ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

HOW TO ACQUIRE AND SUSTAIN A CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT

The Graduate School
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HOW TO ACQUIRE AND SUSTAIN A CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT

Abstract of capstone

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the College of Education At Morehead State University

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Morehead, Kentucky

Committee Chair: Dr. Victor Ballestero, Professor

Morehead, KY

February, 15 2013

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HOW TO ACQUIRE AND SUSTAIN A CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to all educators that believe that there is a better way to educate our children for success and to give them the tools to realize their dreams and potential; and to the faculty, staff, and administrators of Robertson County School without whom this paper would not have been possible, for their listening with an open heart and a determined mind; to my wife, Janet, for showing me the way, and if it were not for you I would not be the man I am today. And to my son, Garrison, who gave meaning to this body of work: may you always learn from your mistakes and strive to be better.
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Appreciation is expressed to Morehead State University for giving me the opportunity to pursue my doctorate in Educational Leadership. Special thanks to the faculty of the College of Education at Morehead State University for their guidance and preparation in helping me develop my capstone and helping my school set the course for success. This capstone would not have been possible if it weren’t for their guidance and the development of the doctoral program at Morehead State University.

I am grateful to the faculty and staff of Robertson County School on which this capstone is based. We are about to embark on a journey that has the potential to change education and the success of our students in Robertson County, the state of Kentucky, and hopefully the nation.

Lastly I would like to thank my wife, Janet, for her insight and support throughout this entire process.
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Executive Summary

What is the Core of the Capstone?

Introduction: In order to create a sustainable change, an organization must start with its culture. The concept of culture refers to a group’s shared beliefs, customs, and behavior. A school’s culture includes the obvious elements of schedules, curriculum, demographics, and policies, as well as the social interactions that occur within those structures and give a school its look and feel as “friendly,” “elite,” “competitive,” “inclusive,” and so on (Major, 2009). Culture is the learned assumptions on which people base their daily behavior.

Leaders must create the desired culture. Either leaders manage culture or it will manage them. An organization’s culture may undermine a leader’s attempt to get desired results. Leaders may plan for growth, quality, productivity, and success, only to end up disappointed by a lack of performance. When the culture is not working, it creates a barrier to achieving results.

Every organization has a culture. That culture either came about as the result of a logical effort to build it, or it has developed haphazard, for better or worse. Whether it arose from a deliberate process or not, leaders must ask themselves one all-important question: If everyone in the organization continues to think and act in the same manner as they do today, can you expect to achieve the results you need to achieve? Overwhelmingly, organizational leaders answer this question with a resounding, “No! We must shift the way we think and act!” (Conners and Smith, 2011). Just as culture is critical to understanding the dynamics behind any thriving
organization or business, the daily realities and deep structure of school life hold the key to educational success. Reforms that strive for educational excellence are likely to fail unless they are meaningfully linked to the school’s unique culture (Reid, 2005). How many organizations develop a brilliant strategy and then fail to execute? How many embark on a major change that does not get successfully implemented or takes too long?

Leaders need to create a culture of accountability within their organizations. A culture of accountability exists in an organization when the people of the organization take personal ownership of the results they received. They start asking themselves, “How can I get better results, what do I need to do to get better?” When accountability like this filters throughout the organization, change is inevitable.

The core of this capstone is guided by the belief that the standards and indicators for school improvement successfully applied in failing schools can create a culture of improvement that will sustain itself over time. By developing structures that address each of the standards for improvement, schools will be able to create a sustainable culture of achievement that will help promote student success. Schools failing to improve or unwilling to change may impede student achievement and hinder students from accomplishing their goals in life.

**Issue to be examined.** In 2007 Deming School (now Robertson County School) was the most improved school in the state according to the Kentucky state test known as the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS). Prior to that Deming was an average school, meeting the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirement of
Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) more years than not. But since 2007, Deming has been on a steady decline, meeting AYP only in 2010. Three years after having the highest test scores in the state, Deming was at the lowest percent of performing schools and as of this writing continues to struggle to meet acceptable academic standards.

Deming needed a new direction, a change in the way it does things. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation would help give Deming a purpose for change and movement in the right direction. By developing a plan based on the SACS seven strategies for school improvement, Deming could create a culture for sustainability.

Significance of the project.

Public education is rising to meet a new challenge: high expectations and academic achievement for all students in every school. States and school districts are raising academic standards and making efforts to align curriculum, assessments, teacher training, and instruction with these challenging standards. Schools often work with several different reform programs as they seek resources and assistance for their improvement efforts (Hatch and Herbert, 2001). Improvement matters. It affects the lives of children. It is vital to “get good at it.” Improvement must become a permanent part of school practice, not a one-time or occasional event (Barnes, 2004).

The significance of this project for Deming and other struggling schools is that it creates a blueprint for sustainable change in a school’s culture, thus providing a way for schools to inform and continually upon their practice.
**Context of the study.** Deming School is a K-12 school in the Robertson County School District and is the only school in the district. It is currently in Tier III for school improvement and has been designated as a turnaround school. To qualify for Tier III status a school must fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on No Child Left Behind accountability for five years.

Both the 2011 Kentucky Performance Report (KPR) and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reports indicate a gap between the achievement of Deming students eligible for free and reduced (F/R) lunch and those who are not eligible. As can be seen in Figure 2 and 3, a much lower percentage of F/R lunch students scored proficient or above in both reading and math than did those who were non-free and reduced lunch status. And there has been a steady increase in the achievement gap between F/R lunch students and non-F/R students reaching proficiency since the 2009 school year at Deming School:
Data analysis and a self-audit conducted by school faculty, revealed that Deming students' total academic needs were not being met during core instruction and subsequently a significant contributing factor to their low academic achievement. Based on administration observations, evaluations, and walkthroughs, teacher classroom instruction did not meet the instructional needs of students. According to Deming's ThinkLink (formative assessment) scores, there were significant gaps between F/R lunch students and non-F/R lunch students. By implication more instruction is needed beyond the core instructional time to get F/R lunch students on grade level in reading and math. According to the KPR and NCLB reports, retention
rates remain high in middle school and elementary school (figure 4) and graduation and transition rates remain high at the high school (figure 5). This would indicate a lack of support and insufficient help for our struggling students.

Several years ago (2005), the Deming staff researched five schools in the state; Augusta Independent; Jenkins Independent; Phelps High School; Silver Grove Independent; and Eminence Independent that were similar to Deming School, similar in enrollment, diversity and teacher student ratio. The only area of difference between Deming School and the other five schools was their state scores were significantly higher than Deming’s. After researching their district and school improvement plans, it was discovered that all five districts were implementing similar strategies in the areas of instruction; assessment and curriculum; they required every
teacher to develop a curriculum map; set classroom goals with their students; and to use formative assessment to drive daily instruction.

After a thorough review of the five districts' improvement plans, Robertson County School District (Deming being the lone school in the district) decided to put these initiatives into practice. By completing a self-audit based on the Standards and Indicators for School Improvement, Deming School revised their Comprehensive District Improvement Plan and School Improvement Plan according to the findings of the audit and the findings of the five schools' research.

One year after the revision (2006), Deming School was the most improved school in the state. It had taken what the other five districts were doing and outperformed them. Five years after this remarkable turn around Deming School had inexplicably digressed to a school in crisis, one step away from becoming a turnaround school with an on-site state department appointed specialist! What happened? Deming School had discovered that their school culture could not sustain the change needed to continue the success!

Deming School staff revisited the original five schools to see if they were experiencing the same letdown that they were. To their surprise, they were; in fact only one school maintained their continued success, Eminence Independent. Deming started a process to find out what happened. By looking at Eminence Independent's Comprehensive District Improvement Plan (CDIP), Deming School could get a good idea of the programs and initiatives they were implementing. Their CDIP almost a
carbon copy of Deming’s! So why were they continuing to succeed while Deming School struggled?

At about the same time and in another part of the state, Eminence Independent Schools received an award from the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), an association that credits independent schools in the U.S. when they show continuing improvement and they reach five dimensions of sustainability: financial sustainability, environmental sustainability, global sustainability, programmatic sustainability and demographic sustainability. The Eminence Independent School System has also received the US. News and World Report for Best High Schools in Kentucky three years in a row (2010, 2011, and 2012). By implementing standards based grading in their middle and high schools and by setting a goal to develop a plan to address the five areas, Eminence Independent Schools created a culture of achievement, success and learning as substantiated by meeting the Average Yearly Progress (AYP) on all No Child Left Behind (NCLB) goals for the next five years.

The next step for Deming was to learn more about how Eminence had accomplished this astonishing feat.

Five years ago when Deming School improved there was no true design behind it. The changes made at Deming School were just quick fixes. There was no real purpose for the changes, other than this was what other schools were doing.

Learning that Eminence Independent received accreditation from the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), at this time a conscious decision was
made to consider Southern Association of Colleges and Schools’ (SACS) membership and accreditation.

In 2010 a Readiness for Accreditation survey (appendix) was conducted with the faculty and staff of Deming School. The first five questions of the survey cover the areas of effective leadership, policies and practices, resources and support systems, quality teachers, and quality information. The survey shows that seventy nine percent of all faculty and staff believe there is a major deficiency in all five areas. Questions six through ten examine how the district (school) expects and ensures desired results. The survey revealed that seventy five percent of the faculty and staff believe that these practices were not evident in the Deming school system. Questions eleven through sixteen investigate how effectively the district monitors student performance, the survey shows that sixty two percent of the faculty and staff believe that Deming is deficient in this area. Questions seventeen through twenty four examined how the Robertson County School district supported student learning. Seventy four percent of the faculty and staff at Deming did not believe that the school district supported learning. Questions twenty five through thirty one investigate how the district maximizes teacher effectiveness, sixty eight percent of the faculty at Deming School believe that the district performance in this area is not evident. Questions thirty two through thirty six examine how the district develops a professional learning community, eighty four percent of the faculty believed that the district was not making progress in this area. Questions thirty seven through forty investigates how the district leads the improvement initiative, seventy four percent of
the faculty believe that the district was lacking in this area. From this survey work toward accreditation began in the creation of new vision, mission, and goals for the school.

Robertson County School.District (Deming) had not been given a direction of which way to go, which could help explain why one year it would meet AYP and the next year it would not. The only goal it had was an academic index to meet and not a real authentic purpose to pursue success. To create a culture of achievement that can be sustained over time Deming School need a place to start, something to help guide them a purpose to pursue success. SACS accreditation could give Robertson County School District the start in the right direction it needed and a standard for success.

Research questions. Standards for school improvement are blueprints for successful schools, so, why do failing schools still exist? How can schools acquire a culture of achievement and sustain it? Are the standards for school improvement done the same way for all schools?

Definition of terms. Accreditation: The act of granting credit or recognition (especially with respect to educational institutions that maintain suitable standards) (Accreditation, 2004).

Capacity: Capability to perform or produce (Dictionary. Com, 2012).

Culture: The behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular group (Muhammad, 2009).

Expectations: Anticipating, with confidence, that a request will be fulfilled (Connors & Smith, 2009).
Leadership: A person who guides or directs a group of people (Lezotte, & Snyder, 2010).

PDSA: Plan, do, study, act. It is a strategy used to encourage groups to determine goals, monitor progress, and make rapid changes when results are not achieved (Langley, Nolan, Nolan, Norman & Provost, 1996).

SISI: Standards and indicators for school improvement.

SACS: Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (Accreditation, 2004).

Who Is The Capstone Meant To Impact?

Populations impacted by this study. Schools and school systems that have implemented school improvement using standards for improvement will benefit from this study by improving upon their own practice and learning about different ways of implementing school improvement within their own systems. The adoption of the Common Core Standards has given states, districts, and schools a common focus, but how school systems intend for their students to learn these new standards is not common among states, districts, and schools. All have a common goal but are taking different roads to get there.

Just like the Common Core Standards, the standards for school improvement are standards that every school should meet in order to be a quality school. And just like the Common Core Standards, districts and schools will use different ways of achieving that quality district or quality school status. This study will give district and schools one plan to follow to meet each of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) standards. Meeting the SACS quality standards must be intentional and precise, as standards are interconnected, inextricably linked. For
example, the vision, mission and purpose of the district and schools (standard one) must be carried out and followed through by the district and school leadership (standard two). The teaching and learning (standard three) is how the vision, mission, and purpose will be met. Documenting and using results (standard four) will show if the vision, mission, and purpose are being met. The resources and support systems (standard five) can be used to help meet the vision, mission, and purpose of the school and district, all vital components. Communication and relationships (standard six) can be fostered to help reach the vision, mission, and purpose of the district and school; critical roles indeed. If the vision, mission, and purpose of the district and school are not being met, strategies must be devised to work toward meeting them (standard seven). All standards are clearly interdependent.

Another benefit that other districts or schools will obtain from this study, whether they are already SACS accredited or they are a struggling school or district, relates to how the continuous improvement process can ensure that districts and schools can sustain success. As stated before, the SACS accreditation standards have one more standard than the Kentucky Standards and Indicators for School Improvement and the Correlates: continuous improvement. All other standards are common place in every school in every district. It is the continuous improvement standard that improving districts and schools will benefit from the most. Continuous improvement in most districts and schools is encompassed in their comprehensive improvement plans. While these plans outline changes districts and schools will make to improve, they don’t address how the improvement will be sustained.
Continuous improvement can't be a statement in an improvement plan, but it must be a process that is a part of a district and school's culture, a process of moving forward. This process for continuous improvement must be established throughout the district in every school from top to bottom. This study will help districts and schools create a process for achieving SACS accreditation as well as promote ideas that will help them with other standards. Every school throughout the state could implement these processes for school improvement.

While studying the standards for school improvement, it has become obvious that if schools are to improve then they must reinvent themselves. A school can't improve on just one standard and hope that all other standards fall into place. Every standard must be part of the school improvement plan, and for failing schools this may mean that they start over from a clean slate. They must analyze the vision, mission, and purpose of the district and school; if these do not paint a positive picture of the future of the district and school then they must be rewritten, a wise course of action if the existing vision, mission, and purpose are no longer relevant. Continuous improvement must produce the shared vision of the school, a coherent picture of how the system will function when the core beliefs have been put into practice. It is only when the school has a shared vision that administrators and staff can determine the gaps between what is and what should be, and proceed toward purposeful improvement that nurtures and advances a competent system (Zmuda, 2004).

The study of school improvement does not just impact individual segments of a school or school system, but the whole organization. Administrators, teachers, and
students must be willing to change for the greater good. Administrators must be willing to take risks and try something new. Teachers must be willing to step out of their comfort zone to change their practice and to view students in different ways. Students must learn from their failures and be willing to correct those shortcomings to grow intellectually. A culture of accountability exists when people in every corner of the organization make the personal choice to take the steps necessary to achieve improved results.

Administrators, school and district personnel alike, must become instructional leaders of the school and district. The days of management are over. Leadership, actually servant leadership is needed for school and districts to improve and sustain change for the betterment of students. Leadership is unquestionably in control of change, but to bring about that change it must live by the vision, mission, and expectations that they have help create and make sure that everyone in the organization does as well. If expectations are not being met then leadership must assume that there is a lack of capacity among teachers and staff members.

Teachers must display the willingness to change. To prepare students for the future, teachers cannot use the instructional methods of the past. When teachers start questioning themselves about the job they are doing, the results they are getting, and what they did wrong, they will see themselves as part of the problem and embrace the effort to improve their practice and do whatever it takes to solve problems. Teaching and learning go hand in hand, but the present change focus has readily been placed on the teaching and not on the learning of our students. It seems, in the nation’s
classrooms, that the textbook has become the curriculum as well as the teaching technique. More emphasis must be placed on student learning. Once a high school science teacher, after he had showed how poorly his juniors did on a test, told me, “I taught them this content when they were in the ninth grade, they should know it!” A wise administrator responded to him, “You taught it, but did they learn it?” This is the change that needs to take place, from a concentration on “why” students don’t learn; to “how” students learn. Not all students learn at the same pace, in the same way, or in the same time frame, so why are they expected to conform to a time line; and why are they punished when what they really need is more time to understand the content or exposure to a different learning strategy? It goes without saying that students are expected to learn the content and learn it at high levels, so why isn’t it happening in our classrooms now? This is where Mastery Learning can help both teacher and student. In order for Mastery Learning to work in the classroom, teachers must learn how to differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of all their students. They must know the best way each of their students learns and to incorporate those learning styles into their classroom instruction. Students can demonstrate mastery of the content in different ways, not just, for example, through a five page test at the end of a unit or chapter test. With Mastery Learning students will be held to higher expectations because they will be expected to master the content or standard covered before moving on to the next content or standard. Mediocre work will not be accepted; only high level, qualitative work from each student will be tolerated. Students will be expected to work to their full potential, but not by themselves as
teachers and support staff will help guide them toward full mastery of the content and standards.

The days are over of just lecturing, giving a test, scoring the test, and moving on to the next unit or chapter without any follow-up to understanding why students are not performing at "A" or "B" levels. Einstein once said, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over but expecting different results each time!" The current educational system is on the verge of insanity, it's time to change.

How Was The Capstone Project Implemented?

Implementation strategies. A school's mission statement reminds the school community of why they exist; a vision paints a picture of what they can become. A vision should provide a compelling sense of where a school is headed and what must be accomplished in the future to fulfill the school's purpose (Blankstein, 2004). Educators at Deming know why their school exists, but that knowledge of their existence was not the same with everyone in the school community. Just like Alice in Wonderland, it didn't matter which way the school went because it didn't have a vision. Accreditation would give the school a sense of purpose, a goal to reach, a vision of who it wanted to become and a path to follow.

As stated previously, Deming School did have a mission statement, but it wasn't being followed. To effect change, the starting point was to rewrite a mission statement, develop a vision statement, establish core values, and set goals. This was accomplished by assembling a task force made up of representatives from each stakeholder group. A school leadership team composed of one teacher leader from
the primary grades (K-3rd grade), one teacher leader from the intermediate grades (grades 4th-6th), one teacher leader from middle school (grades 7th and 8th), and one teacher leader from high school (grades 9th-12th), along with the school principal and a parent volunteer from the District Board of Education comprised the stakeholder group. The representatives were responsible for soliciting feedback from the groups they represented and to share the evolving statements with their group (Blankstein, 2004). The following vision and mission statements were created by the stakeholder group:

**The Robertson County Vision Statement**

A community of learning where all are successful, achievement is present, potential is met, and where the gifts and talents of our children will enable us to be the community we can be!

Our students:

- Choose to be productive members of society who are fully equipped to continue their preparation for the future
- Are confident and self-assured. They have a positive vision of the future and goals to achieve their vision
- Are well rounded academically, physically, and spiritually
- Are proud of their school and community and appreciate learning as a life-long endeavor
- Are creative problem solvers who make sound decisions.
- Value and accept diversity
- Feel safe at school
Our learning environment provides:

- An evolving and innovative curriculum that meets the diverse needs of all students, and equips them to be positive and contributing members of society
- A highly qualified, dedicated, and caring staff recognized as the best
- Homes, classrooms, and school working together in harmony to support a safe and nurturing educational experience
- Modern technology and training that maximizes learning for all
- Pro-active and effective communication between staff, students, and their guardians that ensures student success
- The optimal staffing and facilities to meet the needs of all students

Our district and community:

- Work as a team providing resources necessary to achieve a world-class education
- Recognition of the district as the heart of learning, caring, and support for all the community
- Acknowledgement of education as a privilege and proudly accepts responsibility for the learning process

*The Robertson County Mission Statement*

The Robertson County School District is committed to educating each student to his/her full potential. We believe that a safe and positive environment is essential and defined by mutual respect and an appreciation of diverse ideas. Collaboration with the community, parent involvement, and effective communication are hallmarks of our school and guide school development. Our decisions are based upon a vision of high academic achievement. We understand the importance of education for the future and recognize that each of us should be a lifelong learner.
In addition to the Robertson County School District Mission Statement the Robertson County School faculty identified the following academic, civic, and social expectations.

Students at Robertson County School will:

Academic Expectations:

• Read, write and speak effectively;
• Use a variety of technology and informational resources to gather, synthesize and analyze data;
• Use a variety of problem solving strategies that rely on mathematical reasoning, computation, abstract thinking, and applied problem solving;
• Create, explore and develop knowledge of the arts;
• Understand and successfully apply "life skills" to assist in daily living;
• Communicate ideas through the effective use of media.

Social Expectations:

• Assume responsibility for one's own behaviors;
• Understand the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle;
• Demonstrate the ability to successfully collaborate;

Civic Expectations:

• Contribute to the well-being and welfare of oneself and others, within the school and the broader school community;
• Understanding the role of education in a democratic society;
• Gain exposure, respect for, and an understanding of diverse cultures and personal beliefs.
• Use cultural and global understandings to guide decisions and actions that benefit the interests of a larger community.
After the district’s mission and vision statements were created, the task force came to the conclusion that each individual school in Robertson County needed to make their own mission statements. Even though all Robertson County Schools are located in the same building, the schools are still separate entities and serve different purposes. Teachers in the four different schools (primary, intermediate, middle, and high school) were asked, as a group, to create their own mission statements. The following are the four mission statements that were created:

*Robertson County Schools Mission Statements:*

**Robertson County Primary**

The mission of Robertson County Primary School is to provide a safe enriching environment where students, with the support of parents, teachers, and administration, can learn to the best of their ability, with opportunities for enrichment and remediation, to meet school, state, and national standards so they will become productive well rounded citizens of society.

**Robertson County Intermediate School Mission Statement**

The mission of Robertson County Intermediate School is to provide a learning environment that is conducive to fostering independent and responsible learners who are culturally aware. By providing them with challenging curriculum that promotes collaborative opportunities we are able to assess the student’s needs and ability to meet the criteria set forth in state and national standards. Through a system of support we will assure that our students will become successful life-long learners.
Robertson County Middle School Mission Statement

The mission of Robertson County Middle School is to provide a learning environment that fosters, stimulates, and develops student success academically, while striving to address the critical emotional, intellectual, social, and physical needs related to the development of our students as determined by our state and national standards. It is through a system of support that we will help our students to achieve these outcomes to become life-long learners, and to strive to reach their full potential for the betterment of themselves and their community.

Robertson County High School Mission Statement

The mission of Deming High School is to provide all students with the knowledge to be lifelong learners, the skills and training to be productive members of the workforce, and the understanding and awareness to be responsible citizens capable of contributing in a positive way to the community in which they live. The successful accomplishment of these provisions will be evident in the level of academic performance, honors attained and awards received, and the successful transition into adult life. A school’s vision and purpose means nothing if the instructional leader of the school does not communicate the vision and purpose to the staff, students, parents, and the community.

After the development and creation of mission and vision statements, it was discovered that just because something is written doesn’t mean it will be done. The faculty and staff continued to do what they had done in the past; change was not coming because the school leadership, the school leadership, had not expected
teachers to bring about the change. So, before the school could continue forward with school improvement and the accreditation process, it had to create the expectation of change.

Below is a list of teacher expectations that was created by school leadership in order to bring about school improvement:

1. All students can achieve high standards, given significant time and support.
2. All can teach to high standards, given the right conditions and assistance.
3. High expectations and early intervention are essential.
4. Teachers need to learn all the time, and they need to be able to articulate both what they do and why they do it.
5. Treat your fellow colleges with courtesy, justice and truthfulness.
6. Take ownership in this school and your classroom.
7. Play the hand you are dealt and make the best of it. No pointing fingers at others for what is sitting before you.
8. Develop Relationships with your Students.
9. Design your classroom curriculum to facilitate student learning – Differentiate.
10. Care enough to prepare them for SUCCESS in the future as well as on accountability tests.
11. Be where you are supposed to be, doing what it is that you’re supposed to be doing at all times.
12. Assist the administration in maintaining the building and grounds. Future generations deserve a beautiful school as well.
13. Maintain Professional Bearing, put student’s needs first.
14. Value education and continue to learn on a daily basis; strive to learn the standards and to implement them.

15. Make informed decisions based upon best practice, and research based instructional practices.

16. Utilize effective classroom management techniques that foster mutual respect within your classroom.

After the mission, vision, and expectations were created, change still did not occur. The leadership quickly realized that SACS accreditation as a great goal to accomplish, but it would not solve all of the school’s problems. In their book *Change the culture, change the game, the breakthrough strategy for energizing your organization and creating accountability for results* (2011), Connors and Smith state that organizational culture is the way people think and act, that it’s the culture that produces the results and leaders must create the needed culture. In order to create change in Deming School, leadership must change the way teachers think and act, and create a culture of accountability or school improvement will not be sustained.

*Plan, Do, Study, Act; continuous improvement.* PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act) refers to a four-step improvement cycle for organizing and managing change and continuous improvement. This cycle was developed by Dr. Walter Shewhart in the 1920s and put into business practice in Japan and the United States by W. Edwards Deming. (Embedded in the PDSA cycle are quality tools to facilitate the process.) It is a strategy used to encourage groups to determine goals, monitor progress, and make rapid changes when results are not achieved. The four stages of plan, do, study, act are essential to continuous improvement success and are the basis for a seven-step
improvement process: 1) defining the system; 2) assessing current situation; 3) analyzing causes; 4) trying out an improvement theory; 5) studying the results; 6) standardizing the improvement; and 7) planning for continuous improvement. The plan–do–study–act cycle (appendix) is a four-step model for carrying out change. Just as a circle has no end, the PDCA cycle should be repeated again and again for continuous improvement (Langley, Nolan, Nolan, Norman & Provost, 1996).

The PDSA cycle. The plan-do-study-act approach incorporates an understanding of systems and their variation into actually changing the system to improve it. The cycle represents a powerful process to support the organization’s sense of purpose and facilitate ongoing learning about that purpose and how it can become reality. This is true regardless of whether it is being utilized by the leadership of the entire school system or by a single teacher in a single classroom. Equipped with an understanding of learning theory as well as systems and their variations, a teacher (or a bus driver, or a principal) can begin to change an entire system. The following is a list of when to use the PDSA model:

- As a model for continuous improvement.
- When starting a new improvement project.
- When developing a new or improved design of a process, product or service.
- When defining a repetitive work process.
- When planning data collection and analysis in order to verify and prioritize problems or root causes.
• When implementing any change.

*The Plan-Do-Study-Act procedure.* Plan. Recognize an opportunity and plan a change.

1. Do. Test the change. Carry out a small-scale study.

2. Study. Review the test, analyze the results and identify what you’ve learned.

3. Act. Take action based on what you learned in the study step: If the change did not work, go through the cycle again with a different plan. If you were successful, incorporate what you learned from the test into wider changes. Use what you learned to plan new improvements, beginning the cycle again.

Plan. The emphasis of the plan stage of the PDSA cycle is on developing knowledge about the process that is to be improved – before change is introduced. By means of a number of problem-solving tools, a process can be visualized, its components identified, the cause-and-effect relationships among its factors understood, and its possibilities for improvement put into focus.

Planning demands knowledge of a system’s performance. Leaders responsible for improvement of the system of education will see the organization as a system. Classroom teachers and others who are responsible for subsystems and processes can identify the system of the classroom and processes within that system. A system has processes, each of which is comprised of materials, methods, environment, people, and equipment. The system of education may involve a complex matrix of processes, from orientation of new students to parent information
to development of language skills to food service to classroom management. Each of these processes has the same characteristics as the larger system: the set of interrelationships among activities, people, inputs, and benefits or outputs that were previously examined (Langley, Nolan, Nolan, Norman & Provost, 1996).

_Do_. The next step is the do stage of the PDSA cycle. The improvement theory is tested over a period of time, with data collected on a regular basis so that the results can be studied. Again, a number of tools are available to support this process, but it is not the purpose here to provide instruction in their specific application. Teams will continue to analyze outcomes with control charts, histograms, force field analysis, and other tools.

Students' ability to recognize and use the words that they have found in their reading can provide a source of data to be collected and analyzed for improvement. It is important to make small, measurable changes, especially in the first experience of the improvement process. If a team attempts a complex problem with many ramifications, or one that cannot be adequately measured, it will find the results to be less than satisfactory. Especially for a first experience, select a relatively simple problem to approach. If students try to change too many things at once - the day of the test, the way words are looked up in groups, the process of recording definitions, and the usefulness of the words with respect to ACTs, for example - they will find themselves not only overwhelmed with data, but also unable to see a clear connection between a single change in the system and the ensuing improvement.
Study. In the study phase of the PDSA cycle, data can be evaluated for indications of improvement. For example, a control chart might be used to record weekly vocabulary scores in the same way that the data had been posted prior to making the recommended change in the system. A comparison can be made by using this vital tool. Say that the small change that was made in distributing the lists each week paid off in improved oral test scores, that information can be broken down and analyzed further, with the help of histograms, fishbone diagrams, and other tools.

Act. The last stage of the PDSA cycle is act. After the changes have been carefully observed and analyzed, the improvement should be standardized or implemented. Observation and analysis, however, should not end at that point. A system must be continually monitored to assure that improvements are consistently applied and to suggest other improvements that can be made. In this way, what is known as continuous improvement will come about since the system will be revisited time and again for potential improvement. Although vocabulary mastery may have improved, for example, the team may want to assess the new situation, formulate a new theory for improvement, try it out, study the results, and standardize a new change.

Getting to the causes of problems in schools is often much more difficult than it sounds; it represents a challenge to the leadership of the organization as well as to its members. The PDSA cycle helps teams of students, teachers, administrators, parents, school board members, and others to focus on causes of problems rather than on sources for blame.
For example, attendance and tardiness are often major problems in schools. Getting students to class on time has always been a concern, for clear reasons. When a student is tardy, the dynamics of the classroom are altered or even disrupted. Every teacher knows how much time is occupied in faculty meetings discussing the kind of abuses that tardiness represents, and the appropriate response to this discipline problem. Do three or four tardies equal an absence? If a student is detained by another teacher, who is accountable for that tardy? This issue and other like it have been debated thousands of times by faculties from elementary schools to universities, and every conceivable kind of penalty has been implemented. In the case of tardiness as with other behavior, policies are often devised to deal only with the exception. Most students are not tardy. Most teachers dress appropriately. Most reports are turned in on time. Most employees do not lie about sick days. Rather than address the special causes in systems as special causes, organizations simply make rules to deal with them as if they are common causes.

Having the confidence to involve students in the process of improvement will change the outcome regardless of what else is done. Schools only rarely involve students in solving or monitoring problems. But after all, there is little reason for anyone to become more than mildly interested in responding to elaborate systems over which they have no control. And when they have not been involved in the design of those systems, they can freely blame someone else for the outcome.

What emerges in any discussion of the improvement process is the traditional tendency to assess blame for problems, and then to determine appropriate
punishments. A related issue is the sticky business of evaluating outcomes in such a way that the assessment of progress does not become either an end in itself, or a source of demoralizing punishment to students. This is particularly true in the classroom where traditional grading practices fall into this category (appendix).

*Plus/delta tool.* For schools, teachers, students and teams to be successful, continuous improvement is necessary. However, far too often schools fail to achieve the benefits of change because they don’t know what to change or where to start. The Plus/Delta assessment and feedback tool is quick and effective for both individuals and groups. This brainstorm-type format creates a comfortable atmosphere for openness and honesty. As an added benefit, when people give feedback they often experience a sense of responsibility to the changes and solutions to their feedback. Examples and templates can be found in the appendix.

Having Deming School establish a culture of accountability is the first step toward the vision of what stakeholders want their school to become in the future. An educational institution where everyone learns: students, teachers, administrators, and the community; where testing is conducted to understand the learning process and skill building of its students, where research is conducted to help students reach their full potential; where teachers calculate the best course of action to help students succeed; where administrators are instructional leaders and build capacity among teachers; and where the community takes an active role in the future of its young people. In order to have accountability, a school must have high expectations! At
Deming all teachers will have expectations that, with the right support, all students will be successful in the classroom. Students will value education and know that talent alone will not breed success. That success comes from hard work and continuing to improve. Deming can accomplish this through the use of data notebooks. Data notebooks (or folders) support students in becoming co-producers of their learning. They help students organize processes for learning. The notebook generally contains a student's mission, goals and action plans to support classroom and personal learning. Data notebooks may contain:

- Individual mission statements, goals/objectives, and action plans
- Charts or graphs to self-monitor and document progress
- Subject objectives to guide goal setting
- Formative assessments to document progress (classroom assessments, MAPP tests, etc.)
- Applications of quality tools and the PDSA cycle to guide process thinking
- Opportunities for two-way communication with parents

Data notebooks or folders empower students to become accountable for their learning. By writing goals/objectives based on actual course or subject objectives, students have control over their pace of learning. Goals/objectives are also written by students to capture short-term gains to motivate themselves to achieve long-range goals. As with classroom data centers, analyzing what is working or not working provides timely feedback to the student to correct the course of action, as needed. The notebook also documents progress that can predict course grades, providing "no
surprises" at the end of each school quarter or semester. The development of data notebooks/folders mirrors the process for creating classroom data:

- Students write their individual mission statements based on their own needs, aligned with the classroom mission as closely as possible.
- Students formulate their personal goals/objectives and action plans based on curricular and stakeholders expectations and individual needs and missions.
- Students create data charts to monitor progress of each goal/objective.
- The contents of the data notebook may also include subject or course expectations and goals/objectives.
- Students may also include quality tools to determine "drivers" and "preventers" in achieving goals and PDSA models to redirect learning processes.
- A section of the notebook is devoted to parent communication to keep parents informed on at least a quarterly basis and also provide parents with the opportunity for input.
- Example of student work to show progress toward goals.

Mastery learning in the classroom. The creation and adoption of the new Common Core Standards has phases such as, "All children can learn," and "Students should be able to demonstrate competent levels of achievement." Discussing the new Common Core Standards with Gene Wilhoit, executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), at the Kentucky Association of Assessment Coordinators conference in October 2012, stated that students need to master each standard at a high level in order to prepare them for life after graduation. But, only a
small portion of teachers, schools or school systems have adopted Mastery Learning as a strategy to accomplish this. And those that are using mastery learning make one or more of the common mistakes: (a) passing a mastery test is conceptualized as the endpoint instead of the initial stage of the learning/memory process; (b) there is no requirement and related grading incentive to go beyond initial mastery; (c) mastery testing is embedded in an overall grading scheme that contradicts the goal of achieving mastery by all (a criterion-referenced purpose); (d) demonstrations of mastery are limited to objective tests at the knowledge/recall end of the thinking continuum (e.g., Bloom's 1956 taxonomy); and therefore (e) students are over tested and under challenged (Gentile and Lalley, 2003).

Students often forget a great deal of what they have learned, or what educators thought they had learned. It is often the case that only 20% of students in a typical classroom master the standard (Bloom, 1986). The cure for this problem can be solved in three steps: (a) Require all students to attain initial mastery of the objective; (b) provide enrichment activities for students who attain mastery before the rest of the class, allowing students to revisit the objective through a different learning activity; and (c) continue to revisit the objective at a later point in the curriculum. So, mastery of the unit, then, means being able to do at least all of the processes to some reasonably high standard, say 80% of the standards accurately solved, demonstrated, and represented, in more than one way. Such mastery demonstrates that the student is ready for more advanced analyses, transferring or applying such knowledge to other domains, or other extra-credit work (inventing their own problems or solutions). This
is in keeping with mastery as the beginning level of competence on the road toward expertise.

For the first use of mastery, it is necessary to identify the mastery objectives; this comes in the form of the Common Core Standards. As consistent and clear as the standards are, they need to be developed into targets that both teachers and students can understand. Learning targets are student-friendly descriptions—via words, pictures, actions, or some combination of the three—of what you intend students to learn or accomplish in a given lesson. When shared meaningfully, they become actual targets that students can see and direct their efforts toward. They also serve as targets for the adults in the school whose responsibility it is to plan, monitor, assess, and improve the quality of learning opportunities to raise the achievement of all students. Guided by learning targets, teachers partner with their students during a formative learning cycle to gather and apply strong evidence of student learning to raise achievement. And they make informed decisions about how and when to differentiate instruction to challenge and engage all students in important and meaningful work. Students who take ownership of their learning attribute what they do well to decisions that they make, and control of these factors not only increase students' ability to assess and regulate their own learning but also boosts their motivation to learn as they progressively see themselves as more confident and competent learners. (Brookhart and Moss, 2012).

Mastery helps students frame their learning from a different angle: the "why" that motivates them is the desire to increase their competence, to "get smarter" (Dweck,
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by mastering new knowledge or skills. Focused by mastery, students understand that it takes effort over time to understand complex concepts and become skilled at a process or procedure. Mastery helps students realize that they will not be experts on day one. Students who aim for mastery tend to challenge themselves to apply what they learn, to regard mistakes as inevitable, and to capitalize on errors as important sources of feedback. They judge their progress against targeted criteria, not against the progress of others (Brookhart and Moss, 2012).

Why Were This Capstone And Related Strategies Selected?

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Literature review. When one looks up the phrase educational institution on Google there are three different categories: Higher Education; University; and School. Higher Education is defined as education provided by universities, vocational universities, community colleges, liberal arts colleges, technical colleges, and other collegial institutions that award academic degrees, such as career colleges. A University is defined as an institution of higher education and research which grants academic degrees at all levels (bachelor, master, and doctorate) in a variety of subjects. A School is defined as an institution where students (or pupils) learn while under the supervision of teachers (Define educational Institution, p.3). The definition of a school paints the image of a classroom of students or pupils reading quietly while the teacher walks up and down the aisles with arms crossed and ruler in hand making sure that everyone's eyes are on the right page. Then when the reading is over a test is given to give a student a score on that chapter. Obviously the term school best
defines Deming but the type of classroom described above should not. But what should the replacement strategies be?

With the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), K-12 schools today have the following: different levels of diplomas; student assessments at the national, state, and local level; national and state standards that have to be met; and the list goes on and on. Because of the change in theories and applications, schools can no longer fit under the old definition of "schools". Schools today are more of an "educational institution". An educational institution is a place where everyone learns: students, teachers, administrators, and the community; a place where 1) testing is conducted to understand the learning process and skill building of its students; 2) research is conducted to help students reach their full potential; 3) teachers calculate the best course of action to help students succeed; 4) administrators are instructional leaders and build capacity among teachers; and 5) the community takes an active role in the future of its young people.

The SACS seven standards for school improvement; (a) vision and purpose; (b) governance and leadership; (c) documenting and using results; (d) teaching and learning; (e) resources and support systems; (f) stakeholder communication and relationships; and (g) commitment to continuous improvement, if implemented with fidelity and intent, could give schools and school systems the culture needed for success and help turn them into educational institutions. The first place schools and school systems need to start is a vision of where they want to go.
Vision and purpose. A system is successful in meeting this standard when it commits to a purpose and direction that is shared system wide. The leadership establishes expectations for student learning aligned with the system’s vision that is supported by system and school personnel and external stakeholders (Quality systems standards, p. 1).

In Ken Blanchard’s book (2010), Leading At a Higher Level, he discusses the importance of having a good vision for an organization. A vision builds trust, cooperation, interdependence, motivation and mutual responsibility for success. The story of Alice in Wonderland that Blanchard discusses seems to define the uncertainty that low performing schools face. When Alice asked the Cheshire cat, “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” the cat replied, “That depends a good deal on where you want to go.” Alice told him that it didn’t really matter and the cat replied, “Then it doesn’t matter which way you go.” Many schools have not been given appropriate direction which could explain why one year they meet AYP and the next year they do not. Many schools do have a mission statement, but the mission statement is never followed and they are left with just the goal of meeting an index and not an authentic reason to pursue success.

A school’s mission statement reminds the school community of why they exist; a vision paints a picture of what they can become. A vision should provide a compelling sense of where a school is headed and what must be accomplished in the future to fulfill the school’s purpose (Blankstein, 2004). Many schools’ personnel know why their school exists, but that knowledge of their existence is not the same
with everyone in the school community. Just like Alice in Wonderland, it did not matter which way they went because they did not have a vision. Accreditation from a prestigious organization such as SACS could give low performing schools a sense of purpose, a goal to reach, a vision of who they want to become and a path to follow. A school leader's greatest contribution to school improvement is to articulate a compelling vision and mission, and to convince stakeholders that the mission and vision can be achieved. Leaders must keep the vision and mission in the forefront, and see that every program; policy and educational strategy falls in line with the vision and mission (Lezotte and Snyder, 2010).

Organizations tend to drift away from their mission statement and core values due to continuity; this is what's called a mission drift (Lezotte & Snyder, 2010). The challenge for low performing schools to become effective is first, to reach clarity and consensus on the mission, values, and beliefs; and second, to develop ongoing processes that ensure that the school and staff do not drift in different directions. One strategy that schools can use to keep this from happening is to periodically review and renew their mission, values, and beliefs (Lezotte, & Snyder, 2010). Schools seeking to become qualitative start by reviewing and rewriting their mission statement, developing a vision statement, establishing core values, and setting goals. They can accomplish this by assembling a task force made up of representatives from each stakeholder group. A school leadership team composed of one teacher leader from different departments (English, Math, support staff, etc.) along with the school principal and a parent volunteer could comprise the stakeholder group. The
representatives would be responsible for soliciting feedback from the different groups they represent and to share the evolving statements with their group (Blankstein, 2004).

A final thought on vision and mission relates to the need for these ideals to remain in the forefront of thought. A school's vision and purpose mean nothing if the instructional leader of the school and/or district does not communicate and reinforce the vision and purpose to the staff, students, parents, and the community in an ongoing way. Developing a vision and mission with all stakeholders represented is a time-consuming and arduous task. If the hard work results in a document that sets on a shelf and is never mentioned again, the seeds of cynicism begin and the assumption is that the actual practice of the school is back to the status quo. But if it becomes a living document and it is evident that the school and district leaders "stay on message" all stakeholders know what is valued and what people are working toward accomplishing.

_Governance and leadership._ A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has leaders who are advocates for the system’s vision and improvement efforts. The leaders provide direction and allocate resources to implement curricular and co-curricular programs that enable students to achieve expectations for their learning (Quality systems standards, p. 2).

Schools need an individual who will be an effective leader, one who can create commitment and buy-in to the new mission, vision, values and goals. This leader also needs to help staff change tactics, strategies and behaviors to advance the
school toward the new mission, vision, values and goals (Lezotte, & Snyder, 2010).

Lezotte and Snyder (2010) list four leadership qualities that followers expect from
their leaders: 1) trustworthiness, 2) competence, 3) forward-looking; and 4) enthusiasm.

**Trustworthiness.** If the new mission is to take people to a place where they
have never been and people are to change in order to improve, they will resist change
if they do not trust the judgment or skills of the leader (Muhammad, 2009). Leaders
must give people a reason for change; people have a natural resistance to change.
Two of the main reasons for this resistance are based on trust and competency of the
leader (Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switzler, 2008). Followers may
not have confidence in their leaders' expertise and if they do find them competent,
then they might doubt the leader's motivation. To gain people's trust, a leader must
do what they say; they must "walk the talk". If leader's actions are in line with the
school's mission, vision, values and goals, people start to believe and trust their
actions and intentions.

**Competence.** As stated before, followers may not have confidence in their
leader's expertise. It is important that the leader has a sense of self efficacy about
effective instruction, and be prepared to help staff in areas of weakness by listening
and understanding the areas needing improvement in order to achieve school
effectiveness (Lezotte, & Snyder, 2010). Competence is also a two way street,
competency in the ability of the school leader and competency in the ability of the
school teacher. It is very difficult for teachers to commit to change because from the
time they entered kindergarten until they receive their first classroom as a teacher, they've been institutionalized, incorporated into a structure and well-established system that worked for them (Muhammad, 2009). The reason for change and teachers' ability to change are greater because of this institutionalization and makes the task for school leaders that much more difficult. People will attempt to change if (1) they believe it will be worth it; and (2) they can do what is required. Instilling these two views, increases the likelihood individuals will at least try a new behavior (Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switzler, 2008).

Forward-looking. People want to know what the "big picture," or vision, of the organization is going to look like once it is in place. The leader must create this vision in the minds of the followers and be able to choose the appropriate direction to take the organization. Leaders are constantly researching, examining and investigating different ways to make the organization more effective. Effective leaders embrace a continuous improvement mindset and establish the same mindset among the followers (Lezotte, & Snyder, 2010).

Enthusiasm. A leader must show excitement and motivate others to achieve the mission, vision, values and goals of the organization. Finding a way to encourage others to both understand and believe in a new point of view may not be enough to get them to change. Individuals must actually care about what they believe if it is going to get them to change (Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switzler, 2008). This is a new paradigm for school leaders in a world of change.
The willingness to change. Accountability has become a “dirty” word in the world of education reform. Legislators discuss holding schools accountable for student success and teachers discuss the need to hold students accountable for their effort in the classroom and on state tests. But, there has been little talk about holding teachers accountable for their role in student success, and that is where education reform and school improvement fail!

Teachers must be held accountable for student success, but before leaders can hold them accountable, there must be expectations created for teachers. In their book, How Did That Happen? (2009), Connors and Smith discuss that leaders hold people accountable for results, but at the end of the day, a leader can hold people accountable only for the expectations that they have set for them. Expectations lead to organizational change and holding everyone accountable for those expectations is what leads to organizational success.

Schools, even after the creation of expectations, may fall into what Rogers and Smith (2009) call the Accountability Fallacy. The Accountability Fallacy captures a common mistake made by leaders when they assume that the reason why people are not following through on expectations is because there’s something wrong with them, the people. When leaders fall prey to this fallacy, they start making excuses that teachers don’t care enough and assume that teachers are flawed, and subsequently do very little to help teachers understand, perhaps even develop new strategies or skill sets, to meet expectations. Taking this a step further, teachers also have this fallacy with their students, blaming them for their flaws and doing nothing to help change
Real accountability begins when people begin to look at themselves for the reasons why they are failing and stop blaming others for their shortcomings (Connors & Smith, 2009).

When administrators begin to look at themselves and what they need to do as leaders to bring about positive change in teachers, they can then assume that teachers are doing their very best to fulfill leaders’ expectations and help students succeed. When administrators start looking at teachers in this way it is called the Accountability Assumption (Connors & Smith, 2009). The Arbinger Institute’s book *Leadership and Self-Deception, Getting Out of the Box* (2010), discusses this very assumption. How people are treated, not only in organizations, but in everyday life; how they perceive themselves and others relationships impacts their feelings, their sense of well-being and actions. About relationships it is reasonable to ask, 1) Is this a toxic relationship (in the box); 2) Are other people being used as an excuse why things aren’t being done properly; 3) Is it a healthy relationship (out of the box) where others are helping colleagues achieve their goals and experiencing reciprocity?

When school leadership begins to assume that teachers are doing their very best to fulfill expectations, yet these expectations are not being met, then it is reasonable to question teacher competence and capacity. This is where leadership must secure the help teachers need in order to fulfill the expectations.

When teachers begin to question themselves about what they are doing and what they did wrong, this is what Conners and Smith call the Accountability Truth (2009). When teachers and leaders embrace this principle and see themselves as part
current culture. Together they need to examine the experiences, beliefs, and actions that constitute the culture and carefully consider what needs to be changed. When leaders effectively create accountability to achieve the new results, teachers will start to see their purposes and roles differently, defining their jobs in terms of the results they need to achieve rather than their job descriptions. The act of claiming accountability for current and past results creates a powerful, positive experience for everyone in an organization because it reinforces the idea that "If we are responsible for where we are, we can also be responsible for where we want to go!" (Connors & Smith, 2009).

How does a leader create accountability among his or her staff? Data! In the book ACTIVATE: A Leaders Guide to People, Practices, and Processes (2011), Steven White states that data displays provide precision that advances accountability among staff. If leaders do not acknowledge the data that are being displayed, then they will just become another bulletin board. Consider the impact a school leader has when he or she asks the teacher to explain the data and how he or she uses them to modify instruction, or when the school leader points out the gains made by specific students. Unless the meaning of data is questioned or communicated, energy will dissipate, intensity will waiver, and teachers will return to business as usual.

**Documenting and using results.** A school system is successful in meeting this standard when it uses a comprehensive assessment system based on clearly-defined performance measures. The assessment system is used to assess student performance on expectations for student learning, identify gaps between expectations
for student learning and student performance, evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum
and instruction, and determine interventions to improve student performance. The
assessment system yields timely and accurate information that is meaningful and
useful to system and school leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders in understanding
student performance, system and school effectiveness, and the results of improvement
efforts (Quality systems standards. p. 3).

Webster's dictionary (2009) defines Data as the collection of facts from
which conclusions may be drawn. Teachers and leaders can choose to carefully
examine these data or completely ignore them. Using and analyzing data are efficient
ways to focus and improve any continuous improvement effort. Three questions that
teachers need to answer when analyzing classroom data are: 1) Where are we now; 2)
Where do we want to be; and 3) How do we know when we get there?

Districts know how to collect data and develop improvement plans, but what
teachers need to know is how to make sense out of the data. Teachers need tools that
allow them to know why they are getting the results they are getting and what they
need to do to get better results. The current state accountability system data are not
available for months after the test has been taken; when the data are revealed they are
out dated; this is what's called Lag Measures. When Lag Measures are revealed, the
tools and techniques that produced the measure are in the past, what needed to be
corrected (McChesney, Covey, and Huling, 2012). White, in his book Beyond the
Numbers: Making Data Work for Teachers & School Leaders (2005) called this the
Rearview-mirror effect. The Rearview-mirror effect is defined simply as planning the
future on the basis of past events, and it has four debilitating characteristics. The first relates to responding to a continually changing reality based on past data; it fails to anticipate challenges and does not give fresh feedback from stakeholders about the reality they are facing now. The second effect is waiting for the road to reveal itself by waiting for annual assessment results. The third effect is narrowing the focus on one single area, only on what students do. Successful school systems know that teacher behavior, professional development, learning conditions, resources, curriculum alignment, assessment, common planning, and a host of other antecedent conditions and structures, influence student achievement. The fourth effect is a look back to when times were simpler; when districts and teachers received a not-so-favorable results on the state assessment; or back to a time when there was no state assessment and accountability. These effects can bring discouragement and resentment to a system that is trying to improve.

Clearly, Lag measures are not an effective way to measure what is working and what is not when it comes to student achievement. A preferred process, lead measures are those measures that drive success on the Lag measures; in essence, they measure the new behaviors that are working to help breed that success (McChesney, Covey, and Huling, 2012). Teachers need to focus on the Lead measures in their classrooms, those behaviors, teaching techniques, and instructional strategies that “lead” to student academic success. To produce Lead measures, data need to be collected and analyzed and used to make improvements. Next, what good are data without analysis? Analysis is defined by Webster’s (1983) as “a separating or
breaking up of any whole into its parts so as to find out their nature, proportion, function, relationship, etc." The process of analysis as it relates to education is to examine the whole-by breaking it apart and looking for relationships that influenced student achievement. When analyzing data, teachers and school leaders should be looking for causes that produced the results; Reeves (2004) calls these antecedents. Antecedents are those structures and conditions that proceed, anticipate, or predict excellence in performance. Antecedents are also causes that correlate with effects in student behavior and achievement (results), such as classroom routines, grading procedures, and teacher-student relationships and connections. If a school desires continuous improvements in student achievement, the school needs to identify antecedents, structure their reliability, and test their accuracy to be replicated in other classrooms (Reeves, 2004).

Teaching and learning. A system is successful in meeting this standard when it implements a curriculum based on clear and measurable expectations for student learning that provides opportunities for all students to acquire requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The system ensures that teachers use proven instructional practices that actively engage students in the learning process; provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills to real world situations; and give students feedback to improve their performance (Quality systems standards. p. 3).

According to the 2010 and 2012 surveys (appendix A), data that were collected from formative and summative assessments in the classroom were broken down but there was no follow through with the results. Assessments were given,
results were analyzed, but that’s as far as it went. If a student failed an assessment, that was it, they failed; there was no follow-up to work on problem areas, no chance to continue to learn the material; teachers proceeded on whether the students were successful or not. Sadly, this is the way it is in many schools throughout the nation, textbooks drive the curriculum and the pacing guide is established by the amount of chapters that need to be covered from that textbook.

The introduction of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in the year 2000 placed a huge emphasis on standardized testing as well as other requirements. These requirements, which include annual summative testing of students in third to eighth grade as well as once in high school in mathematics and reading, are designated by expert panels in nearly all states. The federal goal is for all students to score at or above grade-level proficiency according to state standards by the end of the 2013–2014 academic year; and a lack of adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward this goal can lead to sanctions (Zimmerman and Dibenedetto, 2008). The result of the summative test does not indicate growth of individual students, school, or the school district. Instead it compares one group of students to the previous year’s students. For example, a group of sixth graders taking the state test in 2006 would be compared to the group of sixth graders that took the test in 2005; this type of comparison does not credit schools that improved but fell short of Average Yearly Progress (AYP) standards.

Concerns with NCLB, like the one just stated, prompted the U.S. Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to request that NCLB be modified to allow the
states to measure growth of individual students. Growth models are designed to improve the sensitivity and fairness of a summative measure of criterion mastery by adjusting posttest decisions about mastery based on pre-existing levels of knowledge. However, summative growth models do not provide feedback designed to improve individual students’ methods of learning. The need for formative tests to improve accountability was recognized by the CCSSO which was seeking more state authority to use these tests to track the classroom learning of individual students during the school year (Hoff, 2006b).

The work of the CCSSO and others led to The Common Core State Standards Initiative, a state-led effort launched several years ago by state leaders including governors and state commissioners of education from forty-eight states, two territories and the District of Columbia.

The process used to write the standards ensured they were informed by:

- The best state standards;
- The experience of teachers, content experts, states and leading thinkers; and
- Feedback from the general public.

To write the standards, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and Council of Chief State School Officers brought together content experts, teachers, researchers and others.

The standards have been divided into two categories:

- College and career readiness standards, which address what students are expected to have learned when they graduate high school; and
K-12 standards, which address expectations for elementary through high school students.

The NGA Center and CCSSO received nearly 10,000 comments on the standards during two public comment periods. Comments, many of which helped shape the final version of the standards, came from teachers, parents, school administrators and other citizens concerned with education policy:

- The draft college and career ready graduation standards were released for public comment in September 2009;
- The draft K-12 standards were released for public comment in March 2010; and
- The final standards were released in June 2010.

Teachers, parents and community leaders have all weighed in to help create the Common Core State Standards. The standards clearly communicate what is expected of students at each grade level. This will allow our teachers to be better equipped to know exactly what they need to help students learn and establish individualized benchmarks for them. The Common Core State Standards focus on core conceptual understandings and procedures starting in the early grades, thus enabling teachers to take the time needed to teach core concepts and procedures well—and to give students the opportunity to master them (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010).

The state of Kentucky adopted the Common Core State Standards on February 10, 2010; since that adoption of the standards the Kentucky Department of Education has
redesigned the state assessment system to include student growth as part of their accountability system:

"The next-generation learner’s accountability model is anchored in college and career readiness for all students. Like previous accountability models, it continues annual public reporting of disaggregated student outcome measures in math, reading and science to assess school performance. However, this more robust next-generation model also includes student achievement growth measures, emphasis on college and career readiness, high school graduation rates, student achievement in writing and social studies, and increased focus on the lowest-performing schools. Additionally, the new accountability model holds all schools and districts accountable for improving student performance and creates four performance classifications that determine consequences and guide interventions and supports. School and district classifications are based on the following measures:

- Achievement (Content Areas are reading, mathematics, science, social studies and writing.)
- Gap (percentage of proficient and distinguished) for the Non-Duplicated Gap Group for all five content areas
- Growth in reading and mathematics (percentage of students at typical or higher levels of growth)
- College Readiness as measured by the percentage of students meeting benchmarks in three content areas on EXPLORE at middle school
- College/Career-Readiness Rate as measured by ACT benchmarks, college placement tests and career measures
• Graduation Rate” (Sims, 2012).

Mastery Learning. The adoption of the Common Core Standards has given schools a structured curriculum to teach and since each student has to master those standards at each grade level, the Common Core Standards has brought back to the table the discussion of mastery learning.

Almost 50 years ago John Carroll (1963) proposed a basic assumption of mastery learning, that school learning is a matter of time spent and time needed to learn, and that all students can learn as long as they have sufficient time. In addition to learning time, five other elements were included in Carroll’s theory. They were students’ (a) personal differences in perseverance; (b) aptitude; (c) ability to understand instruction; (d) experiential differences in opportunities to learn; and (e) quality of instruction. Carroll hypothesized that providing students with sufficient time to learn would enable them to compensate for limitations in one of more of these five elements (Zimmerman and Dibenedetto, 2008).

Several years later Benjamin Bloom developed a specific way to use Carroll’s five elements during classroom instruction. Bloom observed that in a traditional classroom there was a big difference in student’s academic learning, with scores forming a bell shaped curve. In spite of students’ differences in achievement, normally teachers would proceed on to the next unit under the assumption that those academic differences were inherent. Bloom proposed a mastery learning approach to instruction wherein students do not move to new topics until prior topics have been
mastered. With sufficient instructional time, individual differences in Carroll's five elements are lessened before addressing the next topic (Guskey, 2005).

Bloom's mastery learning model involves four components: defining mastery, planning for mastery, teaching for mastery, and grading for mastery. A key feature of his model is the use of formative assessments that provide both students and teachers with feedback about whether a particular instructional goal, standard, or learning target has been mastered. Students who do not meet the criteria for mastery are given correctives, such as alternative textbook readings, workbooks, or other varied learning tools. On completion of the correctives, the students take a second formative assessment. If they fail to pass this test as well, they are given additional opportunities to study and retake the tests so virtually all students achieve mastery before moving to the next unit. Students who have demonstrated mastery on the initial assessment are provided with enrichment material to continue or extend the learning process (Zimmerman and Dibenedetto, 2008).

Bloom's two important discoveries regarding children's learning are: 1) with mastery learning, individual differences in students' achievement would diminish; he predicted that 90% of the students in a class would achieve a level at which only the top 10% of the students reach under traditional instructional practices; and 2) the weak students who initially need longer time periods to learn will need less time as they master the fundamental material and become familiar with the mastery learning approach (Guskey, 2005).
The mastery learning model is typically a group based, teacher based approach to instruction in which students learn together with their classmates. Mastery learning is designed for use in typical classroom situations where instructional time and curriculum are set, and the teacher is in charge of 25 or more students. The role of the teacher is that of an instructional leader and facilitator who directs a variety of group-based instructional methods with accompanying feedback and corrective actions (Guskey and Gates, 1986).

Guskey and Gates (1986) reviewed a large collection of outcome-based mastery learning studies. They used meta-analysis techniques to synthesize the results of 27 studies in order to answer several questions about group based mastery. The results of this study are as follows:

- Achievement results are overwhelmingly positive, but vary greatly from study to study.
- Although students at all levels appear to benefit from mastery learning, effects are somewhat larger in elementary and junior high school classes than at the high school level.
- Although applicable across subjects' areas, effects in language arts and social studies classes are slightly larger than those attained in science and math classes.
- Students tend to retain what they have learned longer under mastery learning.
- Students in mastery learning classes develop more positive attitudes about learning and about their ability to learn.
- Teachers using mastery learning develop more positive attitudes toward teaching, higher expectations for students, and greater personal responsibility for learning outcomes.
The research on elementary and secondary school group-based mastery learning programs supports the findings of other reviews of effective mastery learning such as those of Block and Burns (1976). The applications of group-based mastery learning have consistently positive effects on a range of student learning outcomes, including student achievement, retention of learned material, involvement in learning activities, and student affect (Guskey and Gates, 1986).

Bloom’s approach to mastery learning requires that learning objectives be well defined and appropriately sequenced; it requires that student learning be regularly checked and that immediate feedback be given; and that student learning be evaluated based on criterion-referenced standards (Guskey, 2005). The changes in NCLB and the creation and adoption of the Common Core Standards as states’ and school districts’ curricula have created the need now more than ever before for mastery learning.

**Resources and support systems.** A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has sufficient human, material, and fiscal resources to implement a curriculum that: 1) enables students to achieve expectations for student learning; 2) meets special needs; 3) and complies with applicable regulations. The system: 1) employs and allocates staff well-qualified for their assignments; 2) provides ongoing learning opportunities for all staff to improve their effectiveness; and 3) ensures compliance with applicable local, state, and federal regulations (Quality systems standards, p. 5).
The implementation of No Child Left Behind has put more emphasis on state testing than at any other time in educational history. Because of this emphasis in state testing, the results from these tests have become the main focus of school systems across the country. Test results are returned to schools months after the state test is taken and these results "claim" to explain exactly what is wrong with student achievement. The problem with this scenario is that state tests are touted as a form of "formative assessment" months after the tests are taken and this is simply not true and, therefore, detrimental to schools that look at these results in this way. In a culture that is focused on results, a shift needs to be made to focus on the causes of those results.

Norfolk Public Schools won the Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2005 not only because it produced great results, narrowing the achievement gap and improving performance, but also because it documented in a clear and public way the link between causes and effects, between the actions of teachers and school leaders and student results (Reeves, 2004a). Schools that continually lead the nation in student achievement success have a deep understanding of how students achieved those results; these schools focus on people and processes.

In Douglas Reeves' book *Transforming professional development into student results* (2010), he discusses that high impact professional learning has three essential characteristics; (a) a focus on student learning; (b) rigorous measurement of adult decisions; and (c) a focus on people and practices, not programs.
First, high-impact professional learning is directly linked to student learning. The most important criterion for evaluating professional learning strategies is not their popularity or ease of adoption. High-impact learning is related to student results, and student results must be analyzed one student and one classroom at a time (Reeves, 2010).

The second characteristic of high-impact professional learning balances student results with a rigorous observation of adult practices, not merely a measurement of student results (Reeves, 2010). Teachers need to reflect not only on the effects but also on the causes of student achievement, a focus on their practice.

Third, high-impact professional learning focuses on people and practices, not on programs (Reeves, 2010). Programs are only as good as the people who are implementing them and if the people implementing the programs do not have the capacity to do so, then the programs will fail.

In order for teachers to change classroom practice they must have the capacity to do so. We know what high-impact professional development looks like. It is intensive and sustained, directly relevant to the needs of teachers and students, and it provides opportunities for application, practice, reflection, and reinforcement. High-impact professional development is not being lectured to by PowerPoint; it is not teachers attending a conference and listening to an hour long lecture about an idea or a product that will revolutionize their classroom instruction; and it is not meeting with other professionals and listening to their whining about the state of education today. One of the greatest frustrations of school leaders is that teachers will attend a
professional development workshop and return to their classroom and not implement what they have learned. School leaders can’t follow-up with the teacher because they don’t know what the professional development workshops were about and how they would help change classroom practice. Thus the difference between what is known and what is practiced becomes an added frustration for school leaders (Chenoweth, 2007).

One of the most important transitions in education in the past decade has been the embrace of academic standards as the prevailing method for evaluation of students. This is a seismic shift from the presumption of the past that the primary function of schools was to compare students to one another rather than to an objective standard (Reeves, 2008).

This transformation has four essential implications for every teacher, administrator, and policymaker. First, tests scores alone are not a sufficient reflection of student learning, but educators must base their conclusions on the evidence of student success. Second, the fundamental purpose of assessment is not merely to evaluate students but to teach them. Third, assessment is most effective as a preventive rather than a remediating or punitive strategy. Fourth, the purpose of assessment in a standards-based environment is not only to provide feedback to students for improvement but also to improve the performance of teachers and leaders (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006).

To improve the performance of teachers and leaders, first, schools wouldn’t use a test score as evidence of proficiency for a teaching professional any more than
accepting one student score on a test as evidence of mastering the content. Schools
and school leaders should use a broad range of evidence that shows the teachers
knowledge, professional competence and understanding of others and themselves.
Second, schools and school leaders should provide feedback to professionals that not
only assesses their present level of competence but also is designed to help them grow
and learn (McTighe & Wiggins, 2005). Third, schools and school leaders can
provide feedback to teachers and administrators in the form of a "preflight"
checklist—that is, information and support before poor decisions adversely influence
student achievement. And fourth, schools should provide low-risk, frequent, and
constructive feedback that is designed to be formative (Reeves, 2004a).

Although many excellent efforts have been made to articulate standards for
staff development, there are three criteria at the heart of the matter. These criteria are
integrity—the relationship of our values to our learning; efficacy—the pursuit of those
practices that make a positive difference for students; and diligence—the application of
what has been learned. When these criteria are applied to staff development, there is
the opportunity for a significant impact on student performance. Programs that rest
on data and practice and, least popular of all, that expect the participants to work
rather than to be entertained, are the only ones that can be expected to transform
classroom practice (Reeves, 2004).

Earlier it was discussed that schools need to develop a culture of
accountability. A culture of accountability can help professional development efforts
achieve their potential. First, the accountability system itself should monitor not only
the delivery of professional development but also its application. In other words, the accountability report should not say, "84% of our teachers were trained in six-trait writing during a half-day program," but rather "84% of our students participated in eight or more writing assessments using the six-trait format learned by our teachers during a professional development program. As a direct result of this emphasis, the number of students who are proficient or better in writing increased by 22%." In other words, it is not the delivery, participation, or popularity of staff development that gives it meaning. A comprehensive accountability system links professional development to application and effectiveness--the things that matter for students (Reeves, 2004).

**Stakeholder communication and relationships.** A system is successful in meeting this standard when it has the understanding, commitment, and support of stakeholders. System and school personnel seek opportunities for collaboration and shared leadership among stakeholders to help students learn and advance improvement efforts (Quality systems standards. p. 6).

Involving teachers as "stakeholders" in school change efforts, as well as making teachers accountable for specific outcomes, increases the likelihood of successful school improvement and reform (Gabel & Manning, 1997). Communication is the key to school improvement and successful reform. The traditional style of teaching is individualistic. Teaching has been viewed as a solitary act and the teacher's decisions viewed as his or her prerogative. The mystique surrounding quality in such a traditional setting reinforces the belief that certain
teachers are "good" and that others simply do not have the same skill or talent (Gideon, 2002). This is very evident in U.S. high schools where a culture exists of teacher isolation and autonomy. Most high schools are organized around content-specific departments that separate colleagues along content lines. Classrooms are also grouped by content area, giving teachers easy access to others who teach in their department but little access to teachers outside their departments. In large schools, teachers may not even know their colleagues who teach in other areas of the building.

In traditional school settings, teachers seldom visit one another's classrooms, and conversations among teachers are more likely to be about other things than the curriculum. These practices result in highly individualistic environments where collaboration is adopted but is unlikely to be made a reality (Gideon, 2002).

Professional collaboration has several distinct advantages over conventional education approaches. First, the shared planning and goal setting process helps the participants gain ownership of the instructional process and establish mutually satisfactory goals; therefore, each party feels equally responsible for ensuring a positive outcome. Collaboration encourages individuals to share goals and objectives, and to direct their own interests for the greater good. Second, collaboration allows participants to learn from one another and to build long lasting, trusting, professional partnerships. Third, collaboration gives teachers an opportunity to work together to bring about school change. Teacher collaboration is consonant with school change in several ways. It includes a number of participants and requires a deliberate shift from schools' hierarchical and authoritarian structures so that all
individuals consider themselves integral to the change process. Collaboration, because it is predicated on equality, leads to a sense of collegiality. It also encourages a climate that is amenable to new perspectives and attitudes (Gabel & Manning, 1997).

Dr. Eric Twadell in his book *Leading by Design* (2012) defines collaboration as a systematic process in which people work together interdependently to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve individual and collective results. Schools can achieve their fundamental purpose of high levels of learning for all students only if all stakeholders work together. And they can cultivate this collaborative culture through the development of high performing teams. Collaboration is essential for the successful integration of information skills instruction into curricular subject areas. But, collaboration is often used to mean cooperation or coordinating, yet there’s a big difference among the three terms.

Cooperation is informal, with no commonly defined goals or planning effort; information is shared as needed. For example, a high school social studies teacher and a high school language arts teacher in a cooperative relationship work loosely together. Each works independently, but they come together briefly for mutual benefit. Coordinating suggests a more formal working relationship and the understanding of missions. Some planning is required and more communication channels are established. For example, in a high school situation the social studies teacher and the language arts teacher may make arrangements to plan to teach a unit together. Here a closer working relationship is required. Collaboration changes the
way people work. Collaboration moves from competing to building consensus; from working alone to including others from different fields and backgrounds; from thinking mostly about activities and programs to thinking about larger results and strategies; from focusing on short-term accomplishments to requiring long term results. Collaboration is a working relationship over a relatively long period of time. Collaboration requires shared goals, derived during the partnership. Roles are carefully defined and more comprehensive planning is required. Communication is conducted at many levels to ensure success. Leadership, resources, risk, control, and results are shared. As a result of collaboration, there is a substantial benefit. “More is accomplished jointly than could have been individually.” (Mattessich and Monsey, 1992).

The levels of collaboration are found in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cooperation</th>
<th>Coordination</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>Longer term</td>
<td>Long term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal relationships</td>
<td>More formal relationships</td>
<td>More pervasive relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No clearly defined mission</td>
<td>Understand mission</td>
<td>Commitment to a common mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No defined structure</td>
<td>Focus on a specific effort or program</td>
<td>Results in a new structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No planning effort</td>
<td>Some planning</td>
<td>Comprehensive planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partners share information about the project at hand</td>
<td>Open communication channels</td>
<td>Well-defined communication channels at all levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals retain authority</td>
<td>Authority still retained by individuals</td>
<td>Collaborative structure determines authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources are maintained separately</td>
<td>Resources and rewards are shared</td>
<td>Resources are shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No risk</td>
<td>Power can be an issue</td>
<td>Greater risk; power is an issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower intensity</td>
<td>Some intensity</td>
<td>Higher intensity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gideon (2002) discusses two factors that are necessary to successfully implement a more collegial model of school organization. The collaboration, at least at first, must address issues teachers find immediately useful and be structured into the regular teacher workday. Many collaboration attempts have failed because the innovations or recommendations, although ultimately benefiting teachers and students, were not immediately evident or because teachers were often asked to meet before or after their regular workday—when they were tired and had other responsibilities. If it is truly believed that teacher collaboration is the key to school improvement, it must be part of the regular work of teachers and administrators, teacher recommendations must actually be implemented, and teachers must be publicly recognized for their success. Collaboration develops over time and, with trust, becomes the way a school operates. Structure that is deliberately built to support collaboration is the key.

There are different frameworks used in order to build a culture of collaboration among teachers. One framework is the school leadership team. The school leadership team meets weekly and the dedicated time provides the framework for the other structures that shape interactions within the school each week. Department chairs meet once a week with assistant principals to discuss curricular concerns and visit classrooms as an instructional cabinet. Classroom visits, called "learning walks," focus on instructional strategies, student work, and congruence of the curriculum (Gideon, 2002). A second and most popular framework is
professional learning community. A professional learning community can be described as a collaborative context where teachers (a) get involved in common work; (b) share a range of norms, values, visions, and beliefs concerning themselves, their students and more broadly, teaching; and (c) are organized on collaborative cultures and structures that enhance interdependence (Lavie, 2006). Professional learning communities discuss common experiences for students, and study student achievement on state accountability measures as well as on campus-designed assessments.

A third framework for building collaboration is grade level meetings. During grade level meetings the individual and collective needs of students are addressed in grade-level meetings. These grade-level meetings focus on student attendance, behavior, and external issues that affect achievement. The meetings also serve to strengthen the bond between administrators and teachers. Instead of complaining that the administrators do not respond to their discipline referrals, teachers have opportunities to discuss particular students (Gideon, 2002). A fourth framework to help build collaboration is cadres. Cadres-- or working groups--meet to plan and implement school projects and deal with common concerns. Cadres study ways to improve attendance, look at positive ways to improve disciplinary issues, and work to improve school climate (Twadell, 2012).

Frameworks to help support the time and purpose of group endeavors along with real results will sustain collaboration in a school and forever change the way it
conducted business. School collaboration depends on a framework that supports collegial work and continuous school improvement.

**Commitment to continuous improvement.** A school is successful in meeting this standard when it implements a collaborative and ongoing process for improvement that aligns the functions of the school with the expectations for student learning. Improvement efforts are sustained and the school demonstrates progress in improving student performance and school effectiveness. New improvement efforts are informed by the results of earlier efforts through reflection and assessment of the improvement process (Quality systems standards, p. 7).

Throughout history, people have used trial and error as an approach to improvement. This approach is often defined as making a change and then seeing if anyone complains, or if something stops working because of the change. The trial-and-error approach, which can be carried out with various degrees of sophistication, has sometimes been criticized as jumping to solutions without sufficient study both before and after trial. All improvement will require a change, but not all change will result in improvement. A primary aim of improvement is to increase the chance that a change will actually result in sustained improvement from the viewpoint of those affected by the change (Langley, K. Nolan, T. Nolan, Norman, & Provost, 2009).

William L. Boyd (2003) observed that America is in the midst of broad social, political, economic, and demographic transformations that portend crisis for public schools as we known. He sees schools as having entered a period of "trial" that will challenge them at their core. He argued that a "paradigm shift" has been developing in
the United States since the 1980s: This shift is marked by a change in focus from inputs to the system to the outcomes and accountability of the system; by a shift in the attitudes of key constituency groups; and by a critical reexamination of what public education means and how it can or should be delivered (Boyd, 2003).

According to Smylie (2009) in his book *Continuous School Improvement* there are several areas in which changes are occurring that are especially relevant to schools. These include (a) jobs for which schools prepare students; (b) politics and control of education; (c) school funding; (d) the characteristics and conditions of children and youth; and (e) demands on schools for new learning, higher performance, and greater accountability. Michael Fullan (2005) discusses in his book *Leadership and sustainability: System thinkers in action* how Leaders must become able not only to transform institutions in response to changing situations and requirements, but must invest and develop institutions which act as "learning systems," systems that are capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation. Sustainability is defined as the capacity to support, maintain or endure (Dictionary, 2012). Fullan defines sustainability as the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with the deep values of human purpose. Strategies that may have brought success to a school in the past might not bring success in the future or help a school achieve greater performance or outcomes. It's the development of the organizational system itself that can exhibit active sustainability.
Continuous improvement developed during the 1950's and the 1960's with management experts such as Deming, Juran, Philip B. Crosby, Armand Fiegenbaum, Kaoru Ishikawa, Genichi Taguchi, and others. Their emphasis was on quality movement and quality management. The emphasis on quality management declined in the 1970's but reemerged in the 1980's as Total Quality Management (TQM). Continuous improvement is usually identified as one of TQM's several "critical components". James Dean, Jr. and David Bowen (1994) understand continuous improvement in TQM as "a commitment to constant examination of technical and administrative processes in search of better methods" (p. 394). They see in it the belief that by improving processes, organizations can continue to meet the increasingly stringent expectations of their customers" (p. 394). Richard Hackman and Ruth Wageman (1995) also identify continuous improvement as one of several broad principles of TQM. They contend that behind the various models and practices of TQM is the idea that the long-term health of an organization depends on "treating quality improvement as a never-ending quest" (p. 312). As they view it, opportunities to develop better methods for carrying out work will always exist and organizational commitment to continuous improvement "ensures that people will never stop learning about the work they do"

Fullan (2005) lists the following examples as the few efforts to define continuous improvement in schools and school districts:

- James Detert, Karen Louis, and Roger Schroeder (2001) conceptualize continuous improvement as a cultural value of school organization. Consistent with
that value. "Teachers and others in the school should devote time and energy to make things better. "This is a never-ending process" (p. 191).

- AdvancED (n.d.a, b), the umbrella organization for North Central Association and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, names continuous improvement as one of its standards for school accreditation. It defines continuous improvement as a commitment of schools to "being better today than they were yesterday." It is a "quality improvement process that yields results for students." This process articulates a vision and purpose; maintains a "rich and current description" of students, their performance, school effectiveness and the school community; employs goals and interventions to improve student performance; and documents and uses the results to inform what happens next.

- The National Education Association (2012) defines continuous improvement as a means by which "organizations work in steady, systematic fashion to improve their results" (NEA, 2012). Change in effective schools is a constant. Continuous improvement focuses attention on discovering and implementing ways to achieve core goals related to student learning.

- Lawrence Lezotte and Kathleen McKee (2002) define continuous improvement as "a never-ending cycle of self-examination and adjustment" (p. ix). School improvement is an endless succession of incremental change. The effective school and school district will continually ask, "How are we doing? What can we do better? How can we better serve our students?" (p. ix). Continuous improvement is both "an attitude and a set of concepts and tools" (p. 35). "The underlying attitude,"
they contend, "is that anything and everything can be improved" (p. 35). The process of continuous improvement is a cycle of action, evaluation, and reflection that should result in continuous adjustment of activities in response to changing environments, new research on practices, and the success or failure of present efforts.

All of these various definitions consider continuous improvement as something organizations do and strive to achieve. The concept embodies the notion of continuously getting better, to achieve outcomes more effectively. The concept also exemplifies ideas about processes that organizations approach to make sure desired outcomes are achieved. Improvement requires change in the direction toward some valued objective.

Dr. Smylie (2009) identified eight common descriptive characteristics that bring some core of shared meaning to the concept of continuous improvement; (a) regular and ongoing; (b) oriented toward small incremental changes; (c) intentional and strategic; (d) proactive as well as reactive; (e) focused on the whole organization; (f) inclusive of all organizational members; (g) oriented toward the organization's mission and core values; (h) integral to an organization's mission, identity, design, and basic functions. Finally, continuous improvement is central to what an organization is and what an organization does.

Continuous improvement is connected to the premise that change is no longer a choice for organizations, but a necessity. Given a rapidly changing world, organizations will need to assess their surroundings and themselves continually and change accordingly. The issue is not whether to change; it is how to change and
where to direct the change. Organizations will need to adapt, improve, and even transform on an ongoing basis. Organizations will need to change in small, incremental ways and in fundamental ways. Organizations will need to understand that any current condition or practice is or may soon be insufficient. This will require more than a flexible organization, but rather a strategic organization (Smylie, 2009).

Literature suggests firstly that the success of any continuous improvement process depends on the fidelity of its implementation. And implementation depends on the framework in which it is performed. Literature also suggests that that most organizations don’t adhere to only one model or set of strategies of continuous improvement. Thirdly, literature indicates that it is wise to think about models and strategies in terms of equifinality, is a concept that means that the same goal can be attained from different starting points and by following different paths (Burke, 2008).

A fourth consideration found in the literature is the danger of goal displacement, is a phenomenon whereby an initial objective is replaced by another, typically when means become ends-in-themselves that displace the original goals. A common instance of goal displacement is when the successful implementation of a policy or a practice becomes viewed as the end to be achieved rather than the objective that was to be achieved through the implementation of that policy or practice. In the classroom, goal displacement may occur when the completion of assignments becomes the goal rather than the student learning that is to be achieved through those assignments. Finally, the literature on continuous improvement raises the issue of where to locate in the organization the process of continuous improvement. Should
the process of continuous improvement be at the top with management, should it be part of the core of the organization, or should it be part of the everyday activity of the organization (Smylie, 2009)?

For decades schools have been changing, but have they been improving? Failing schools were at one time “good” schools, so why can’t they return to glory? Our environment, our world is consistently changing, but our schools are holding on to the instructional practices that once made them good or adequate; those days are over. For schools to survive and remain meaningful, they must continuously improve every day in order to keep up with our ever changing world. Composer and lyricist, Irving Berlin, once said, “The toughest thing about being a success is that you’ve got to keep being a success.” Success like this depends on continuously improving every day.

**Summary.** In order for a school to become an effective school, the school must start with a mission (why the school community exists) and a vision (a picture of what the school can become). A school’s values and goals will grow out of the mission and vision of the school. Before a school can move forward, it must have a picture of where it is going and must have a path to follow.

The mission and vision statements give reason for existence and a path to follow, but both are worthless if there’s not a leader that embraces and communicates these two statements to all stakeholders of the school community. These two standards: (a) vision and purpose; and (b) governance and leadership must be in place before anything else can be accomplished. Once the mission, vision and leadership
have been established then the stakeholders must be convinced that this is the best course of action for the school and district. Leadership can do this by creating a culture of accountability that describes the desired results and convinces the stakeholders of the correct course of action to achieve these results. Data are the best way to create a culture of accountability. When teachers start looking at themselves and asking what they need to do to increase student achievement, when teachers take ownership of the success of their students in the classroom, when people in every corner of the organization makes the personal choice to take the steps necessary to achieve results, a Culture of Accountability exists. By collecting and analyzing data, from the classroom to the state assessments, teachers and school administrators can begin to build a culture of accountability.

The problem with state assessments is the lag time between the times the tests were administered and when school systems receive the results which often is as much as six months. Because of this lag time, classroom formative assessments become more important to assess student knowledge and success toward the Common Core Standards.

The introduction of the Common Core Standards has given states a common curriculum and school districts an instructional plan to follow. The introduction of these Core Standards has re-introduced the concept of Mastery Learning into the educational world. Mastery learning has been discussed since the 1960's; Benjamin Bloom first introduced Mastery Learning based on John Carroll's assumption that given sufficient time all students can learn. Because of the Common Core Standards,
Mastery Learning is getting renewed attention. Standards have been a part of education for many years; they just haven’t been in the forefront of education until recently. The classrooms of the 60’s, 70’s, 80’s and 90’s were textbook driven and precious instructional time was used to make sure that students made it through that textbook in a school year. By states adopting the core standards, they are adopting a curriculum, a standard, that students must master at every level in order to be high achievers. Mastery Learning will be an important part of the implementation of the core standards.

The implementation of the core standards and mastery learning comes with a new way of providing classroom instruction. With this change in classroom instruction, teacher capacity and collaboration must be developed across all schools and all classrooms. In order for teachers to change classroom practice they must have the capacity to do so. High impact professional development must be available, intensive and sustained; it must be directly relevant to the needs of teachers and students, and it must provide opportunities for application, practice, reflection, and reinforcement. Collaboration with colleagues is essential to change instructional practice. Collaboration encourages teachers to share goals and instructional practices; it gives teachers an opportunity to work together to bring about school change.

School improvement isn’t a one-time goal! Once a school reaches the desired improvement the improvement must not stop. Once school systems implement strategies for improvement and those activities become a part of the school culture, it is imperative that they be maintained. Continuous improvement is the piece of the
missing puzzle for improving schools. When school systems discuss sustainability of a program or a change, there is usually a dollar amount associated with it. But sustainability in the context under discussion actually means how the program or change will continue. Continuous improvement does not begin or end at the district level; it is imbedded throughout the school system, from the superintendent's office all the way to the classroom. Teachers and students must continuously improve by learning from their failures, reflecting on their practice, and building on success.

True improvement happens in the classroom with each and every student. Until this change or improvement happens, is practiced, is expected and becomes a part of the culture, school systems will fail more than they succeed.

When was the Capstone Implemented?

Successful implementation of all the above processes will be measured by Deming School meeting proficiency on the Kentucky Performance Report of Educational Progress (K-PREP) test as well as all students becoming college and career ready. Successful implementation on a district level will result in the school district receiving the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation. Work toward SACS accreditation started in the spring of 2010 when a Readiness for Accreditation survey (appendix) was conducted with the faculty and staff of Deming School (now called Robertson County School). From this survey corrections toward accreditation began in the creation of new vision, mission, and goals for the school. New leadership at the school level was hired in the 2011-2012 school year. In the spring of the 2012 school year another Readiness for
Accreditation survey (appendix) was conducted with the faculty and staff of Robertson County School (Deming) to measure progress toward accreditation. Another survey will be conducted in the spring of 2013 just before the Robertson County School district will apply for SACS accreditation.

Impact of Capstone

Two surveys were conducted entitled Readiness for Accreditation (appendix), one was conducted in 2010 before we started on the path toward acquiring SACS accreditation, and the other in 2012, two years into the accreditation process. We needed to know where to start and where we stood with the accreditation standards and how hard of a journey this would be.

Both surveys were completed by the faculty of Deming School. The 2010 survey was completed by 22 faculty members out of a possible 34 faculty members and the 2012 survey was completed by 24 faculty members out of a possible 32. The first five questions of both surveys cover the areas of effective leadership, policies and practices, resources and support systems, quality teachers, and quality information, all these areas are essential to create the necessary conditions for a district to become accredited. From 2010 to 2012, according to the survey, the school increased in all five of these areas, but by a very small increase. Questions six through ten examine how the district (school) expects and ensures desired results. When it comes to: 1) implementing a vision for student learning through goals and strategies; 2) maintaining high expectations for student achievement, and 3) acting on a compelling, shared belief that, collectively, staff and other stakeholders can impact
the desired results of the district, the percent of faculty believing the district was meeting these goals increased from 2010 to 2012. In respect to maintaining a focus on improving student learning that permeates all levels of the district, the percent of faculty that believed that the school was meeting this goal decreased.

Questions eleven through sixteen investigate how effectively the district monitors student performance, and the results of all six questions show that the faculty did not believe that we’re close to reaching this goal from 2010 to 2012. The percent of faculty members who believed the school was in the operational or highly functional area decreased: Questions seventeen through twenty four examined how our district supported student learning. According to the results faculty believed that the district from 2012 to 2012 supported student learning in all areas except maintaining district-wide expectations for student learning that reflect academic cognitive and metacognitive skills. Questions twenty five through thirty one investigate how the district maximizes teacher effectiveness, and according to the survey results a majority of faculty believe the school is moving closer to achieving this goal in all areas except when using instructional strategies that provide students with focus, feedback, and sufficient opportunities to master skills. Questions thirty two through thirty six examine how the district develops a professional learning community. A majority of the faculty believe that the school is making progress toward this goal in every area. Questions thirty seven through forty investigates how the district leads the improvement initiative; again, the majority of the faculty believes that the district is making progress toward this goal.
The text responses from the 2010 survey describe a lack of consistency among programs and leadership; a lack of vision, focus, and expectations for the future; and no instructional process for continuous improvement. Text responses from the 2012 survey show an improvement in the vision for the district; common goals throughout the district; continuous improvement in instruction; and improvement in leadership opportunities. When faculty were asked in the 2010 survey the question “How does the district communicate and maintain a focus on results?” They responded by saying the district was very erratic and it did not follow-up to make sure programs were being implemented. When faculty were asked the same question in the 2012 survey, they responded by saying, “We’re working together to set and meet common goals” and “review and corrective actions take place immediately.”

When the faculty was asked, “How does the district use data to guide improvement and to monitor the results of efforts to improve?” they responded in 2010 by saying, ”At the high school level teachers give a numerous amount of assessments, but they do not go back and work on problem areas. They proceed on whether the students were successful or not.” And “Still a work in progress.” The 2012 responses show an improvement in the areas of ”Using data in the classroom (target/assessments) to see if a student has mastered the target-if not, reteach, study techniques (try different approach, etc.) re-assess.” And “Data used to coordinate appropriate responses to areas requiring improvement.”

When asked the question “How does the district provide and ensure support for student learning?” faculty in 2010 responded by saying, “Not sure”, “This is an
area that needs improvement.” And, “We have programs for students which are a
good start, but I do not think we have high expectations as a school. We tend to
spoon feed and give in to the pressure of grades. C is average and people seem to
forget that.” Faculty responded to the same question in 2012 saying, “This seems to
be more of a faculty thing. Good teachers will support and challenge students. We
are still keeping around those who are not benefiting our students. No class the last
three weeks is unacceptable. Having to let students out of class to go to the library
(not open in the mornings when they have their own time) is not a good thing. There
seems to have been a focus on improving some of these issues but there is more to be
done.”

When the question, “How does the district guide and ensure that instruction
supports student learning?” was posed in the 2010 survey, faculty responded with, “I
think the same as always; some of the classrooms are more conducive to this than
others. Again, we aren’t on the same page as a staff and we don’t have enough
administrative presence in our classroom to observe and make necessary changes.”
The 2012 survey responses show a move toward improvement: “We are using data
notebooks this year to help students see their progress. Teachers are documenting
action plans and providing feedback to improve instruction and support student
learning... by providing teachers with professional development that assist them with
their own area of study.”

The question, “How does the district foster a community of learners dedicated
to improvement?” fostered these responses in 2010, “We come together a lot for
meetings, but I would not say that they foster a sense of community as much as rebellion sometimes. We do not celebrate as we should and we really struggle with being on the same page and feeling respected and valued.” And, “Higher expectations are a good starting point.” The same question in the 2012 survey shows an improvement in this area, “We are giving those learners the opportunity to better themselves. Then it becomes a 'leading a horse to water... issue...creating a sense of accountability for students, teachers, and parents.” And,” New vision and goals.”

The last question both surveys posed was, ”How does the district build the capacity of leaders to provide leadership for improvement?” Faculty responded in the 2010 survey by saying,” We randomly put teachers on committees, but most of the time no one knows what is going on.” And “A leadership committee has been established that meets once a month.” The 2012 survey responses shows great improvement: “There has been an increase in teacher involvement in committees and groups.” And “Multiple leadership opportunities provided.”

The responses from the faculty between the 2010 and 2012 surveys show that Deming School is on the right path to overall school improvement, but still has a long way to go.

A new assessment system, K-PREP, began in Kentucky during the 2011-2012 school year. This assessment system measured student progress toward mastering the Common Core Standards in grades 3-8 in the areas of Math, Reading, Science, Social Studies, Language arts, and On-Demand Writing. K-PREP also measures college and career readiness in grades 8-11 based on the Explore, PLAN and ACT tests.
Robertson County School (Deming), after taking K-PREP in the spring of 2012, received a classification of needs improvement and fell into the category of a focus school. A ‘needs improvement’ category ranking means that the school did not meet proficiency, which is a percentile rank of 70 or higher. A focus school means that Robertson County School had a significant gap group score in the bottom 10% of the state. Although the overall school did not do well, those classrooms that implemented mastery learning showed major gains in achievement. Fourth grade science showed a score of 81.1 as compared to the state score of 92.4; seventh grade science earned a score of 61.1 as compared to the state score of 79.0; fifth grade Social Studies earned a score of 64.3 as compared to the state score of 77.0; and eighth grade social studies earned a score of 65.1 as compared to the state score of 78.2. All of these classrooms were pilot classrooms for mastery learning. The average percentile score for these classrooms was 67.9, the average percentile score of the classrooms that did not implement mastery learning was 38.8. Clearly Mastery Learning, when done with fidelity and intentionality, increases student achievement. Because of these results, mastery learning will be implemented in every classroom across the district.

Limitations of the Study.

Time is an enemy of all! One of the limitations of this capstone is time. It takes time in order for a school to reach success. Although this capstone places Robertson County School District (Deming) on the right path, only time will tell if the implemented changes lead to success. It is believed they will! The writer’s
research and personal action in his district coupled with the changes made on the state and federal level with the adoption of the new core standards, have put Deming School on the best course of action for meaningful change and improved student academic achievement. Success will not come with minimal changes at the school and district levels; if it did schools across the Commonwealth and nation would already be successful and would not need to be improved. Schools cannot be successful in the future by using techniques of the past. This is why in order for schools to improve and be successful, they must reinvent themselves, start over from the beginning by clearing out the old culture and replacing it with a new culture, a culture of continuous improvement.

Another limitation is the number of schools that are implementing Mastery Learning. Some schools and school districts are implementing standards based grading and calling it mastery learning, but this just a component of mastery learning. Mastery learning revolves around standards and the mastery of these standards at a high level. Many of those who claim to be using mastery learning make one or more of the following common, often fatal, mistakes: 1) Passing a mastery test is considered as the endpoint instead of the initial stage of the learning process; 2) there is no requirement and related grading incentive to go beyond initial mastery; 3) demonstrations of mastery are limited to objective tests at the knowledge/recall end of the unit; 4) most teachers are giving redo's and retakes of tests until students reach a minimum score of proficiency which helps students master the test and not the content. This is not Mastery Learning but rather catch-up grading.
Reflections.

The research in this capstone should help schools and districts implement real change that will lead to the success of all students. Three components of this research are talked about in educational circles but never together: Mastery Learning, Learning Targets, and Continuous Improvement. The research shows how these three elements can come together to initiate major change in schools. The standards for school improvement can involve many different approaches schools use to meet each of the standards. But, in today's educational realm there are only a few methods that truly impact total school improvement. It is believed that this research and plan will give schools the right path to take to reach total school improvement and to sustain a culture of achievement.

When beginning a major change, any organization must first accept the fact that what it is doing is not working. In order to improve, the organization, or the people in the organization, must be willing to change. If the change is minimal or major, it is a hard thing to accept, particularly in the teaching profession. When a person decides to go into teaching, they have entered into the longest internship of any profession. From the time they entered Kindergarten, he or she was in training to become a teacher because this was the first time he or she entered the classroom. This training lasted until that teacher entered his or her own classroom. This type of institutionalization in any profession is hard to change because the person who has chosen teaching as his or her career presumes the best way a child can learn is the
way he or she learned. And the longer a teacher has been in the classroom, the harder it is for him or her to change.

So why is change so hard? Fear! People in general do not like change because they fear what they haven’t experienced: the unknown. People who are afraid resist change at every turn; they rarely disconfirm their unfounded fears by approaching them head-on. Lectures don’t work with helping eliminate fears; people will have to conquer their fears through personal experience. But, if a teacher is unwilling to change in his or her own classroom, he or she needs to have what is called a vicarious experience. A vicarious experience works when a teacher is exposed to another teacher that is demonstrating the change that is desired, learning from that teacher’s successes and failures. Watching others in action is the next best thing to personal experience. But in order for a teacher to get to the point of benefiting from observing another teacher, he or she must accept the fact that what they are doing in the classroom is not working. Data are the best provider of what is or is not working in the classroom. When teachers start analyzing data, they are essentially looking at the truth of what is going on in their classroom. Once teachers start questioning themselves about what they are doing and what they did wrong, the goal if for them to see themselves as part of the problem and subsequently embrace the effort to improve.

Any organizational change is only as good as the people who are willing to embrace the change. Unfortunately, the above strategies do not always work. There are always a few in any organization who will never embrace change or see the need
Anthony Muhammad in his book *Transforming School Culture: How to overcome staff division* (2009), calls these teachers' fundamentalists. Fundamentalists are passionate about keeping the status quo and traditions within the culture of their school because change to a fundamentalist means to admit failure and they believe that they are saving their school. Finding a solution to this problem is exceedingly difficult. A teacher like this in a school, especially in a small school, can be devastating to a school's changing culture. The best a leader can do is to move forward with everyone else and leave the fundamentalists behind limiting influence on others and eventually they will be standing alone or perhaps join the change.

Changing school culture takes a long time especially when the old culture is still prevalent. In order for schools to change their culture, they must first eliminate the old culture. A new culture and an old culture cannot exist together if school change is to happen. If a doorway is left open for teachers to revert back to the old way of doing things, then once they are challenged or feel uncomfortable with the new culture, they will return to their comfort zone. This is one mistake that the writer had made in changing Deming's school culture. Seven years ago the school was the most improved school in the state. There was evidence of change but the school culture at the time would not allow for the sustenance of a new culture. One thing that was learned from this research is that if schools need to change, then they must start over from scratch. They must create policies that do away with the things that schools have always done and create experiences that will guide everyone to a new culture. Schools in the 21st century must learn that change is an inevitable part of
organizational evolution. Those who don't embrace it and are not ready to meet the ever changing needs of students are setting themselves up for failure.
References


Association Annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA.

Hoff, D. J. (2006a). Education dept. poised to approve more states for growth-model project. Education Week, November 8, pp.1 – 2.


Muhammad, A. (2009). Transforming school culture; how to overcome staff division. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.


Appendix

- Establish goals and measures.
- What actions did not work and what needs to be changed.
- Methods used to reach goals.
- Analyze classroom data.
Robertson County School Classroom Action Plan

**PLAN:**
What essential learning skill(s) will your students learn this week/unit?

Focus: ________________________________

Assessment: ____________________________

Target: ________________________________

**ACT:**
What will you and your students do differently this week/unit based on last week's/unit's learning?

Teacher: ________________________________

Students: ________________________________

**DO:**
What specific instructional strategies and/or activities and resources will you use for student learning of identified essential learning skill(s)?

The teacher will: ____________________________

Students will: ________________________________

**STUDY:**
How many students learned (showed they know and/or can do) last week's/unit's essential skill(s)?

Analysis:
Charted (attached if necessary)

Plus/Delta (attached)
\[ \text{Plus}^{(+)} \quad \text{Delta}^{(\Delta)} \]
### 2010 Survey Response Summary Report for Readiness for Accreditation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Not Evident</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Operational</th>
<th>Highly Functional</th>
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<td>1. Effective Leadership- The leadership decisions and practices support the vision for student learning.</td>
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<td>72.73</td>
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<td>2. Policies and Practices-The district has policies and practices in place that support improvement efforts.</td>
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<td>72.73</td>
<td>18.18</td>
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<td>3. Resources and support systems- The district has the human, technology, and material resources to support improvement efforts.</td>
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<td>72.73</td>
<td>13.64</td>
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<td>4. Quality Teachers-The recruitment, placement, and professional development of teachers are aligned with the district's vision for student learning.</td>
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<td>40.91</td>
<td>31.82</td>
<td>4.55</td>
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<td>5. Quality Information-An information system which collects, manages, and uses information to support the district's vision is in place in the district.</td>
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<td>54.55</td>
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<td>6. Implementing a vision for student learning through goals and strategies</td>
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<td>59.09</td>
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<td>7. Maintaining high expectations for student achievement.</td>
<td>22.73</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>22.73</td>
<td>4.55</td>
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<td>8. Maintaining a focus on improving student learning that permeates all levels of the district</td>
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<td>54.55</td>
<td>31.82</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Acting on a compelling, shared belief that, collectively, staff and other stakeholders can impact the desired results of the district</td>
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<td>59.09</td>
<td>18.18</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>11. Using data to inform decision-making about teaching and learning</td>
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<td>12. Using a comprehensive assessment system to provide feedback for improvement in instructional practices and student performance</td>
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<td>13. Using classroom-based assessments to provide robust measures of student's academic, cognitive, and metacognitive skills.</td>
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<td>54.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Identifying performance targets, indicators, and measures for comparing and improving effectiveness</td>
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<td>50.00</td>
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<td>9.09</td>
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<td>15. Taking appropriate and timely action to improve areas of identified needs</td>
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<td>59.09</td>
<td>18.18</td>
<td>4.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Maintaining district-wide expectations for student learning that reflect academic, cognitive, and metacognitive skills</td>
<td>22.73</td>
<td>40.91</td>
<td>36.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Delivering on the expectations for student learning through a coherent and rigorous curriculum.</td>
<td>18.18</td>
<td>63.64</td>
<td>13.64</td>
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<td>19. Aligning an assessment system with curriculum that is enacted through instruction</td>
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<td>54.55</td>
<td>27.27</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Supporting the equitable opportunity of students to learn through individualization and differentiation.</td>
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<td>63.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. Providing student support services and special programs to optimize individual student learning.</td>
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<td>22. Supporting a student learning community that includes student</td>
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<td>50.00</td>
<td>13.64</td>
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### How to Acquire and Sustain a Culture of Achievement

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<th>% 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Involving families and the community in supporting children as learners</td>
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<td>27.27</td>
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<td>25.</td>
<td>Using instructional strategies that provide students with focus, feedback, and sufficient opportunities to master skills</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>63.64</td>
<td>27.27</td>
<td>4.55</td>
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<td>26.</td>
<td>Using appropriate strategies to assess the performance of students' academic, cognitive, and metacognitive skills</td>
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<td>77.27</td>
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<td>27.</td>
<td>Adapting instruction to meet individual needs and engage learners</td>
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<td>63.64</td>
<td>9.09</td>
<td>9.09</td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>Maximizing the use of time for instructions</td>
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<td>36.36</td>
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<td>29.</td>
<td>Creating a classroom environments conducive to learning</td>
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<td>40.91</td>
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<td>30.</td>
<td>Optimizing technology and multimedia as learning tools</td>
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<td>68.18</td>
<td>13.64</td>
<td>9.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Sharing a common vision and goals that have student learning as the focus</td>
<td>31.82</td>
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<td>33.</td>
<td>Improving individual and collective performance by coming together regularly for learning, decision-making, problem-solving, and celebration</td>
<td>13.64</td>
<td>63.64</td>
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<td>34.</td>
<td>Continuously enhancing individual effectiveness through inquiry, practice, and peer reflection</td>
<td>22.73</td>
<td>63.64</td>
<td>9.09</td>
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<td>35.</td>
<td>Supporting a culture of collegiality, collaboration, respect and trust</td>
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<td>40.91</td>
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<td>37.</td>
<td>Sharing leadership for the improvement of teaching and learning throughout the district</td>
<td>13.64</td>
<td>68.18</td>
<td>9.09</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following are answers to the text questions asked on the survey:

10. How does the district communicate and maintain a focus on results?

- Very erratic. It’s like what’s the new flavor of the month with assessments, implementation or anything else that matters. Seems to be more focused this year however.
- Meets to discuss Think Link scores. Teachers are allowed to look at test data on the computer. Teachers can print off lessons that will enhance student learning that align with skills.
- There is a lack of communication in this small district.
- Team and staff meetings
- Surveys, meetings, ability to attend board meetings and express opinion
- I think there are attempts, but no follow through or consistency in the maintaining of results. We work on breaking down test scores, but what happens then in individual classes.
- Communication and focus start out on the right path and are eventually lost. Things are completed and followed through with, therefore focus is lost.
- Too many things are started and not carried through. We as staff feel like guinea pigs by always getting ‘let’s try this and see how it works’ attitude. Many teachers will do what is asked but nothing happens to those who do not even attempt it.

16. How does the district use data to guide improvement and to monitor the results of efforts to improve?

- District leadership looks at data and discusses data with teachers.
- By sending the teachers out of the classroom to meetings.
- Have used professional days to disseminate data
• At the high school level teachers give a numerous amount of assessments but they do not go back and work on problem areas. They proceed on whether the students were successful or not.

Same as before, there are attempts, but no follow through in a lot of areas.

• We are working towards these goals, but I don't think we place enough focus on long-term. We analyze data and test scores, but then we tend to not follow through with our results.

• Our district uses data from assessments to monitor student progress. We discuss where changes need to be made and how best to accommodate students so that they can show improvement.

• Still a work in progress.

24. How does the district provide and ensure support for student learning?

• Through traditional channels. ESS, Homework Den and also RTI this year.

• The district provides RTI for all students who need extra help.

• not sure

• This is an area that needs improvement. I have mixed feelings about this question.

• We have programs for students which are a good start, but I do not think we have high expectations as a school. We tend to spoon feed and give in to the pressure of grades. C is average and people seem to forget that.

• I feel our family resource center needs to find ways to involve our community more. Not only FRYSC, but our Administrators as well. I feel like many people have this feeling that they are not welcomed at times.

• They have the ESS program. RTI has been implemented this year. However, it is being used as a study hall instead of instruction for struggler learners.

31. How does the district guide and ensure that instruction supports student learning?

• Lesson Plans, team meetings about best practices

• Observations and leadership should talk to the teachers about their instruction.

• Assessments, lesson plans

• Learning Targets, Curriculum Alignment, Checking Lesson Plans

• I think the same as always, some of the classrooms are more conducive to this than others. Again, we aren't on the same page as a staff and we don't have enough administrative presence in our classroom to observe and make necessary changes.
• I have been taught thoroughly how to meet and instruct my students at their levels. I feel some teachers do this. However, many (as I can tell) teach to the class as a whole.

36. How does the district foster a community of learners dedicated to improvement?

• Team meetings, trying to improve moral.
• Monthly meetings to discuss best practices and to discuss issues.
• At the high school level it is based on individual classroom expectations. The district provides guidelines but it is up to the individual teacher to follow them.
• We come together a lot for meetings, but I would not say that they foster a sense of community as much as rebellion sometimes. We do not celebrate as we should and we really struggle with being on the same page and feeling respected and valued.
• The teachers are doing what they can, but it is an individual effort. We have started having more meetings, but not being followed through with.
• Some do and some don't. Some get so wrapped up in our own personal issues and concerns that we lose focus of keeping student success and achievement front and foremost as we should.
• The district, from being observant is not coming together, teacher's worry too much about what the other teacher is doing and not themselves. If they have a concern they need to professionally address the issue with the Curr. Instructor and the other teacher to work out the problem, not air it out in front of everyone.
• Higher expectations is a good starting point.

40. How does the district build the capacity of leaders to provide leadership for improvement?

• Not sure
• Leaders meet to discuss data and meet with teachers to discuss data and students groupings for RTI. This needs to be revisited for the second semester.
• They do go through our turning in lesson plans and meetings.
• A leadership committee has been established they meet once a month
• We randomly put teachers on committees, but most of the time no one knows what is going on. We do not share PD with others and most of the time if we attempt to they have no interest.
- Our leadership roles have been improving in the past couple of years. It’s crucial for us to identify each other’s strengths and capitalize on those in order to make our school stronger.
- Some are chosen to help lead while nothing is done to those who do nothing!

### 2012 Survey Response Summary Report for Readiness for Accreditation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Not Evident</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Operational</th>
<th>Highly Functional</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Effective Leadership- The leadership decisions and practices support the vision for student learning.</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>66.67</td>
<td>33.33</td>
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<td>2. Policies and Practices-The district has policies and practices in place that support improvement efforts.</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>37.50</td>
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<td>3. Resources and support systems- The district has the human, technology, and material resources to support improvement efforts.</td>
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<td>4. Quality Teachers-The recruitment, placement, and professional development of teachers are aligned with the district's vision for student learning.</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>45.83</td>
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<td>8.33</td>
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<td>5. Quality Information-An information system which collects, manages, and uses information to support the district's vision is in place in the district.</td>
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<td>6. Implementing a vision for student learning through goals and strategies</td>
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<td>7. Maintaining high expectations for student achievement.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>HOW TO ACQUIRE AND SUSTAIN A CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Maintaining a focus on improving student learning that permeates all levels of the district</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Acting on a compelling, shared belief that, collectively, staff and other stakeholders can impact the desired results of the district</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Using data to inform decision-making about teaching and learning</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Using a comprehensive assessment system to provide feedback for improvement in instructional practices and student performance</td>
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<td>4.17</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Using classroom-based assessments to provide robust measures of student's academic, cognitive, and metacognitive skills.</td>
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<td>4.17</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Identifying performance targets, indicators, and measures for comparing and improving effectiveness</td>
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<td>Taking appropriate and timely action to improve areas of identified needs</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Maintaining district-wide expectations for student learning that reflect academic, cognitive, and metacognitive skills</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Delivering on the expectations for student learning through a coherent and rigorous curriculum</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Aligning an assessment system with curriculum that is enacted through instruction</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Supporting the equitable opportunity of students to learn through individualization and differentiation</td>
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<td>21. Providing student support services and special programs to optimize individual student learning.</td>
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<td>22. Supporting a student learning community that includes student involvement</td>
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<td>23. Involving families and the community in supporting children as learners</td>
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<td>25. Using instructional strategies that provide students with focus, feedback, and sufficient opportunities to master skills</td>
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<td>26. Using appropriate strategies to assess the performance of students' academic, cognitive, and metacognitive skills</td>
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<td>27. Adapting instruction to meet individual needs and engage learners</td>
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<td>28. Maximizing the use of time for instruction</td>
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<td>29. Creating a classroom environments conducive to learning</td>
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<td>30. Optimizing technology and multimedia as learning tools</td>
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<td>32. Sharing a common vision and goals that have student learning as the focus</td>
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<td>33. Improving individual and collective performance by coming together regularly for learning, decision-making, problem-solving, and celebration</td>
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<td>34. Continuously enhancing individual effectiveness through inquiry, practice, and peer reflection.</td>
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<td>16.67</td>
<td>66.67</td>
<td>12.50</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
35. Supporting a culture of collegiality, collaboration, respect and trust | 20.83 | 54.17 | 25.00 | 0.00
37. Sharing leadership for the improvement of teaching and learning throughout the district | 8.33 | 58.33 | 29.17 | 4.17
38. Articulating a compelling need for improvement and providing meaningful ways for our professional learning community to focus on its performance | 4.17 | 50.00 | 41.67 | 4.17
39. Engaging in practices that support the ongoing improvement of teaching and learning | 0.00 | 58.33 | 37.50 | 4.17

The following are answers to the text questions asked on the survey:

10. How does the district communicate and maintain a focus on results?

- There have been meetings to discuss scores and changes needed to raise them.
- Staff meetings, PD, email
- Review and corrective actions that take place immediately.
- Good. Meetings where we are informed about this information.
- We meet in content area groups to look at test scores and curriculum alignments periodically throughout the year. We are working together to set and meet common goals.
- Through team meetings, professional development time, staff meetings, and individual meetings with admin.
- We try to analyze test results but then we would never go any further with the information. We are left on our own to figure things out and try to get the students where we need to be.
- Frequent testing of students and analysis of results.

16. How does the district use data to guide improvement and to monitor the results of efforts to improve?

- Placement of students in RTI is evidence of data being used to guide decisions.
- RTI in Grades 4-12, supplemental and intervention in reading grades K-1. Data used to coordinate appropriate responses to areas requiring improvement.
• Students are taking MAPP test and Star testing in Math and Reading. Those scores are used to determine what areas students need additional instruction. The scores are also used to assign students to RTI groups.
• Using data in the classroom (target/assessments) to see if a student has mastered the target—if not, reteach, study techniques (try dif. approach, etc.) re-assess.
• Still working on how to best implement changes in a timely manner and not overwhelming teacher.
• We don't really use this data. We are left to do things on our own. We try to analyze the data together but then it is put away and never looked at again.

24. How does the district provide and ensure support for student learning?
• This seems to be more of a faculty thing. Good teachers will support and challenge students. We are still keeping around those who are not benefiting our students. No class the last the three weeks is unacceptable. Having to let students out of class to go to the library (not open in the mornings when they have their own time) is not a good thing. There seems to have been a focus on improving some of these issues but there is more to be done.
• Multiple opportunities provided as well as consistent communication involving all parties.
• ESS, RTI, individual after school tutoring if asked upon by students.
• Feel remediation classes would have helped if they had been effective, after school tutoring.
• Workshop for parents to become more actively involved.
• We have RTI and Non RTI groups. We also have assemblies to support student learning.
• I feel we need to listen to our students more. They really know what is going on in the classroom. Walking in a classroom for 10 minutes does not give a true picture of what that teacher is doing.

31. How does the district guide and ensure that instruction supports student learning?
• Require teachers and students to keep a data notebook.
• Guidance and observational studies.
• Data notebooks, review of classes with a walk-through.
• We are using data notebooks this year to help students see their progress. Teachers are documenting action plans and providing feedback to improve
instruction and support student learning. By providing teachers with professional development that assist them with their own area of study.

- By teachers being evaluated.
- Meeting with Curr. instructor for added support/information.
- Technology and classroom environment I selected emerging. I selected this because I believe when we move into the new school the technology will be second to none. We have adequate technology now. However, it will be greatly improved. Classroom environment will be completely different for the better as we move into the new school.

36: How does the district foster a community of learners dedicated to improvement?

- We are giving those learners the opportunity to better themselves. Then it becomes a 'leading a horse to water... issue.'
- Creating a sense of accountability for students, teachers, and parents.
- New vision and goals, 7 habits.
- Community of learners is a work in progress and will be for some time, take a survey of parents that are educators and that will give you your answers.
- Red notebooks, but they still need improvement.
- Often as teachers, we have many good ideas to improve things. I often feel that we are ask to make us feel that our ideas are important, but then decisions are made without our suggestions being used.

40. How does the district build the capacity of leaders to provide leadership for improvement?

- There has been an increase in teacher involvement in committees and groups. Unfortunately, some of the more effective teachers have avoided joining in because they have felt that nothing would come of it after the years of how things have went. Then you're stuck with teachers who do not need to be giving anyone input making up these groups.
- Planning where we have PD days through the year.
- This is a tough question- by encouraging teachers to learn continuously, and to step outside their box or their comfort zone.
- Holds meetings after school and a few meetings during school. Needs to focus on everyone listening so learning can take place.
- They try to find professional development that is beneficial but it is not always something that I need. I would like to be able to find things that I need and that would benefit me. They need to take care of the problems of teachers not teaching and not doing what our students need.
VITA

GARRICK RATLIFF

Date of Birth: February 1, 1969
Place of Birth: Chicago, Ill

EDUCATION

1991 Bachelor of Science in Government with a minor in Business Management
Morehead State University
Morehead, Kentucky

1994 Bachelor of Science with an Area of Concentration in Social Sciences, Teaching Certificate in Secondary Education
Pikeville College
Pikeville, Kentucky

1996 Master of Arts in Education with an Emphasis in Guidance and Counseling,
Morehead State University
Morehead, Kentucky

Pending Doctor of Education
Morehead State University
Morehead, Kentucky

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

2011-Present Assistant Superintendent
Robertson County Board of Education
Mt. Olivet, Kentucky

2004-Present Instructional Supervisor
Robertson County Board of Education
Mt. Olivet, Kentucky

2004-Present Director of Pupil Personnel
Robertson County Board of Education
Mt. Olivet, Kentucky

1999-Present
District Assessment Coordinator
Robertson County Board of Education
Mt. Olivet, Kentucky

2011-2012
Principal
Deming School
Mt. Olivet, Kentucky

2004
Assistant Principal
Deming School
Mt. Olivet, Kentucky

1997-2004
Guidance Counselor
Deming School
Mt. Olivet, Kentucky

1997-1999
Varsity Boys Basketball Coach & Building Administrator
Deming School
Mt. Olivet, Kentucky

1996-1997
Teacher
Henry County High School
New Castle, Kentucky

1996-1997
Assistant Varsity Boys Basketball Coach & Freshman Boys Basketball Coach
Henry County High School
New Castle, Kentucky

HONORS

2012-Present
Next Generation Learners and Leaders Committee
KASA
Frankfort, Kentucky

2012
President of Kentucky Association of Educational Supervisors (KAES)
Frankfort, Kentucky

2009
Professional Development Chairman
Kentucky Educational Development Cooperative (KEDC)
Ashland, Kentucky
2007 & 2008

Nominated District Assessment Coordinator of the Year
Kentucky Association of Assessment Coordinators
Frankfort, Kentucky

2003

Nominated Kentucky Guidance Counselor of the Year
Kentucky Association of School Counselors
Frankfort, Kentucky