leadership practices (Derrington & Campbell, 2015). Ultimately, it supports principals in driving meaningful, sustainable change aligned with school improvement goals (Hallinger, 2011).

The findings from this inquiry revealed a layered picture of how leadership decisions are influenced by data-driven practices in Restart schools, reflecting key principles from Change Theory, Leadership Theory, and Transformational Leadership Theory. The leadership practices of the three principals were shaped significantly by the insights gathered from systematic classroom walkthroughs, which were used to inform strategic actions documented in School Improvement and Restart documents. This aligns with Lewin's Change Theory, which suggests that shifts in leadership behavior directly impact organizational change, particularly in schools facing consistent underperformance.

During the focus group discussions, it was clear that a lack of trust served as a significant barrier to change. In two of the three groups, teachers expressed concerns regarding the lack of focus during walkthroughs, uncertainty about their purpose, and the absence of follow-through on feedback. This lack of clarity and collaboration between staff members and school leaders exposed the need to make improvement. According to change theory, successful implementation of change requires trust, clarity, and ongoing support (Fullan, 2006). Trust serves as the foundation for any change initiative, as it fosters openness to new ideas and reduces resistance. Fullan (2016) emphasizes that trust must be built through transparent communication, consistency in leadership actions, and meaningful engagement with stakeholders. Clarity is equally critical, as it ensures all participants understand the purpose, processes, and expected outcomes of the change. Without clarity, confusion and misalignment can undermine the change

process, leading to frustration and resistance. Ongoing support, such as targeted professional development and opportunities for collaboration, sustains the momentum of change and helps address challenges as they arise (Kotter, 1996).

The resistance noted by teachers in the inquiry, stemming from distrust in the walkthrough processes and an attachment to familiar practices, illustrates the challenges of initiating sustainable change in low-performing schools. Teachers' reluctance often reflects underlying concerns about fairness, transparency, and the potential impact of change on their established routines. As Fullan (2007) points out, successful change requires addressing these emotional barriers by creating a safe environment where stakeholders feel heard and valued. This includes providing clear and consistent communication about the goals and benefits of the change, as well as aligning leadership practices to demonstrate commitment to the process.

Additionally, change theory shows the importance of identifying and addressing the specific context of low-performing schools. Fullan (2010) argues that sustainable change occurs when leaders work collaboratively with staff to identify practices that need to be adapted, while simultaneously providing the resources and professional development necessary to support those adaptations. In the context of this inquiry, the lack of consistent walkthrough practices and feedback undermined trust and clarity, reinforcing the need for leadership to approach change strategically, with an emphasis on building relationships, defining clear expectations, and offering sustained support to teachers.

Applying change theory, teachers' responses to the implementation of classroom walkthroughs revealed their reflective engagement with the data collected, even when they were hesitant (Kotter, 1996; Fullan, 2011). Principals also noted in their interviews that the data from walkthroughs directly influenced their decision-making. For instance, at Hook Middle School,

the principal identified an issue in a beginning teacher's classroom and promptly collaborated with the instructional coach to plan targeted support. Similarly, at Bunker Elementary, the principal observed a grade-level pacing issue and instructed the assistant principal to address it during Professional Learning Team (PLT) meetings. These examples show how leadership behaviors that are focused on using data, responding quickly to needs, and taking immediate action can build trust and bring clarity (Hallinger, 2011; Marzano et al., 2005). These are key ideas in change theory and can make a difference in improving teaching practices and creating a culture where schools are always striving to improve. When leaders take this approach, it helps teachers feel supported and confident in the process (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Derrington & Campbell, 2015).

The observational data from the walkthroughs provided a critical lens through which principals could evaluate the effectiveness of instructional practices and determine the need for adjustments. These data-driven decisions were systematically documented in NCStar and other monitoring documents, ensuring accountability and ongoing progress tracking (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2020). This systematic approach aligns with the principles of change theory, where structured, step-by-step processes are essential for implementing and sustaining change within an organization (Kotter, 1996; Fullan, 2011).

Leadership theory emphasizes that effective leadership emerges from the relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who are willing to follow (Gallos, 2008), with trust serving as the foundational element for success between leaders and team members (Blanchard & Hodges, 2005). Leadership theories, especially transformational and distributed leadership, emphasize the relational dynamics between school administrators and teachers. Research highlights that strong relationships are built on trust, respect, and open communication (Bryk &

Schneider, 2002). When administrators foster positive relationships with teachers, it leads to increased teacher motivation, engagement, and willingness to embrace change (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Conversely, poor relationships can result in resistance to change, low morale, and a lack of alignment with school goals. The teachers at Hook Middle described their relationship with the principal as positive, sharing that the principal provided helpful feedback and was always available. In contrast, at Bunker Elementary, some teachers noted that the principal rarely visited their classrooms, leading to weaker connections. At Mulligan Elementary, teachers explained that frequent changes in leadership created obstacles to building trust and clarity around the classroom walkthrough process.

The leadership theory connects directly to the classroom walkthrough process, highlighting how the relationship between school leaders and teachers can impact outcomes. At Hook Middle, the walkthrough data was more consistent, and teachers had a clearer understanding of its purpose due to the strong principal-teacher relationship. At Bunker Elementary, the principal reflected during their interview on the need to communicate walkthrough criteria more effectively. Similarly, the principal at Mulligan Elementary recognized the importance of connecting walkthrough data to professional development. These reflections and intended changes in leadership behavior demonstrate a desire to strengthen relationships with teachers, reinforcing the idea that trust and collaboration are critical for driving meaningful change.

The walkthroughs served as a structure for the principals to identify instructional strengths and weaknesses, helping them to make informed decisions about the professional development needs of their staff. All three principals highlighted Learning-Focused high-yield strategies as a priority for professional development, showing a commitment to targeted,

research-based instructional methods that align with district goals. This emphasis reflects Leadership Theory's focus on how leaders influence instructional practices and guide decision-making at the organizational level. In the context of Restart schools, trust between administrators and teachers is vital for fostering a collaborative culture and achieving school improvement goals. Teachers are more likely to engage in initiatives like professional development, instructional monitoring, and curriculum changes when they trust that their principal values their input, supports their growth, and prioritizes student success.

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that inspires and motivates followers to exceed their own self-interests for the sake of the organization, fostering significant changes in individuals and systems. It is characterized by a leader's ability to establish a compelling vision, challenge the status quo, encourage innovation, and nurture an environment of collaboration and empowerment (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders engage followers by appealing to their values, emotions, and ethical principles, which fosters commitment and a shared sense of purpose. By observing and discussing instructional practices, principals can reinforce the school's vision and goals, fulfilling the inspirational motivation component of transformational leadership (Hallinger, 2011). Walkthrough data helps principals make informed decisions about professional development and resource allocation, promoting intellectual stimulation among teachers (Bloom, 2007). Engaging in classroom observations allows principals to provide tailored support and recognition, addressing the individualized consideration aspect of transformational leadership (Zepeda, 2014).

Transformational leadership thrives on fostering continuous improvement, motivation, and reflective practice. Classroom walkthrough observations provide principals with the tools to engage meaningfully with teachers, gather actionable data, and drive systemic instructional

improvements. This approach not only helps principals develop their instructional leadership skills but also cultivates a school culture of shared responsibility and professional growth. For example, the principal at Bunker Middle School shared in the interview how walkthrough data was integrated into professional development plan discussions and evaluation conferences. The data served as evidence for teacher growth or as a foundation for goal setting, based on observed progress. At Mulligan Middle School, the principal emphasized using walkthrough data to guide PLT discussions, fostering a collaborative environment focused on continuous instructional improvement.

At each Restart school, all three principals strategically used Restart flexibilities to implement Learning-Focused professional development. Budget flexibility was leveraged to cover contracted services, substitutes for teacher release, and instructional materials, while calendar flexibility provided dedicated release days for teachers at Hook Middle to participate in professional development. These flexibilities were documented in school improvement plans and Restart flexibility monitoring documents, reflecting a deliberate approach to enhancing instructional leadership and teacher effectiveness.

This strategic application of Restart flexibilities not only supports professional growth but also aligns with Transformational Leadership Theory, which emphasizes the role of charismatic and motivational leaders in inspiring staff to embrace change and work toward shared goals. By embedding professional development plans centered on high-yield strategies and prioritizing teacher capacity building, the principals demonstrated a clear vision and a strong commitment to instructional improvement. Their deliberate focus on teacher growth and alignment with school improvement goals exemplifies the transformational leadership practices essential for driving meaningful change in schools.

The more administrators were seen in classrooms, the stronger the perception that they were invested in the school's success and committed to collaborating with teachers to achieve instructional goals. This visibility fostered trust, encouraged collaboration, and exemplified transformational leadership. Teachers at Bunker emphasized the value of administrators making firsthand observations rather than relying on assumptions. This approach positioned administrators as partners rather than evaluators, making teachers more receptive to feedback and instructional changes when principals offered solutions or resources. At Mulligan, the principal's references to specific observations during PLT meetings demonstrated awareness of classroom practices and a commitment to collaborative problem-solving. This consistent presence in classrooms reinforced key themes of instructional leadership, boosted teacher morale, and supported ongoing school improvement efforts.

There was a clear desire from both the teachers and the principals in all three Restart schools for walkthroughs to be more than just a checklist or a formality. Teachers in the focus groups expressed that they wanted to fully understand the walkthrough process and have a voice in the criteria being observed. They suggested breaking down the walkthrough tool into smaller, more focused “look-fors” to facilitate collaborative analysis of the data and identify specific areas for improvement. While they appreciated positive feedback, they also wanted more detailed, individualized feedback that highlighted areas for growth and offered resources or strategies for improvement.

The principals echoed these sentiments in their interviews, emphasizing the need for a clearly defined process and actionable feedback. This alignment between teachers and principals demonstrates the importance of providing support that includes clear guidelines and best

practices for instructional monitoring. When leaders understand and implement these practices effectively, they can foster a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration.

Additionally, the data collected from classroom walkthroughs facilitated a robust cycle of school improvement within the NC Restart Reform Model. Principals actively engaged in reflective practices during weekly leadership meetings, leveraging walkthrough insights to refine instructional priorities and tailor professional development plans. Donaldson (2006) highlights that reflective practices enable school leaders to evaluate the impact of their decisions on teaching and learning, fostering continuous improvement. By engaging in reflection, principals can make more informed, strategic decisions that align with their school's goals and instructional priorities. This consistent focus on using data for strategic planning demonstrates how principals adapted their leadership behaviors to align with the NC School Executive Standards, particularly those related to instructional leadership and school improvement. The subtle shifts observed in their leadership inventory responses, specifically concerning instructional monitoring, suggest a deepening understanding of the complexities involved in observing and evaluating classroom practices. This growth in instructional capacity ultimately strengthened the school's ability to effectively support student learning within the framework of the NC Restart Reform Model.

Limitations of the Inquiry

The scope of the data collection is a limitation. The inquiry was limited to a single North Carolina district, specifically within the context of Restart schools. This might limit the findings to other districts or schools that do not operate under the same Restart model or in similar socio-economic conditions. The inquiry included only three principals from Restart schools, which limited the scope of my findings. The small sample size made it challenging to account for variability in leadership practices or the unique challenges and successes of individual principals.

The inquiry only included principals, excluding other leadership perspectives such as assistant principals, instructional coaches, or district administrators who might have provided valuable insights into instructional monitoring and Restart flexibilities. This limitation reduced the depth of understanding regarding how leadership teams as a whole contribute to implementing systematic instructional monitoring and using Restart flexibilities effectively. While teacher focus groups were included, the inquiry did not directly include a broader population of teachers (e.g., through surveys) to capture wider perspectives on how walkthroughs and leadership practices impacted them. A more comprehensive understanding of teacher perceptions and experiences across different instructional areas might have revealed additional trends or themes related to instructional monitoring and professional development.

The timeframe for walkthrough observations was short, limiting insight into the influence they had on leadership skills and behavior. There wasn't time for the principals to grow their leadership skills to have an impact on the instructional practices. Given the complexities of observing classroom instruction, a longer period would have allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how the change intervention impacted both classroom practices, leadership behaviors and the strategic use of Restart flexibilities by principals. If given more time, the principals might have been able to implement additional changes using Restart flexibilities throughout the school year, with a deeper exploration of how the change intervention influenced their strategic use of these flexibilities.

As classroom walkthroughs were a central data collection method, they could provide only "snapshots" of classroom environments at particular times. This method did not fully capture long-term instructional trends or the consistency of teaching practices over time that were impacted by leadership decisions. The presence of observers could have influenced the data

during walks, potentially leading teachers to adjust their behavior. The principal interviews were conducted at the end of the school year. The timing might have impacted the recall of events and practices that occurred earlier in the academic year. This timing and completing the post inventory at the end of the school could have led to bias, with principals possibly emphasizing recent successes or downplaying earlier challenges.

The impact of external factors was an additional limitation of the inquiry. Differences in how individual schools utilize Restart flexibilities affected the outcomes, leading to variability that is difficult to account for within the inquiry. The unique context of each school made it challenging to attribute changes solely to the implementation of systematic instructional monitoring. Changes in leadership, one school having an interim principal, inhibited the ability of the leader to make significant changes with Restart flexibilities. The district was conducting their own district walks with different look-fors. The district was also providing professional development on the Learning-Focused high yield strategies. There wasn't an expectation that school administrators implement school-based PD on the strategies or implement any of the ideas, however, many of the school leaders began making plans. These factors might have influenced the Restart schools principals and could have confounded the impact of instructional monitoring on utilizing Restart flexibilities.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

· The findings highlight the critical role of principals as instructional leaders in Restart schools, leveraging data from classroom walkthroughs to make informed decisions that drive school improvement. Their use of Restart flexibilities to focus on building teacher capacity illustrates a strategic and transformational approach to leadership, emphasizing the importance of professional development and alignment with district goals. This inquiry provides valuable

insights into the impact of leadership on instructional quality and the transformative potential of systematic instructional monitoring in underperforming schools.

Based on the results of this inquiry, the use of a systematic instructional monitoring program supports targeted instructional leadership, data-driven decision-making, planning professional development, effective use of Restart flexibilities, and strengthened feedback and accountability. The results emphasize the need for a systematic plan with clear expectations that are articulated to teachers prior to the walkthrough to achieve an increased impact on effective instructional practices.

The inquiry highlighted that a systematic approach to classroom walkthroughs creates a more targeted focus for instructional leadership. Principals expressed the need for walkthroughs to have specific objectives, linked directly to school improvement goals, instructional priorities, and district expectations. The data gathered during walkthroughs allowed principals to be more strategic in identifying strengths and areas of improvement, which informed both immediate and long-term leadership decisions. This targeted focus helped principals to prioritize their efforts like reallocating instructional coaching support, providing materials, and providing follow-up in PLTs on school goals from the data collected during walks; fostering a clear and data-driven approach to instructional leadership.

The systematic monitoring plan facilitated data-driven decision-making, enabling principals to gather evidence on teaching practices across classrooms. This evidence was used in determining professional development needs and evaluating the effectiveness of instructional strategies. The data analysis showed that principals were able to make informed adjustments to professional development plans based on the patterns and trends observed during walkthroughs.

This led to more relevant and impactful professional development sessions that were directly tied to the instructional needs of each school.

Walkthrough data connected professional development to supporting a culture of collaboration through Professional Learning Teams (PLTs). Principals used walkthrough findings to guide PLT discussions, identify high-yield strategies, and determine the focus for professional development. The inquiry revealed that when walkthroughs were aligned with school improvement plans, they enhanced collaboration and increased the relevance of training for teachers.

The inquiry demonstrated that a systematic instructional monitoring plan enables principals to effectively leverage Restart flexibilities. The principals in the inquiry utilized data from instructional monitoring and conferring with teachers to justify adjustments to reallocate budget resources and implement professional development that directly targeted observed needs. The inquiry showed that data from systematic monitoring is essential for making adaptive and context-specific decisions within the Restart model.

This inquiry revealed that a systematic plan for instructional monitoring supports more structured feedback and accountability systems. Principals identified the need to improve feedback mechanisms based on walkthrough observations. While the feedback practices varied, the collection of walkthrough data provided a foundation for conversations about instructional effectiveness. This increased accountability and transparency, with walkthrough data serving as a shared reference point for evaluating progress, discussing instructional practices, and setting teacher growth goals.

Despite the benefits, the inquiry highlighted some challenges associated with implementing a systematic instructional monitoring plan. Principals noted the difficulty of

balancing administrative tasks with regular walkthroughs, as well as the challenge of aligning feedback to specific goals and instructional priorities. Additionally, teacher perceptions of walkthroughs varied, with some expressing skepticism or viewing them as a compliance task rather than a supportive process. This emphasizes the importance of clear communication about the purpose of walkthroughs and building trust to foster a culture focused on growth and development.

The findings highlight the critical role of principals as instructional leaders in Restart schools, leveraging data from classroom walkthroughs to make informed decisions that drive school improvement. Their use of Restart flexibilities to focus on building teacher capacity illustrates a strategic and transformational approach to leadership, emphasizing the importance of professional development and alignment with district goals. The leadership framework in Restart schools provided demonstrates that Leadership Theory, Change Theory, and Transformational Leadership intersect to shape instructional leadership in Restart schools. This intersection highlights how a Systematic Instructional Monitoring Plan can provide a structured approach for continuous improvement. By recognizing the complexity of organizational systems and contextual influences, this inquiry offers practical applications that can benefit districts, schools, and the broader educational field.

At the district level, these findings suggest that systematic instructional monitoring plans should be embedded as a core component of leadership practice. By aligning classroom walkthroughs with district goals and improvement strategies, district leaders can ensure a consistent approach to instructional leadership. The systematic collection of data during walkthroughs can inform district-level professional development initiatives, ensuring they are relevant to the needs identified in individual schools. Additionally, the flexibility offered by the

Restart model allows districts to reallocate resources quickly and effectively in response to the data, optimizing support for both teachers and administrators. To address challenges such as administrative workload and teacher skepticism, districts should provide ongoing professional learning for principals on effective walkthrough practices and feedback delivery. Change Theory suggests that supporting principals through structured processes and clear communication can foster buy-in and trust among teachers. District leaders can also create principal PLTs to share best practices and collaborate on refining instructional monitoring processes.

For schools, the inquiry reinforces the importance of clear expectations and transparency in walkthrough processes. Teachers expressed a desire for walkthroughs to be more than a checklist or formality, advocating for a process that is inclusive and responsive to their instructional needs. By involving teachers in the development of walkthrough criteria and providing individualized feedback with actionable strategies, principals can cultivate a culture of shared responsibility and professional growth. This aligns with Transformational Leadership, where principals act as partners in the improvement process, fostering collaboration and mutual trust. Principals can use the data gathered from walkthroughs to guide PLT discussions, aligning professional learning with identified instructional gaps. The strategic use of Restart flexibilities allows schools to address specific needs quickly and remove barriers to improvement. For instance, principals at Hook Middle School used calendar flexibility to provide dedicated professional learning days, ensuring teachers had the time and support needed to implement instructional changes effectively.

On a broader scale, this inquiry offers valuable insights for the field of educational leadership, particularly in low-performing schools. The findings emphasize that systematic instructional monitoring, when combined with Transformational Leadership practices, can lead

to significant instructional improvements. Grounded in improvement science, the use of Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles (Langley et al., 2009) demonstrates how iterative processes for testing and refining strategies can foster meaningful change. This approach highlights the importance of organizational systems, contextual influences, and environmental complexity, emphasizing the need for adaptable leadership practices in reform settings.

Educational policymakers and researchers can use these insights to refine leadership development programs and provide resources that support data-driven decision-making. The inquiry also illustrates the need for ongoing research into the challenges and best practices of instructional monitoring, particularly in schools with unique contextual factors. By embracing frameworks grounded in improvement science, districts can better address the complexities of school improvement efforts and create scalable, sustainable models for educational reform.

This inquiry shows that the integration of systematic instructional monitoring plans with Restart flexibilities can transform instructional leadership by making it more strategic, data-driven, and collaborative. By addressing the challenges of balancing administrative duties and fostering teacher trust, districts and schools can optimize their walkthrough processes to achieve sustainable school improvement. Ultimately, this approach aligns with Change Theory and Transformational Leadership, providing a pathway for educational leaders to inspire growth, drive change, and improve outcomes for all students. Overall, the inquiry confirmed that a systematic instructional monitoring plan can significantly enhance instructional leadership in Restart schools by providing a clear structure for data collection, informed decision-making, targeted professional development, and effective use of flexibilities. It also demonstrated the need for ongoing refinement of feedback processes, improved communication, and consistent

alignment of monitoring efforts with school improvement goals to ensure sustained and impactful instructional leadership.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this inquiry suggest several recommendations for improving instructional leadership and practice in low-performing schools. These recommendations span across various levels from school-based practice to district-level policy. At the school level, implementing effective instructional monitoring plans through regular classroom walkthroughs can serve as a foundation for improvement. Walkthroughs provide valuable data on instructional practices and student engagement, which can drive targeted professional development. It is recommended that schools invest in leadership training to ensure administrators are proficient in conducting meaningful walkthroughs and interpreting the collected data for actionable outcomes. Additionally, hiring practices should prioritize identifying leaders skilled in transformational leadership, as these leaders are adept at fostering a culture of continuous improvement and are better equipped to leverage the insights gained from instructional monitoring.

Districts should develop comprehensive staffing plans that align with the specific needs of Restart schools. These plans should include policies that mandate the use of effective monitoring practices, ensuring that administrators are consistently gathering and utilizing data to make informed instructional decisions. Additionally, district leaders should provide guidance and support for school leaders on how to effectively use Restart flexibilities such as changes to scheduling, staffing, and budgeting to address identified areas for improvement.

North Carolina policy mandates that all low-performing schools create reform plans aimed at enhancing school performance grades and growth designations (NCDPI, n.d.e). A systematic instructional monitoring plan, which includes classroom walkthroughs, should be a

cornerstone of these reform efforts. District leaders must recognize the link between effective instructional monitoring and improved school outcomes, as the data collected can highlight instructional strengths and areas for growth, ultimately informing the strategic and instructional leadership practices needed to drive improvement.

Given that the Restart model is relatively new in North Carolina's educational policy, there is a limited body of research on its effectiveness in fostering school improvement. The findings of this inquiry are particularly relevant to districts considering the Restart model as a strategy to support low-performing schools. These districts should ensure that their leaders have the necessary skills and understanding to conduct instructional monitoring effectively. This means setting clear expectations for how walkthroughs should be conducted and how the data will be used to implement Restart flexibilities that remove barriers to school improvement.

The significance of this inquiry extends beyond district leaders to include policymakers who are responsible for determining the long-term viability of the Restart model as a reform strategy. Currently, there are limited requirements for schools operating under the Restart model, aside from submitting a school improvement plan in NCStar and providing annual reports on the use of Restart flexibilities. Future policy could benefit from incorporating instructional monitoring data, as it provides a clearer picture of how teacher capacity and instructional quality are evolving. This aligns with the broader goal of school reform, which aims to strengthen teacher effectiveness and improve student outcomes.

Research has shown that instructional leadership plays a critical role in school improvement. Robinson et al. (2008) emphasize that leadership focused on improving teaching and learning has a stronger impact on student outcomes compared to traditional leadership approaches. Additionally, instructional monitoring is a key component of effective leadership, as

it provides data that can be used to make evidence-based decisions (Hallinger, 2011). By systematically collecting and analyzing data through classroom walkthroughs, school leaders can develop targeted professional development initiatives that are responsive to the specific needs of their teachers and students.

For districts across North Carolina, the insights from this inquiry offer a roadmap to systemic school improvement. Districts seeking to raise the performance of low-performing schools should integrate instructional monitoring into their regular practices and use the data to inform strategic decisions. This approach will not only enhance instructional quality but also create a culture of data-driven decision-making that is essential for sustained improvement. By supporting school leaders in becoming more effective instructional leaders, districts can foster environments where teaching and learning are continuously refined, leading to better outcomes for all students.

Recommendations for Future Study

Based on my inquiry, I have several recommendations for future research. Future research should delve deeper into instructional monitoring practices in low-performing schools, specifically utilizing Restart flexibilities. There is a need to explore the structures and supports that districts should implement to enable leaders to effectively use monitoring data to drive school improvement. This could involve investigating which strategies and processes are most effective for translating walkthrough data into actionable insights for instructional leadership. Additionally, understanding the types of professional development, coaching, and support that leaders need to leverage Restart flexibilities will be critical for fostering systemic improvement.

I could have approached my inquiry to get different results and potentially stronger data to support my findings in a few ways. One improvement would have been to enhance the

frequency and consistency of the walkthrough observations. There were gaps in the data because not all classrooms were observed consistently. Standardizing the number, timing, and focus areas of classroom walkthroughs across all schools involved in the inquiry would have been beneficial. More consistent data could improve the reliability of the findings, making it easier to compare results across schools and identify patterns or trends in instructional leadership.

Further, using more structured feedback mechanisms would have been advantageous. I should have worked with the principals to determine how feedback would be given to teachers based on the classroom walkthroughs. In my inquiry, I served more as an observer of the leaders' actions. A more effective approach may have been to collaborate with the principals to establish and implement a standardized feedback framework (e.g., rubrics, templates) for use after walkthroughs. This may have reduced variability in feedback quality, enhanced accountability, and ensured that walkthrough data consistently translated into actionable steps for teachers.

A question I have is whether introducing focus groups or surveys specifically aimed at understanding teacher perceptions before and during the implementation of the systematic instructional monitoring plan would have led to greater teacher trust and buy-in. Addressing teacher concerns proactively might have improved engagement and willingness to adopt recommendations from walkthroughs, leading to more impactful changes in instructional practices. The principals in this inquiry were genuinely interested in the results of the focus groups. They wanted to hear their teachers' thoughts about the walkthrough process and the feedback provided.

If I were to implement the components of this inquiry in the future, I would explore professional development about leadership styles. I believe assessing how different leadership styles influence the effectiveness of systematic instructional monitoring would be valuable. This

information could help design professional development and resources that motivate each principal in a way that resonates with their individual leadership style. Additionally, identifying which leadership styles work best in Restart schools could help tailor professional development for principals, maximizing their impact on school improvement overall.

While this inquiry examined the Restart model as a whole, future research should focus on specific Restart flexibilities and their direct impact on school improvement. This would involve exploring which particular flexibilities such as modified staffing, curriculum adjustments, or extended learning opportunities are most effective for enhancing school performance. A deeper examination at how individual schools tailor these flexibilities to address their unique challenges could provide valuable insights into best practices for low-performing schools across the state.

Long-term research is essential to understand the systemic impact of Restart policies on school improvement. Research suggests that sustainable school improvement can take five or more years to become evident (Aladjem et al., 2010; Stoll, 2009), so a longitudinal study on the progress of Restart schools would be valuable. Such studies could track trends in student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and leadership practices over time to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Restart policies influence school reform. This research could also offer insights into the sustainability of improvements and the factors that contribute to long-lasting change in low-performing schools. By focusing on these areas, future researchers can build a stronger foundation for understanding the relationship between instructional monitoring, Restart flexibilities, and school improvement. These studies will not only help refine the Restart model but also offer evidence-based guidance for districts and policymakers to improve educational outcomes in low-performing schools.

Conclusions

Chapter 5 provided a comprehensive overview of the inquiry's outcomes and implications. It began with a summary and an outline of the chapter, along with a restatement of the inquiry's purpose to contextualize the analysis. This chapter detailed the findings and their interpretations, grounding the analysis in the inquiry's theoretical framework. The chapter also addressed the limitations encountered during the inquiry, highlighting areas where constraints impacted the inquiry's scope and methodology. Implications for practice were explored, focusing on how the findings can enhance instructional leadership, particularly in high-poverty and low-performing schools. The implications for equity were considered, emphasizing the need for equitable resource distribution and targeted interventions. In addition to practical implications, Chapter V offered specific recommendations for improving practice, outlined areas for future research, and concluded with an overall reflection.

In conclusion, the inquiry aimed to examine the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools. The inquiry endeavored to understand how principals perceive and utilize the flexibilities granted under the Restart model to address persistent challenges in low-performing schools. The findings highlighted the critical role of effective instructional leadership in fostering school reform. Principals in Restart schools leveraged data from classroom observations to identify instructional gaps, provide professional development, and set goals for PLTs. The inquiry highlighted the importance of ongoing data collection and reflective practices in creating a culture of continuous improvement.

Ultimately, the inquiry's implications extend beyond the specific context of Restart schools, offering broader insights for districts and policymakers in North Carolina as they seek to

improve outcomes in recurring low-performing schools. This inquiry provides a foundation for future research on effective leadership practices in reform models and highlights the need for sustained efforts for school improvement through strategic use of Restart flexibilities.

Scholarly Practitioner Reflections on Leadership

Trends in education have required school principals to do more than manage schools. They are expected to be instructional leaders and are held accountable for their impact on teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Hagan (2015) describes the role of the principal by stating, “They are expected to coach, mentor and support teachers as they approach the difficult task of promoting high levels of student achievement in a standards-based, accountability-oriented environment”. The movement toward instructional leadership calls for the principal to further their leadership role by becoming familiar with the instructional practices actually occurring in their schools (Kachur, Stout & Edwards, 2010). This shift in expectations means that principals must actively engage with the instructional practices taking place in their schools, rather than relying solely on secondhand reports or standardized test results.

To effectively fulfill this role, principals must employ a variety of strategies to monitor and enhance instructional quality. Classroom walkthroughs represent one critical tool in their toolkit. As Kachur, Stout, and Edwards (2010) explain, these walkthroughs help principals become familiar with the day-to-day instructional practices occurring within their schools. This ongoing exposure gives principals the information they need to support teachers and make data-driven decisions aimed at improving instruction and, ultimately, student achievement.

Working on this problem of practice using improvement science has been an invaluable learning experience in leadership, allowing me to lead a team of district leaders from multiple departments. I gained practical experience in setting agendas, clarifying the purpose and desired

outcomes of our work, and facilitating collaborative discussions. These aspects of the process came naturally to me, but I encountered challenges in managing competing viewpoints and delegating tasks. Ensuring that every team member was prepared and aligned toward a common goal was time-consuming and required establishing checks and balances to maintain focus and accountability.

Creating a proposal for the action research was another eye-opening experience. I learned the importance of bringing the right stakeholders as collaborative inquiry partners on board to breathe life into a project. Presenting the proposal in its best light required thorough research and planning, particularly to address the projected impact. Stakeholders, naturally, scrutinize whether the benefits of a project justify the time and effort required for its planning and implementation. I had to ensure that the project's value was clearly articulated and aligned with district priorities. The process of creating the action research proposal highlighted my strengths in seeing the bigger picture and articulating the project's value to stakeholders. This is a key skill for any instructional leader aiming to drive school reform.

The positive feedback from my supervisors has been both encouraging and affirming. Developing the team, creating an action plan, and implementing strategies to highlight leadership skills have all made a noticeable impact in the district. My supervisors believe that the data collected during this project will inspire both new and veteran administrators to refocus on instructional leadership. Specifically, incorporating varied instructional monitoring methods such as formal observations, feedback sessions, and classroom walkthroughs, has enabled principals to develop a deeper understanding of classroom practices and identify areas for professional development.

Through my inquiry, I have gained valuable insights into leadership theory and transformational leadership. I've learned that transformational leadership is essential in fostering continuous improvement, particularly in the context of Restart schools. Effective transformational leaders inspire and empower teachers, creating a shared vision for school improvement while promoting professional growth. By leveraging systematic instructional monitoring, transformational leaders can make informed, data-driven decisions that build teacher capacity and enhance instructional practices. This shows the importance of clear communication, trust-building, and collaboration in creating an environment where teachers feel supported and motivated to improve.

As a central office administrator, my role in developing transformational leaders has become clearer. I recognize that providing principals with structured professional development and tailored resources is crucial for helping them implement systematic instructional monitoring effectively. Supporting principals through ongoing coaching, clear frameworks, and opportunities for collaboration can help them grow as transformational leaders. By ensuring that they have the tools and knowledge needed to inspire their teachers, I can contribute to a culture of continuous improvement and shared responsibility within the schools. Furthermore, aligning professional development initiatives with leadership styles and school improvement goals can maximize the impact of these efforts.

Working on my inquiry about the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools has significantly strengthened my leadership skills and enhanced my work in principal leadership development. Through this inquiry, I gained deeper insights into driving school reform and the critical role of instructional monitoring in fostering data-driven decision-making and accountability. This work has

reinforced the importance of consistency and vision in leadership. By modeling a systematic and purposeful approach throughout my inquiry, I demonstrated the value of having a clear vision and being consistent in my expectations, actions, and follow-through. These are qualities that I now emphasize in our School Leadership Academy and take into my work with the implementation of Advanced Teaching Roles. The inquiry required me to reflect on my own leadership practices, specifically my ability to inspire change, support principals, and assess the impact of my leadership on their growth and performance. This reflection helped me understand how vital it is to cultivate a shared sense of purpose with principals, ensuring they feel equipped and motivated to implement meaningful reforms.

This inquiry has also deepened my understanding of my own leadership skills. I have become more aware of the importance of strategic planning, clear communication, and relationship-building in my work. I have learned to be more reflective, recognizing the need to adapt my approach based on the needs of principals and the context of their schools. I now see the value in fostering trust and collaboration, not only among school leaders but also between central office staff and schools. By modeling transformational leadership in my own practice, I can better support the growth of leaders who are committed to improving outcomes for all students and support the effective use of Restart flexibilities to remove barriers in low-performing schools to increase improvement.

In this problem of practice using improvement science, data was collected through a principal inventory, classroom walkthrough observations, teacher focus groups, and principal interviews. The data collected and then analyzed addressed the inquiry questions: How do principals perceive restart flexibilities around strategic and instructional leadership? How are administrators using Restart Flexibilities in the school? What effect does a systematic

instructional monitoring plan have on principal instructional leadership behaviors in Restart schools? How can a systematic monitoring process using classroom walkthroughs influence how principals plan for school improvement using Restart flexibilities? I gained valuable insights into data collection that enhanced my understanding of its importance in driving meaningful change. One of the most beneficial aspects was learning how to systematically gather data from various sources, such as classroom walkthroughs, inventories, and interviews. I typically favor efficiency, data, and results-oriented approaches, which aligns with an emphasis on using systematic instructional monitoring plans. I see the value of collecting reliable data through classroom walkthroughs, inventories, and interviews, showing the importance of triangulating data to guide instructional leadership. I have learned that streamlining processes and focusing on accountability are crucial for conducting thorough analysis and drawing valid inferences, especially when working with large volumes of data. This process taught me the value of triangulating data to ensure that conclusions are supported by multiple forms of evidence. However, I also encountered several challenges. One struggle was managing the sheer volume of data, especially ensuring that it was organized in a way that allowed for accurate and timely analysis. Coordinating data collection across multiple teams and schools was time-intensive, requiring constant communication and follow-up to maintain consistency. Additionally, ensuring the reliability of the data was an ongoing concern. Despite these challenges, the experience deepened my understanding of how rigorous data collection is essential for driving action and making informed decisions.

Classroom walkthroughs, in particular, have proven to be an effective strategy for fostering continuous improvement. By observing instructional practices in real time, principals are able to provide timely feedback that promotes a culture of reflective practice and

instructional growth. This has been especially valuable in Restart schools, where principals can adapt their monitoring methods to meet the unique needs of their schools and utilize Restart flexibilities to remove barriers or provide support. As a result, they are better positioned to support strategic and instructional leadership, driving teacher effectiveness. This inquiry has created an opportunity to collect evidence of leadership practices in the Restart schools that are enduring and effective.

Overall, this problem of practice using improvement science not only strengthened my leadership skills but also highlighted the importance of empowering principals with strategic and instructional leadership tools. By actively engaging with instructional practices, principals can enhance teacher effectiveness, foster continuous improvement, and meet the increasing demands of accountability in education.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
Willis Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 · rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

Social/Behavioral IRB

From:

To: [Heather Stewart](#)

CC: [Elizabeth Hodge](#)

Date: 2/19/2024

Re: [UMCIRB 24-000008](#)

Testing the effectiveness of a systematic instructional monitoring plan as a way to improve instructional leadership in Restart schools.

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 2/18/2024. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 1.

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

Appendix B Informed Consent(0.01)
APPENDIX C - Focus Group Protocol.docx(0.01)
APPENDIX D Instructional Leadership Survey.docx(0.01)
APPENDIX E Classroom Walkthrough Observation Tool.docx(0.01)
APPENDIX F Principal Interview.docx(0.01)
Appendix G Focus Group Email(0.01)
Appendix H Survey & Interview Email(0.01)
Heather Stewart - Problem of Practice(0.01)
IRB Protocol Components - Heather Stewart(0.01)

Description

Consent Forms
Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Surveys and Questionnaires
Surveys and Questionnaires
Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Study Protocol or Grant Application
Study Protocol or Grant Application

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 FORM

TESTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTIONAL MONITORING PLAN AS A WAY TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN RESTART SCHOOLS

UMCIRB#: 24-000008

Principal Investigator: Heather E. Stewart

You are being invited to participate in a research study titled “TESTING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTIONAL MONITORING PLAN AS A WAY TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN RESTART SCHOOLS” being conducted by Heather Stewart, a doctoral student at East Carolina University in the College of Education LEED department. The goal is to complete a survey and interview individuals at the Moore County Restart schools. The survey will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. Interviews will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. Interviews will be audio recorded for accuracy and kept confidential. Only the researcher will have access to the recordings. Names will not be utilized. It is hoped that this information will assist us to better understand effective leadership practices using restart flexibilities. Your responses will be kept confidential, and no data will be released or used with your identification attached. Your participation in the research is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any or all questions, and you may stop at any time. We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study. There is no penalty for not taking part in this research study. Please call Dr. Travis Lewis at (252) 916-1129 for any research related questions or the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at 252-744-2914 for questions about your rights as a research participant.

Name of Participant _____ Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____

APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP

Preparation Considerations

- Location - school library; comfortable, can hold a group of 5-15, accessible
- Tables and seating arranged in a circle, name tags and light refreshments provided
- Audio Recording equipment available
- Plan for a break if it takes more than an hour

Introduction

- Introduce myself and set the tone, provide my background
- Explain the purpose of the focus group
- Confidentiality: explain that there are recorders to capture their experiences and ideas.

Explain that everything said is confidential and that nothing will be shared what others have discussed with people outside of this group.

- Reiterate the agenda and time boundaries of the focus group, including any planned breaks.

Ground Rules (I will say...)

1. First, there are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your opinions and perspectives.
2. Second, you do not have to agree with everyone else in this room if that is not how you really feel. I expect people will have different views on these questions.

3. Third, I want you to feel comfortable saying good things as well as critical things. I am not here to promote a particular way of thinking. I just want to understand your viewpoints.
4. Fourth, I ask that you talk one at a time.
5. Other ground rules (such as turning cell phones off if possible) or opening it up to the group to suggest other ground rules (time permitting).

Focus Group Questions - Strategic and Instructional Leadership

- I would like to start by learning more about each other. Can you introduce yourself, what you teach, and how long you have been at XXX school?
- Proceed with questions
 - Describe your overall experiences with classroom walkthrough observations?
 - While the walkthrough has certain look-fors, what is most important for you when planning lessons and why?
 - How do you know there is a particular practice or strategy that you should be using?
 - How would you describe the purpose of classroom walkthrough observations?
 - Describe how the walkthrough observation process has influenced your planning, staff meetings, PLTs, or professional development in your building?
 - How has the walkthrough process improved communication and alignment to the school improvement plan in the building?
 - Describe how the classroom walkthrough observation process has changed the relationship you have with your principal? Please give examples.

- This is the end of the questions I have for you today. Is there anything else you would like to add or think that I should know?

Closing

- To close, thank the participants for sharing their experiences and perspectives.
- End with an opportunity for participants to ask questions of you, time permitting.

Thank you for your participation in this interview. All of your responses will be kept strictly confidential.

APPENDIX D: INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP SURVEY

You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted by Heather Stewart, a doctoral student at East Carolina University in the College of Education LEED department.

Procedures: If you choose to participate, you will answer some questions about your experience with instructional support in your school. The survey will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

Potential Risks and Benefits: It is unlikely that you will experience any risks or discomforts beyond what would be experienced in everyday life by participating. There are no specific benefits associated with participating.

Compensation: There is no compensation associated with participation in the study (other than my undying gratitude and a nice note in your mailbox).

Confidentiality: The data collected in this study are completely anonymous. No personally identifiable information will be collected and the information you choose to provide in this study cannot be connected back to you. Results from this study may be published or presented at research conferences, and the anonymous data may be shared with other researchers through an online data repository.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to not participate or end your participation at any time without penalty.

Questions or Concerns: If you have any questions or comments about this study, you may contact the researcher: Heather Stewart, (440)563-6464 or hstewart@ncmcs.org.

Consent: By completing this survey, you are consenting to participate in this study.

School-wide Professional Development

My leadership practices promote school-wide professional development that:

Encourages teachers to attend professional development activities that are aligned to school improvement goals.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Provides for site-based professional development opportunities around instructional best practices.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Plans professional development around teacher needs and wants.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Supports individualized professional development plans.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Plans or supports teacher leaders to plan professional development

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Furnishes useful materials and resources aligned to professional development to teachers.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Schedules time during in-service for collaboration among teachers.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Shared Goals

My leadership practices define and communicate shared goals that:

Uses data on student achievement to guide faculty discussions on the instructional program.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Encourages teachers to use data analysis of student academic progress.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Develops data-driven academic goals in collaboration with teachers

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Communicates the school's academic goals to faculty.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Works with teachers to interpret assessment data for instructional implications.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Uses school goals when making academic decisions.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Develops school goals that promote high standards and expectations for all students.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Sets high but achievable standards for all students.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Teaching and Learning Process

My leadership practices to monitor and provide feedback on the teaching and learning process include:

Visiting the classroom to ensure classroom instruction aligns with school goals.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Monitoring classroom practices for alignment to district curriculum.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Modeling instructional strategies.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Staying in the office all day.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Observing teachers for professional development instead of evaluation.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------------------------	----------	-------------------

Implementing the NCEES teacher evaluation process effectively.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------------------------	----------	-------------------

Providing private feedback of instructional delivery.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------------------------	----------	-------------------

Providing private feedback of evidence of student learning

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Thank you for your assistance!

APPENDIX E: INSTRUCTIONAL MONITORING CLASSROOM WALKTHROUGH

Drop-down Questions:

- School
- Day of the week (Monday-Friday)
- Grade level (K-8)
- Subject Area (ELA, Math, Science, etc.)

Lesson Curriculum

EQ/Learning Target visible for subject observing?*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Evidence of EQ/Learning Target unpacked with students. *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

EQ/Learning Target aligned with standard/skill taught in the lesson. *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

EQ/Learning Target mentioned during observation.*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Lesson Instruction

Activating Strategy - Check all that apply

- ☐ Whole group
- ☐ Small Group
- ☐ Linked to EQ/LT
- ☐ Linked to important vocabulary
- ☐ Built on background knowledge
- ☐ Not Observed
- ☐ None

Graphic Organizer - Check all that apply

- ☐ Whole group
- ☐ Small group
- ☐ Previewed
- ☐ Higher order thinking
- ☐ Linked to EQ/LT
- ☐ Scaffolding
- ☐ Differentiation
- ☐ Not Observed
- ☐ None

Included in Learning Activity - Check all that apply

- ☐ Aligned to EG/LT
- ☐ Explicitly teaching higher order thinking
- ☐ Reading comprehension strategy
- ☐ Chunking
- ☐ Preview prerequisite skills/Spiral Review
- ☐ Scaffolded content and process
- ☐ Questioning
- ☐ Math Talks
- ☐ Anchor Charts
- ☐ Phonics/Phonemic Awareness Practice
- ☐ Guided Notes
- ☐ Stations
- ☐ Experiment
- ☐ Guided Reading/Math

Teaching Strategies - Check all that apply

- ☐ Distributed Summarizing
- ☐ Numbered Heads/Collaborative Pairs

- ☐ Vocabulary Instruction
- ☐ Reading Comprehension Instruction
- ☐ Math Comprehension Instruction
- ☐ Writing
- ☐ Accelerated Intervention
- ☐ Social Learning
- ☐ Activating Thinking
- ☐ Feedback
- ☐ Direct Instruction

Type - Check all that apply

- ☐ Whole Groups
- ☐ Small Groups
- ☐ Independent Work
- ☐ Collaborative Groups
- ☐ Assessment

Formative Assessment - Check all that apply

- ☐ Formal (CFA, running record, etc.)
- ☐ Informal (thumbs up/down, white board show down, etc.)
- ☐ Planned
- ☐ Observed
- ☐ Aligned to EQ/LT
- ☐ Timely
- ☐ Not Observed
- ☐ None

Student Assignment - Check all that apply

- ☐ Planned
- ☐ Aligned to EQ/LT

- ☐ Differentiated
- ☐ Scaffolded
- ☐ Rubric/Checklist/Exemplar provided
- ☐ Not Observed
- ☐ None

Student Work - Check all that apply

- ☐ Worksheet
- ☐ Guided notes
- ☐ Task Cards
- ☐ Project
- ☐ Performing Art
- ☐ Tech Enhanced
- ☐ LMS (Canvas, Google classroom, Seesaw)
- ☐ Game
- ☐ Other:

Closing/Summarizer - Check all that apply

- ☐ Planned
- ☐ Aligned to EQ/LT
- ☐ Not Observed
- ☐ None

Notes:

APPENDIX F: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol for Principals Use of Classroom Walkthroughs to Improve Instruction

Time of interview:

Date:

Interviewee:

1. Describe your overall experiences with classroom walkthrough observations?
2. While the walkthrough has certain look-fors, what is most important for you, what are you looking for when you are conducting classroom walkthrough observations?
 - a. (Follow-Up) What course of action do you take if you are looking for a particular strategy or practice during a classroom walkthrough observation, and you do not observe that practice or strategy?
3. How would you describe the purpose of your classroom walkthrough observations?
4. Describe how the walkthrough observation process has influenced your planning for professional development.
5. How has the walkthrough process influenced how you communicate and share the goals of the school improvement plan?
6. Describe how the classroom walkthrough observation process has influenced how you provide feedback to teachers about their instructional practices?
 - a. (Follow-up) In what ways have you increased the feedback provided to teachers?
7. How has using classroom walkthrough observations influenced the NCEES formal evaluation process?

8. How do teachers perceive the classroom walkthrough observations?
9. How would teachers describe the purpose of the classroom walkthrough observation process?
10. Tell me about any resistance you've felt from teachers in response to your classroom walkthrough observations?
 - a. (Follow-Up) What actions have you taken to overcome this resistance?
11. Talk to me about how conducting classroom walkthrough observations has influenced your strategic and instructional leadership skills or practices?
12. Have you used any Restart flexibilities based on the classroom walkthrough observation data collected? How? If not, what plans do you have for the future for using Restart flexibilities based on the data you collected?
13. This is the end of the questions I have for you today. Is there anything else you would like to add or think that I should know?

Thank you for your participation in this interview. All of your responses will be kept strictly confidential.

APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP EMAIL

Greetings,

You are being invited to participate in a focus group about instructional support in your school. In this guided discussion, you will be asked some questions about instructional support, classroom walkthrough observations, and the school improvement process and your involvement in it. Your responses will be kept confidential. You are being asked to take part in this project because you are in a Restart school. Please read this information carefully. Ask questions about anything that you do not understand or want to know more about. Thank you in advance.

What is this project about?

Examining leadership practices that lead change in systemically low-performing Restart schools.

What are the procedures?

If you choose to participate, you will participate in a Focus Group after school hours and answer some questions about your experience with instructional support in your school. The time commitment is about 60-90 minutes. Child care will be provided. These sessions will be audio recorded, and pizzas will be offered by way of thanks.

What are the potential risks and benefits?

It is unlikely that you will experience any risks or discomforts beyond what would be experienced in everyday life by participating. There are no specific benefits associated with participating.

Will there be compensation?

There is no compensation associated with participation in the study (other than my undying gratitude and a nice note in your mailbox).

Your Privacy

The data collected in this study are completely anonymous. No personally identifiable information will be collected and the information you choose to provide in this study cannot be connected back to you. Results from this study may be published or presented at research conferences, and the anonymous data may be shared with other researchers through an online data repository.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to not participate or end your participation at any time without penalty.

Questions or Concerns

If you have any questions or comments about this study, you may contact the researcher: Heather Stewart, (440)563-6464 or hstewart@ncmcs.org.

Click on the link (Google Form) to register to participate.

Consent: By completing the registration, you are consenting to participate in this study.

Thank you for your assistance!

APPENDIX H: SURVEY & INTERVIEW EMAIL

Dear [Participant's Name],

I hope this email finds you well. I am reaching out to you as a part of our research study. The purpose of this study is to examine leadership practices that lead change in systemically low-performing Restart schools. I am requesting your participation in a survey and an interview. The survey should take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. An audio recorded interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and all the information you provide will be kept confidential. No personally identifiable information will be collected and the information you choose to provide in this study cannot be connected back to you. Interviews will be audio recorded for transcription accuracy and kept confidential. Only the researcher will have access to the recordings. Names will not be utilized. Results from this study may be published or presented at research conferences, and the anonymous data may be shared with other researchers through an online data repository.

Click on the link (Google Form) to complete the survey. If you encounter any issues or have questions regarding the survey, please feel free to contact me.

Consent: By completing the survey, you are consenting to participate in this study.

Questions or Concerns

If you have any questions or comments about this study, you may contact the researcher: Heather Stewart, (440)563-6464 or hstewart@ncmcs.org.

Thank you for your assistance!

