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Enabling School Structures, Trust, and Collective Efficacy:
Predictors of Professional Learning Community
Julie Gray – Texas A&M University-San Antonio
Roxanne Mitchell – The University of Alabama
C. John Tarter – The University of Alabama

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Statement of Purpose

This paper explores the role of enabling school structures, trust, and collective efficacy in the development of professional learning communities. While prior research has not specifically looked at the development of professional learning communities from this angle, we argue that there is enough research to date to give credence to the view that the formal aspects of the school, rules, regulations and the hierarchy of authority that enable teachers to do their jobs, along with the informal aspects of the organization, such as collegial trust, trust in principal, and collective efficacy, are essential to the development and maintenance of professional learning communities. Furthermore, this paper lends empirical data to support the explanatory framework. While the theory represents what we know, the empirical extends the knowledge to the real world and thus the practical. Indeed, this study aligns with the 2012 theme "non satis scire: to know is not enough" (AERA, 2011).

Over the last twenty years many school districts have established professional learning communities (PLCs) as a means of bringing together teachers within school organizations toward common goals and collaborative efforts (Gray, 2011). This study hypothesizes that enabling school structures, collegial trust, trust in the principal, and collective efficacy will individually and jointly predict the development of professional learning communities.

Theoretical Framework

One of the assumptions underlying the theoretical framework is that trust is an essential aspect of building a professional learning community. While there is emerging research about trust, enabling school structures, and collective efficacy, to our knowledge, none has been

applied to PLCs. It is our hope that the current study will further expand the theoretical knowledge base and assist in informing classroom practice.

In light of the fact that PLCs are being put forth as a major restructuring effort for schools (Hipp, Huffman, Pankake, & Olivier, 2008; Hord, 1997, 2004; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001), we suggest that it is important to understand how enabling school structures, trust, and collective efficacy can enhance the development of PLCs. Finally, "research examining parents' perceptions of trust in teachers, principals, and schools has recently begun to emerge, with relationships found between parental trust and school structure, collective efficacy, parental involvement, and student achievement (Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky, 2009, p. 297; Adams & Forsyth, 2006; Forsyth, Barnes, & Adams, 2006)."

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

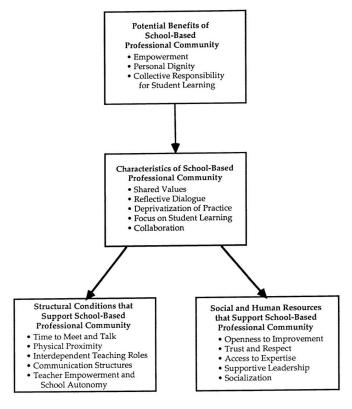
According to Hord a professional learning community (PLC) is a collegial group of faculty and staff who are united in their commitment to student learning (Hord, 1997). Further PLCs maintain the following attributes: supportive and shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice (Hord, 1997). Finally, Hord contends that there are "two types of supportive conditions necessary for PLCs to function productively: (1) logistical conditions such as physical and structural factors and resources, and (2) the capacities and relationships developed among staff members so that they may work well and productively together" (Hord, 2007, p. 3).

Hord's research supports the theoretical framework for this study with the formal aspects of structure represented by enabling school structures and the informal aspects characterized by the various aspects of trust and collective efficacy. This follows the thinking of Stoll and her colleagues who state that "creating and developing PLCs appears to depend on . . . focusing on

learning processes; making the best of human and social resources; managing structural resources; and interacting with and drawing on external agents" (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006, p. 231).

Louis and Kruse conducted a three-year longitudinal study of schools as a part of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement's Center for Organizational and Restructuring of Schools, which provides a basis for analyzing professional community and supports the theoretical framework of this study (Louis & Kruse, 1995). The benefits of a school-based professional community, characteristics of such, structural conditions needed, and social and human resources of support are represented in Figure 1. Enabling school structures are represented by the structural conditions that support school-based professional community, while trust is represented by the social and human resources of support.

Figure 1 Framework for School-Based Professional Community



FROM: LOUIS & KRUSE, (1995), p. 25

Teachers who participate in PLCs no longer work in isolation and become part of a collaborative team within their schools (Gray, 2011). Bryk and his colleagues contend that professional community refers to "schools in which interaction among teachers is frequent and teachers' actions are governed by shared norms focused on the practice and improvement of teaching and learning" (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999, p. 753). In summary, teachers move away from individualism, isolation, and privacy of practice as they engage in the community with their colleagues (Gray, 2011).

Enabling School Structures (ESS)

An enabling school structure (ESS) represents the teachers' belief that the administration and rules of the school help them in their work (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). Hoy and Miskel assert that "an enabling school structure is a hierarchy that helps rather than hinders and a system of rules and regulations that guides problem solving rather than punishes failure" (2008, p. 110). In contrast, a hindering school structure would be more controlled or managed by a principal with a top-down approach. Schools, like most organizations, have bureaucratic structures that vary in the extent of formalization, rules, policies, and procedures, and centralization, manner in which decisions are made (Hoy, 2002).

The formalization of an organization ranges along a continuum from hindering to enabling in the same way as the centralization of the organization does (Adler & Borys, 1996; Hoy, 2002). Schools with enabling structures tend to encourage problem solving, enable cooperation, protect participants, and promote collaboration, flexibility, and innovation (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). Supportive conditions exist in the form of administrative support, time for collaboration and planning, and open communication among all faculty members regarding instructional goals in order to sustain a professional learning community over time (Hord, 1997).

We concur with Hord (2007) and Stoll et al. (2006) that structure is essential in the development of PLCs. In summary, since PLCs require collaboration among teachers and administrators we assert that the more enabling the structures are the more likely the PLC will function effectively (Gray, 2011).

Miskel, Fevurly and Stewart (1979) studied the organizational structures and processes in schools. They summarized that "more effective schools, as perceived by teachers, are characterized by (1) more participative organizational processes, (2) less centralized decision-making structures, (3) more formalized general rules, and (4) more complexity or high professional activity" (Miskel, Fevurly & Stewart, 1979, p. 114). In other words, if teachers work in a structured environment that is enabling, share in decisions that affect them, and view themselves as professionals, then they perceive the school to be effective (Miskel et al., 1979).

Hord asserts that for PLCs to be effective certain physical and structural conditions must be in place to "enable shared leadership, collective learning, and shared practice" (Hord, 2004, p. 10). Enabling structures determine the what, when, where, and how professional learning will occur and who will be involved in such (Gray, 2011). Louis and Kruse assert that for PLCs certain structural conditions must be in place: "time to meet and talk, physical proximity, interdependent teaching roles, communication structures, and teacher empowerment and school autonomy" (Louis & Kruse, 1995, p. 25).

Trust in the Organization

Trust has been described as being an essential ingredient in the work of schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Because the work of schools rests on the establishment of trusting relationships, we suggest that the more trust there is between teachers and their colleagues and between teachers and administrators the more likely that the PLC will

function effectively and efficiently. For this study trust is defined as "an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open" (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 189).

This study will focus on two aspects of trust, trust in colleagues and trust in principal. Collegial trust is the faculty belief "that teachers can depend on one another in a difficult situation; teachers can rely on the integrity of their colleagues" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998, p. 342). Faculty members who trust the principal "have confidence that the principal will keep his/her word and will act in the best interests of their colleagues" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998, p. 342). Those who view their colleagues as honest, open, competent, reliable, and professional tend to have greater trust in their colleagues. Furthermore, collegial trust is based upon the teacher's willingness to be vulnerable to his fellow teachers, while trust in principal varies because of the power structure of the organization and supervisory role of the principal over the teacher (Gray, 2011).

Hoy and Tschannen-Moran characterize trust as a multi-faceted construct that may change over the time of a relationship based upon the five facets of trust: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999 & 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998 & 2000). Teachers who are confident that their colleagues and principal will protect their best interests rather than harm them consider them to be benevolent colleagues (Baier, 1986; Frost, Stimpson & Maughan, 1978; Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985). In contrast, reliability relates to a person's level of predictability and can be combined with benevolence in regard to trust of another. If a person's actions are consistent and well-intended, then they are more likely to be reliable. While a person can be reliable, this is not always sufficient for building a trusting relationship.

Wahlstrom and Louis contend that "Tschannen-Moran's (2004) work on trust implies, creating trust among teachers, which happens within professional communities, may be more significant in stimulating change in practice than does having a trusting relationship with the principal" (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008, p. 482). In other words, trust in the principal has an indirect effect on teacher practice, while trust in colleagues may have a direct influence classroom practice as teachers collaborate and share instructional strategies (Gray, 2011). Hord concludes that building trusting relationships with colleagues takes a substantial amount of time when a person has the opportunity to experience another's trustworthiness and to reciprocate (Hord, 2007).

Collective Efficacy

Collective efficacy is "the groups' shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 477). Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy further state that "teachers' beliefs about the faculty's capability to successfully educate students constitute a norm that influences the actions and achievements of schools" (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000, p. 496). In schools, collective efficacy refers to the teacher perceptions of their colleagues' ability to affect student outcomes in a positive way (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004).

Bandura described four ways to shape individual efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and affective state (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Goddard et al. contend that these same sources are essential for developing collective efficacy beliefs (Goddard, et al., 2004). We believe that the more efficacious the teachers are as a group the more likely they will sustain the efforts needed to develop and maintain the PLC and to reach their conjoint goals regarding student achievement.

Hypotheses

We assert that these three factors; enabling school structures, trust, and collective efficacy are essential elements in the development of PLCs. Prior research has shown that there is a relationship between enabling school structures, trust, and collective efficacy (Gray, 2011; Goddard, 2002; Hord, 1997, 2004; Hoy & Sweetland, 2000). This study will investigate the effect of these variables on PLC development. Therefore we hypothesized that:

H1: Enabling School Structure, teacher trust in colleagues, teacher trust in principal, and collective efficacy will be correlated with PLC development.

While each of the independent variables would logically contribute to the development of the learning communities, there was no guiding literature as to which elements would be greater contributors (Gray, 2011). Consequently, we hypothesized that:

H2: Enabling school structure, trust in colleagues, trust in the principal, and collective efficacy will individually and jointly contribute to an explanation and be predictive of professional learning community development.

Methodology

The independent variables were enabling school structures, collegial trust, trust in principal, and collective efficacy. The dependent variable was professional learning communities, while the control variables were school level, and SES. Individual teacher responses were aggregated to the school level with the school being the unit of analysis.

Sample

Data were collected from a large southeastern school district. Approximately 3,700 teachers from 67 schools completed the Qualtrics Research SuiteTM survey online. The final

sample consisted of 67 schools altogether: 44 elementary schools, 17 middle schools, and 6 high schools.

Student enrollment for this large school district was over 62,000 students, ranging from 90 to 2,123 students, with a mean of 685 students per school. The number of teachers employed at each school ranged from 12 to 126 teachers, with a mean of 41 teachers per school. Of the 3,700 teachers invited to participate, 42% had a bachelor's degree, while 51% had a master's degree and 4% had advanced degrees beyond a master's degree.

The completion rate for teacher data was 74% (66 participated out of 89 schools invited). Of the respondents represented 42% (1713 surveys completed out of 4082 teachers) participated, however the school was the unit of analysis. The principals who chose not to participate mentioned time constraints, busy schedules, and voluntary nature of the survey as reasons for nonparticipation (Gray, 2011).

Instrumentation

Professional learning community was measured using a shortened version of the Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA) instrument which was developed by Olivier, Hipp and Huffman in 2003 and revised in 2010 (Olivier, Hipp & Huffman, 2003; 2010). The shortened form of this instrument was developed after items were selected from each subscale. Factor analysis was performed to determine the shortened version was valid and reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .94 (Gray, 2011). The abbreviated PLCA-R instrument is a 12-item, four point Likert-type scale with a response range from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Sample items include: "Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members," "Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring," and "Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work."

Enabling school structure was measured using a 12-item, five point Likert-type scale that ranges from "never" to "always" and was reliable in the high .8s and .9s (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). For this study the Cronbach's alpha was .95. Sample items from the instrument are: "Administrative rules help rather than hinder," "Administrative hierarchy enables teachers to do their job," and "Administrative rules in this school enable authentic communication between teachers and administrators."

Operationally, trust, collegial trust, and trust in principal will be defined by the Omnibus Trust instrument, Omnibus T Scale (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1997, 2003). Each subscale included eight items on a six-point, Likert-type scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The alpha coefficients of reliability for faculty trust in principal was .93 and for collegial trust is .94 (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1997). The Cronbach's alpha for Trust in Principal was .87 and .95 for Trust in Colleagues for this study. Sample items include, "Teachers in this school trust each other," "The teachers in this school have faith in the integrity of the principal," and "Teachers in this school are open with each other."

Collective efficacy will be measured using the short version of the Collective Efficacy (CE) Scale, a 12-item Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" with a Cronbach's alpha of .96 (Goddard et al., 2000). Sample items are: "Teachers can count on the parents in this school," "Students in this school are reliable," and "Teachers in this school trust the parents to support them."

Data Analysis

The first level of analysis involved bivariate correlational analysis using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient to test the relationships between enabling school structures, trust in colleagues, trust in principal, collective efficacy, and professional learning community development. The second level of analysis used multiple regression to determine the individual

and collective relationships between the independent variables, (enabling school structures, trust, and collective efficacy) and the dependent variable, (professional learning communities).

Descriptive Analysis

Our first level of analysis involved obtaining descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations of the variables in our study. The descriptive statistics for our sample of schools revealed that PLC development ranged from 2.17 to 3.81 with a mean of 3.02 and a standard deviation of .35. ESS ranged from 2.43 to 4.77 with a mean of 3.97 and a standard deviation of .46. TC ranged from 3.29 to 5.80 with a mean of 4.61 and a standard deviation of .53. TP ranged from 2.79 to 5.15 with a mean of 4.27 and a standard deviation of .50. The percent free and reduced lunch ranged from 34% to 99% with a mean of 74% and a standard deviation of .19.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Professional Community (PLC)	67	2.17	3.81	3.0195	.34627
Enabling Structures (ESS)	67	2.43	4.77	3.9714	.46252
Trust in Colleagues (TC)	67	3.29	5.80	4.6174	.52680
Trust in Principal (TP)	67	2.79	5.15	4.2650	.49806
School Level (Level)	67	1.00	3.00	1.4179	.65480
Collective Efficacy (CE)	67	2.50	5.34	4.0836	.63002
% Free/Reduced Lunch (SES)	67	.34	.99	.7425	.18956
Valid N (list wise)	67				

Teacher trust in colleagues and the principal tended to be higher than their perceptions of collective efficacy, enabling school structure, and professional learning community development. However, teacher perception varied the most with regard to their trust in colleagues and the principal but they were most alike in their perceptions of professional learning community

development and enabling school structures. Table 1 displays the results of our descriptive analysis.

Bivariate Correlational Analysis

Hypothesis 1 which stated that "enabling school structure, teacher trust in colleagues, teacher trust in principal and collective efficacy will be correlated with professional learning community development" was confirmed as demonstrated in Table 1. PLC development was positively correlated with ESS (r = .72, $\rho < .01$), CE (r = .62, $\rho < .01$), and TC (r = .57, $\rho < .01$). PLC was negatively correlated with Level (r = -.36, $\rho < .01$) indicating that PLC development was higher at the elementary school level and tended to progressively decline at the middle school and high school levels. There was no significant correlation between PLC and the percent free and reduced lunch, which was a proxy for SES (r = -.07, $\rho < .01$).

Table 2: Pearson Correlations of All Variables (N=67)

	Enabling	Trust	Trust	Collective	School	SES
	Structures	Colleagues	Principal	Efficacy	Level	(1 -FRL)
Professional Community (PLC)	.72**	.57**	.57**	.62**	36**	07
Enabling Structures (ESS)	1	.35**	.49**	.41**	16	15
Trust in Colleagues (TC)		1	.65**	.59**	29*	.15
Trust in Principal (TP)			1	.39**	01	.08
Collective Efficacy (CE)				1	46**	.16
School Level					1	.13
SES						1

^{**} Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

N = 67

Our independent variables were also highly correlated with each other TC and TP (r = .65, ρ < .01); TC and CE (r = .59, ρ < .01); TC and ESS (r = .35, ρ < .01); TP and CE (r = .39, ρ < .01); TP and ESS (r = .49, ρ < .01); and ESS and CE (r = .41, ρ < .01). There was a significant

^{*} Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

correlation between school level and TC (r = -.29, ρ < .05) and between school level and CE (r = .46, ρ < .01) indicating that teacher trust in colleagues and collective efficacy both were higher at the elementary school level and also progressively declined at the middle and high school levels. The percent free and reduced lunch was not significantly correlated with any of the variables in our study. Table 2 displays the bivariate correlations between the variables in this study.

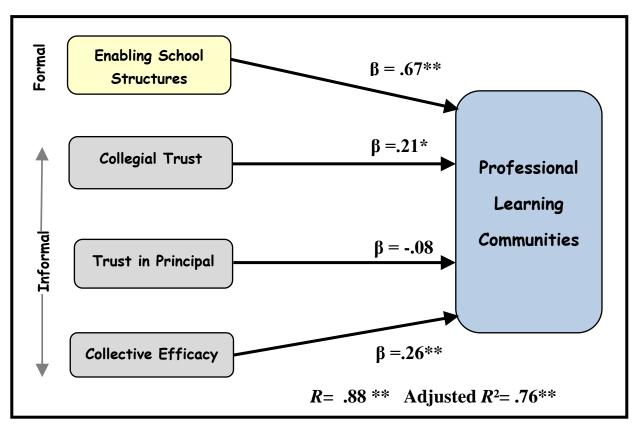


Figure 2 Conceptual Diagram of Hypothesized Relationships with Results

Note: ** p < 0.01 * p < 0.05

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

The second level of analysis involved a hierarchical regression in which the control variables (school level and percent free and reduced lunch were entered in step 1 and the independent variables (ESS, CE, TP, TC) were entered simultaneously in step 2. School level had a significant negative effect on PLC development ($\beta = -.37$, $\rho < .01$). The percentage of

students eligible for free and reduced lunch did not have a significant effect on PLC development ($\beta = .05, \rho > .05$). Together school level and percent free and reduced lunch explained approximately 14% of the variance in PLC development.

When the independent variables were entered in step 2 all but TP had a significant effect on PLC development, ESS (β = .65, ρ < .01), CE (β = .22, ρ < .01), trust in colleagues (β = .19, ρ < .05), and TP (β = -.03, ρ > .5). Together ESS, CE, and TC explained approximately 66% of the variance in PLC development over and above school level and SES, with ESS making the largest contribution followed by CE. Together school level and the independent variables explained roughly 78% of the variance in PLC development. See Table 3 for the results of the hierarchical regression analysis.

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression

Model		Unstandardized	Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		
		В	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.213	.198		16.256	.000
	School Level	193	.062	365	-3.104	.003
	% Free and Reduced Lunch	.100	.219	.053	.455	.651
2	(Constant)	007	.271		027	.978
	School Level	067	.037	126	-1.816	.074
	% Free and Reduced Lunch	.156	.115	.084	1.358	.180
	Enabling School Structure	.515	.061	.649	8.485	.000
	Collective Efficacy	.118	.045	.215	2.625	.011
	Teacher Trust in Principal	024	.065	034	367	.715
	Teacher Trust in Colleagues	.122	.059	.187	2.063	.044

a. Dependent Variable: PLC

The insignificant beta for the effect of TP on PLC development along with the change in sign, given that the zero order correlation between TP and PLC development had been (r = .57, ρ

< .01) led us to suspect a suppression effect. Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003) and Cohen and Cohen (1983) state that this problem can occur when independent variables are highly correlated because the independent variables are laying claim to the largely the same variance in the dependent variable.

Hypothesis 2 which stated that "enabling school structure, trust in colleagues, trust in the principal, and collective efficacy will individually and jointly contribute to an explanation and be predictive of professional learning community development" was only partially confirmed.

While ESS, CE, and TC explained roughly 68 % of the variance in PLC development, we take caution in interpreting these findings. See Figure 1 for the results of our hierarchical regression.

Scholarly and Practical Significance of the Study

This study demonstrates the importance and necessity of enabling school structure, trust in colleagues and collective efficacy, yet the regression indicates that the structural dimension has more effect than the relational dimension as represented by the trust variable. The empirical findings emphasize the importance of establishing enabling school structures as an antecedent of professional learning communities. One cannot exist or be sustained without the others. This reciprocal relationship confirms the hypotheses, yet further extends what is known about professional learning communities. Prior to this study, the importance of establishing enabling school structures in professional learning communities, as described by Hord, had not be explored empirically. Therefore, this research adds to our knowledge about PLCs as well as to the field of literature.

McLaughlin and Talbert summarized the benefits of teacher participation in PLCs. They found that "teachers who participated in strong-innovative communities enjoyed a greatly enriched teaching career, marked by continuous growth and intrinsic professional rewards"

(McLaughlin & Talbert, in Lieberman & Miller, 2008, p. 27). They further posited that there are "positive effects . . . on student achievement for both regional and nationally represented school samples; strong correlations teacher learning community with teaching practices that predict student learning gains" (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 9). In summary, PLCs provide opportunities for increased student achievement, greater teacher job satisfaction, and overall improvement for schools (Gray, 2011).

The principal is also responsible – but not solely – for building physical and structural conditions that support the development of the professional learning community and establishing and encouraging trust amongst colleagues (Gray, 2011). The school leader sets the tone for participative decision making and collaboration within the PLC and relies upon the teachers to do the work of the school, teaching, learning, and encouraging student achievement. "A most important job for principals involves establishing the normative, structural, and practical conditions a teacher learning community needs to thrive" (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 80).

Limitations & Recommendations for Future Research

While the findings of this study are provocative and offer preliminary evidence for the importance of trust, collective efficacy, and enabling school structures, this study took place in one large southern district and may not be generalizable to other contexts. We also take caution in interpreting our findings because of the problem with multi-collinearity between our independent variables. Cohen et al. (2003) and Cohen and Cohen (1983) advise combining these variables into a single latent variable structural model. Future studies that explore the relationships in this study using structural equation model may prove to be more informative.

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Appendix A - Professional Learning Communities Assessment - Revised

Professional Learning Communities Assessment – Revised

Directions: This questionnaire assesses your perceptions about your principal, staff, and stakeholders based on the dimensions of a professional learning community (PLC) and related attributes. This questionnaire contains a number of statements about practices which occur in some schools. Read each statement and then use the scale below to select the scale point that best reflects your personal degree of agreement with the statement. Shade the appropriate oval provided to the right of each statement.

Key Terms:

- Principal = Principal, not Associate or Assistant Principal
- Staff/Staff Members = All adult staff directly associated with curriculum, instruction, and assessment of students
- Stakeholders = Parents and community members

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD) 2 = Disagree (D) 3 = Agree (A) 4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

STATEMENTS				SCALE				
	Shared and Supportive Leadership	SD	D	Α	SA			
1.	Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	0	0	0	0			
2.	Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.	0	0	0	0			
	Shared Values and Vision							
3.	Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0			
4.	Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.	0	0	0	0			
	Collective Learning and Application							
5.	Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	0	0	0	0			
6.	Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0			
	Shared Personal Practice							
7.	Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.	0	0	0	0			
8.	Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.	0	0	0	0			
	Supportive Conditions – Relationships							
9.	Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	0	0	0	0			
10.	School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	0	0	0	0			
	Supportive Conditions - Structures							
11.	Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	0	0	0	0			
12.	Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.	0	0	0	0			

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