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The Quick Analysis for Principals in the Alignment of Administrative Plans within the School Improvement Framework at the Middle School Level

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THE QUICK ANALYSIS FOR PRINCIPALS IN THE ALIGNMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE
PLANS WITHIN THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK AT THE
MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL

by

James Vanden Heuvel

A project submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Specialist in Education
Educational Leadership
Western Michigan University
June 2017

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James Vanden Heuvel, Ed.S

Western Michigan University, 2017

High performing schools require administrators to align the continuous improvement efforts with the professional development activities while evaluating teaching and learning for fidelity. The administrative plans of school improvement, professional development, and teacher evaluation systems systemically aligned begin with an administrator who can see the important interaction of these three plans. The increased pressure for improved achievement from stakeholders, coupled with competing demands on time for the school administrator, leads towards a need for efficient tools for improvement. School administrators are creating administrative plans that are in isolation or disconnected from each other which leads to a lack of cohesion. This project creates a quick analysis tool that administrators can use to align administrative plans and improve fidelity of implementation. School principals need quick, helpful, and flexible tools, which lead to improved teaching and learning. The School Improvement Monitoring Tool (SIMT) was created to provide a solution for school principals who are attempting to align their administrative plans. The tool identifies areas of focus for professional development efforts that directly align with the school improvement activities. Finally, the tool can provide evaluation information for principals to use when providing coaching, feedback, and support during the teacher evaluation process. The tool was reviewed by school improvement professionals and simulated with middle school improvement plans. This tool is important for administrators who increasingly are required to show high stake improvements in the areas of teaching and learning as well as aligning efforts for efficiency.

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James Vanden Heuvel

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

School administrators are on the front line in the improvement efforts of their schools by providing leadership in the continuous school improvement process, professional development, and evaluation of teaching and learning. Standard 10 of the National Policy Board of Educational Administration states that “effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student’s academic success and well-being” (p. 2). School principals play an essential role in aligning the organization towards the vision of student success and improved achievement. Robert Marzano (2005) identified 21 responsibilities of the school principal. Some of the key responsibilities he highlighted include being a change agent, monitoring work, providing focus, and allocating resources. The school administrator’s role is to lead the school from the current reality towards the vision of the organization.

School leaders need tools and resources that can be used within the school day to assess, monitor, and evaluate the system they are leading. The purpose of this action research project was to design and implement a tool for school administrators to assess the fidelity and consistency across the administrative plans. The following paper outlines the background about administrative plans, the problem with disconnected planning, a focused literature review, and the creation of a tool that can assist with the tasks of aligning of the plans.

Background

For the purpose of this project, an administrative plan is defined as the written plan or process used in the operation of the school to achieve the mission of improving student outcomes. The primary plans that school administrators interact with include the school improvement plan, which is part of the continuous improvement process, the teacher evaluation plan, and the professional development plan (Lunenburg, 2010). There are other plans that school administrators focus on, which support the school’s mission such as financial, technology, or facility management plans. However, the focus of this project was to target the alignment of the teaching and learning administrative plans, which improve student outcomes.

Many researchers have studied what leads to high performing schools and improved outcomes for student (Robinson, 2008; Marzano, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Districts and schools can contract with consultants, organizations, and businesses that will be very willing to share a program, system, or process that theoretically will improve student achievement. A collection of programs, products, and systems do not make a coherent education system that drives student achievement. Shannon (2004) highlights that research supports a clear and shared focus for the school. School administrators need to have administrative plans to support this clear focus. The school improvement plan, professional development plan, and teacher evaluation plan can provide common language, goals, and focus for the stakeholders in the school.

The school improvement plan is a document that Michigan Department of Education requires because of federal and state statute. The Michigan Department of Education (2007) uses the School Improvement Framework 2.0 to provide a methodology for continuous improvement. The school improvement framework outlines four interconnected efforts of Gather-Study-Plan-Do. Each effort is part of the school improvement process that schools undertake for advancing student achievement. In the development of the improvement plan, school administrators provide leadership in each step of the gathering, study, planning, and doing process (Ludenburg, 2010). The school administrator is an active member of the school improvement team and is often times directly involved in the plan creation and monitoring. School improvement plans are annually reviewed by the school improvement team. Their plans outline goals, objectives, activities, and strategies to address the achievement of students within the system. The plans are created by disaggregating student achievement data along with school systems review processes to determine the needs of the students and the structures of the system (Hanover, 2014). This project acknowledges that strategic plan, school improvement planning, and continuous improvement process are synonymous and helpful in creating clear direction with focus in complex school systems.

The second plan that school administrators develop is the professional development plan. Using the Michigan School Improvement Framework 2.0, administrators will find that professional development is directly embedded into the existing school improvement plan process. The Michigan Department of Education Professional Learning Policy standards guide schools to focus on professional learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment (Learning Forward, 2012). Professional learning

should be directly tied to the goals of the organization outlined in the school improvement plan. The professional development standards also recommend that professional learning should align with teacher performance outcomes. This guidance suggest that effective professional development needs to be connected and aligned to the school improvement plan as well as the teacher evaluation system.

The third plan school administrators need to align is the teacher evaluation plan. The State of Michigan has identified four teacher evaluation systems that have been approved for school districts to use. The approved tools are Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching, Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model, The Thoughtful Classroom, and 5D+ Teaching and Learning. School districts are required by Michigan Public Act 173 of 2015 in the Revised School Code to adopt a teacher evaluation system. Each of the approved evaluation models have research-based standards and indicators that align with high quality teaching. School districts have adopted the teacher evaluation program and require principals to evaluate teachers using the framework. Teachers and administrators are trained in the evaluation process and seek to understand the standards of quality in which they are measured professionally.

To summarize, school administrators use written plans and processes to improve student outcomes. The plans are required by law, informed by best practices, and developed by stakeholders. School staff create these administrative plans but why are their planning efforts not leading to the desired achievement results in schools? Could it be that the written plans and processes are not aligned within each other? Could the plans be created in disconnected isolation leading to potential problems in school operation and student outcomes?

Problem Identification

Schools in every state face the pressure of consequences for underperformance of students. In Michigan, 46% of 3rd grade students are proficient in reading, 31% of the students 3rd-8th grade are proficient in reading and math together, and the 4-year graduation rate is at 79.65% (Michigan Dashboard, 2017). Each school year the State of Michigan identifies the bottom 5% of schools and labels them as failing. The data alarms school staff, parents, school boards, community members, and policy makers. Schools have searched for the root causes for the underperformance. The school administrator is in the position to consider the performance

data and to make data-based decisions to improve the organizational structure towards continued improvement.

The Michigan School Improvement Framework 2.0 assists school districts in reviewing the organization of the school system and district using tools like the School Systems Review and District Systems Review. These review processes help the school administrator identify organizational and instructional areas that need improvement. The research-based improvement process assists the school in looking at system coherence and alignment. The problem is that within the improvement process there are limited tools that administrators can use for monitoring efforts and the tools fail to connect the administrative plans of the school together.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was conducted to explore what research says about the school improvement process, connecting administrative plans, and the availability of tools that align administrative plans together. It is well documented in the research that there are multiple factors that contribute to improvement for students. Dr. John Hattie (2009) in his book *Visible Learning* conducted a meta-analysis on the effect size of educational activities' impact on student achievement. Readers can review Dr. Hattie's descriptive list of the variety of activities that teachers and schools can do to effect learning such as providing formative evaluation, teacher/student relationships, teacher clarity, professional development, and many others. In addition to all the factors that influence student achievement, it is possible that it is not the educational activities alone that had total effect on student achievement but the framework or process the activities were implemented.

The continuous improvement process is defined by Hanover (2014) as a "road map that sets out the changes a school needs to make to improve the level of student achievement, and shows how and when these changes will be made" (p.5) The Carnegie Foundation (2013) provides another definition for continuous improvement process as the act of integrating quality improvement into the daily work of individuals in the system. The use of continuous improvement has become common place in Michigan public schools due to federal legislation of Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. There are several methodologies of continuous improvement identified by the *Carnegie Report on Continuous Improvement in Education* (2010). Some of the methodologies are adapted from business and private companies such as Sig Sigma, Lean and Results-Oriented-Cycle of Inquiry. However, the model that is identified in the Michigan School Improvement Framework 2.0 is called the Model for Improvement, which includes the steps of Plan, Do, Study, and Act. A systemic approach is needed to make the improvements to our nation's schools. Darling-Hammond (2010) says that "To meet twenty-first-century demands, the United States needs to move beyond a collection of disparate and shifting reform initiatives to a thoughtful, well-organized and well-supported set of policies that will enable young people to thrive in the new world they are entering" (p. 6). A systemic approach towards aligning administrative plans will accelerate the type of change that is needed

for student success in schools. The continuous improvement process is a systemic process that provides the road map towards quality improvement efforts within the school.

The Michigan Board of Education adopted the School Improvement Framework 2.0 in 2014. The goal of the School Improvement Framework 2.0 is to assist schools and districts in continuous improvement efforts leading to increased student achievement. Miles (2008) emphasizes the importance of instructional coherence with a common instructional framework, staff working conditions that support implementation of the framework, and allocation of resources such as staff, time, and materials to advance the framework.

The research further indicates that inter-connectedness of administrative plans (school improvement, professional development, and teacher evaluation systems) will lead to improved student achievement (Robinson, 2008; Hammond, 2000; Hirsch, 2009; Fullan, 2002). For example, Michael Fullan (2002) describes that the principal needs to be involved in coherence-making and avoid fragmentation. Darling-Hammond (2000) explored the connection of state policies of teacher quality on student achievement. Her study examined the educational impact of teacher connected policies of hiring, certification, and professional development with consideration of the alignment towards overall teacher quality. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) completed a meta-analysis of the impact of leadership practices on student achievement. Their findings indicate five leadership practices that together lead towards improved outcomes. The practices include:

- Establishing goals and expectations;
- Resourcing strategically;
- Planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum;
- Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development,
- Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment (p. 635).

The Southern Regional Education Board (2010) researched schools to identify and share practices that improve learning. They identified findings which include the following: focus on achieving strategic vision and plan, invest in high quality professional development, and give administrators real authority over staff selection, instructional program as well as aligning resources. Goe, Biggers, and Croft (2012) identified the importance of connecting teacher evaluation and professional development on improving student outcomes. With the research supporting connecting the administrative plans, why isn't this alignment occurring within the

school environment consistently? I believe that a tool does not exist that would easily and quickly connect the plans together for monitoring.

The *Practical School Improvement Timeline for Michigan* (2017) website highlights some tools that have been developed to improve monitoring according to the Michigan School Improvement Framework 2.0. The tools range from a quarterly monitoring survey to task matrix. However, the tools are not aligned to the professional development or teacher evaluation plans. The teacher evaluation systems like Charlotte Danielson and Robert Marzano have tools for administrators for classroom observations and teacher feedback forms. However, these tools are specifically designed for the teacher evaluation system. I was unable to find tools that supported professional development monitoring compliance beyond surveys and sign-in sheets.

One tool that has been used over the years for monitoring instructional compliance is the classroom walk-through tool. The existing classroom walk through protocols also known as learning walks, Data walks, Mini-observations, Data-in-a-day, Instructional walkthroughs, and Reflective walkthroughs. Professional learning visits, and Rounds are used by administrators and teachers to improve teaching practices. The informal walk-throughs tools include rubrics, checklists, narratives, and other forms.

Quality teachers are essential for student achievement. Research has indicated that having a highly qualified teacher in the classroom increases student achievement (Tucker, 2005). Classroom walkthroughs have been increasingly used to informally supervise teachers and observe classroom activities (Protheroe, 2009). Her summary of research highlights some specific benefits of walkthroughs and improving instruction:

- Administrators become familiar with the school's curriculum and instructional practices,
- Administrators can gauge the climate of the school,
- A team atmosphere develops as teachers and administrators examine achievement and Instruction, and;
- Students see administrators and teacher's value instruction and learning (p. 30).

The blog by Ian Kelly titled *Educator Evaluation: Policy to Practice* (2014) summarized the research between walk-throughs and teacher evaluation as follows:

Ginsberg and Murphy (2002) define walkthroughs as frequent, short, unscheduled visits. According to Ginsburg and Murphy, these visits have the capacity to develop “focused, reflective, and collaborative adult learning” (p.34). Cervone and Martinez-Miller (2007) conceptualize the classroom walkthrough as part of a cycle of improvement that focuses on “the effects of instruction” and observation of “the effects of the delivered program on students” (p.2). Bloom (2007) further defines walkthroughs adding that they are intended to support the development of professional learning communities, are tied to strengthening teaching, are “grounded in a commitment to the success of every student and every teacher” (p. 42) and that they are built on transparent processes and protocols. Given the potential benefits of this practice and analysis of those characteristics that define effective walkthroughs is prudent.

Some researchers have cautioned using the classroom walk-throughs as evaluation tools. Donald Kachur (2014) cautions administrators that walk-throughs are not intended for formal teacher evaluations. The reason for the caution is specifically related to the potential fear of the evaluation process.

Classroom walk-through’s have also been used for enhancing professional development. The idea of classroom walkthroughs are to help administrators and teachers learn more about instruction and to identify what training and support teachers need (David, 2009). Research on classroom walkthroughs is rather limited and findings indicate those doing the walkthroughs report more learning than those being observed (Marsh, 2005).

Walk-throughs enhance teacher professional development by providing important observations that can inform teachers and administrators in growth areas. Franklin (2017) identified that walk through data should be used to make continuous improvement connecting to professional development. Teachers use walk-throughs to observe other teachers delivering instructional strategies that may be innovative or effective. David (2007) describes the goal of walk-throughs are to help administrators and teachers focus on instruction and identify areas for professional growth.

Classroom walk-throughs have been used as an important tool for administrators and teachers over the years to improve instruction but there has been limited research about using the classroom walk-through tool to look for alignment of school improvement processes, professional development, and teacher evaluation. The State of Michigan Revised School Code 451 of 1976 outlines in statute that school districts should use the evaluation of teachers to inform decisions regarding “promotion, retention, and development of teachers and

administrators including providing relevant coaching, instruction support, or professional development.” Classroom walk-through data integrated with professional development and teacher evaluation can provide an effective way to address statutory requirements as well as drive student achievement.

A careful survey of all existing walk-through tools did not provide for the alignment of the school improvement plan with the professional development and teacher evaluation system. Classroom observation tools historically have had the following criticisms:

- Observers have been asked to do too much;
- Rubrics are too complex;
- Ratings are often inflated and/or inaccurate;
- Observations don’t focus on enough feedback (TNTP, 2013).

The literature review highlights several studies that investigate questions related to factors that influence or impact student outcomes. Some of the studies highlight individual factors that have had an effect on achievement. Other studies have supported the benefits of aligning leadership practices around goal setting, teacher preparation and training, as well evaluation. Further reviews were conducted looking for tools that would provide for alignment of administrative plans. Particular interest in the walk through model was highlighted as a tool that has been a researched method for regular observations of monitoring improvement efforts along with teacher development. The literature review supports the need for aligning administrative plans using a walk-through model to improve student outcomes. However, there are limited tools available for principals.

CHAPTER 3

SOLUTION AND METHODOLOGY

With this gap in quick tools for administrators, I set out to create a tool that aligns the school improvement plan, professional development plan, and teacher evaluation plan with the goals of being simple, flexible, and collaborative. The concept of a tool originated from an understanding of systems thinking informed by Peter Senge (1990) and his thoughts about learning organizations. He describes the two fundamental aspects of seeing systems: seeing patterns of interdependency and seeing into the future (p. 343). Using this conceptual framework, I set out to envision a tool for school administrators to take the essential parts of their administrative planning and combine them together to see if new learning could be created for the organization. In this chapter, I will highlight the solution using a concept map and description of the alignment tool used for quick analysis for school administrators as well as the methodology used to create and test the tool.

Concept Map

In building a tool, I felt it was important to begin with a concept map that displayed how the different administrative plans should build on each other. Each administrative plan aligns with the plan below itself. The concept map is called the Sustainable Administrative Plan Alignment Model. This model provides clarity to how the plans need to be aligned by the school administrator (See Figure 1).



Figure 1-Sustainable Administrative Plan Alignment

I believe that the district vision, mission, and goals are the foundation for the organization. The school board along with the superintendent provide the vision of the schools. When the schools understand what is envisioned for the organization, then the school administrators can build the administrative plans that help the organization get to the envisioned future. The next administrative plan that needs to be considered is the Teacher Evaluation Framework. This plan is the research based system that guides teaching and learning. Each teacher evaluation system identifies standards and indicators for teaching, learning, and organizational structure for those activities. After the teacher evaluation system is implemented, the school improvement plans with the goals, objectives, activities, and strategies are developed. The next administrative plan that needs to be aligned is the professional development plan. Teachers and staff are continuously learning and improving towards the envisioned future. A tool of aligning all these important plans together would lead to improved student outcomes.

Description of Alignment Tool

The solution that I developed is called The School Improvement Monitoring Tool (SIMT). It uses the concept of the classroom walk-through method to document observables based on the school improvement plan and analyzed for professional development and teacher evaluation. It is a modified walk-through using some characteristics of traditional walk-through but differs in that the tool is simple, flexible, and has coherence with the different plans. Traditional walk-throughs failed to connect the three plans together with ease. The School Improvement Monitoring Tool meets the goals of flexibility, is easy to use, and aligns the administrative plans.

The following sections review each tab of the School Improvement Monitoring Tool. The first section will be the Overview and Instructions Tab. This section gives the user the needed information to use the tool. The next section of the tool is the Observables Worksheet. This section assists school improvement teams and administrators in the development of the observables for the tool. The third section is the School Improvement Observation Tab. This is where the data is recorded by the administrator. The forth section is the Professional Development Tab. Administrators will get a quick glance at what areas the staff need training. The final section is the Teacher Evaluation Tab. Teacher observation data is calculated on this tab to gather informal feedback for teachers.

Overview and Instructions Tab

The Overview and Instructions tab gives information about how to enter and analyze the data on the School Improvement Monitoring Tool. Users follow the directions to understand how the tool is used. They are guided to use the tool for gathering observation data as well data analysis. The overview section talks about the purpose of the tool. The Directions for SIMT Data Collection discusses how to download or open the tool along with information about steps to manage the tool. The directions for analysis discuss the different tabs used for viewing information of alignment (See Figure 2).

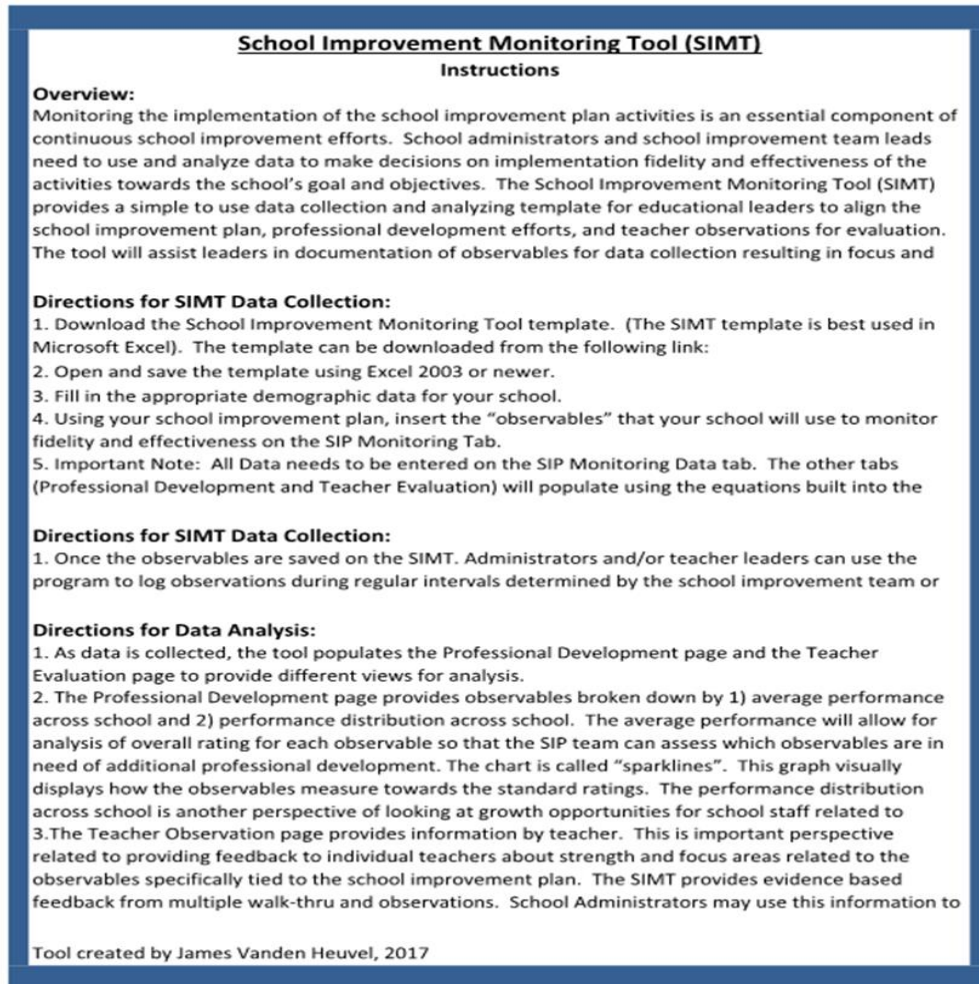


Figure 2-Overview and Instructions Tab

Observables Worksheet Tab

The Observables Worksheet Tab provides the School Improvement Team a process to consider how to make the school improvement goals and teacher evaluation standards aligned using observables that meet the criteria of being measurable, quick, and clear. This important process clearly identifies the work of alignment. Teachers will need to know exactly what is being looked for when an observation is occurring. This observable is connected to the school improvement activities as well as the teacher evaluation standard or indicator (See Figure 3).

The School Improvement Observation Tab provides a format for school administrators to collect observational data in one location that aligns with improvement plans, professional development, and teacher evaluation. This tool is simple to use as well as useful for the tasks of monitoring and implementation fidelity. The tool has the following features:

- [illegible]

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The School Improvement Plan is used to meet statutory requirements for federal and state regulations outlined by the State of Michigan. The School Improvement Plan includes goals written towards increasing student achievement. These goals are operationalized with objectives and activities that need to be written as observables.

The administrator inserts the rating score as they complete their observations throughout the regular walk-throughs. This tab provides one location to keep track of the walk-throughs. In the past, administrators may keep personal notes about observations, use a template, or simply not document walk-throughs. This page provides a place for the data. Cells on the observation tab are connected to algorithms that analyze the data towards actionable plans. The cumulative data align with the professional development and teacher evaluation tabs on the remaining pages of the School Improvement Monitoring Tool.

Professional Development Tab

The Professional Development Tab utilizes the data from the School Improvement Observation TAB and organizes the data into two views: a) Average score: summarizes the SIP indicator into average rating score, b) Counter Score: calculates the number of SIP indicators in each rating score. School Improvement Teams will be able to use these two calculations to make decisions regarding professional development needs (See Figure 5).

The SIMT will take all the observables that are listed on the Observation page and analyze the data on the professional development page. The data will populate automatically and the administrator will be able to view easily which observables are being implemented with fidelity (Exemplary), which observables are in need of encouragement (satisfactory), and which observables will need more targeted support. The professional development page has two different charts that allow the data to be analyzed for unique feedback.

The first chart provides information about the average performance across the School. This information will give administrators a perspective of general progress towards school improvement efforts. Administrators can use this view to support professional development efforts throughout the school year. For example, if a particular observable is underperforming,

the school administrator can invite teachers to discuss at the monthly staff meeting how they are implementing the observable with fidelity.

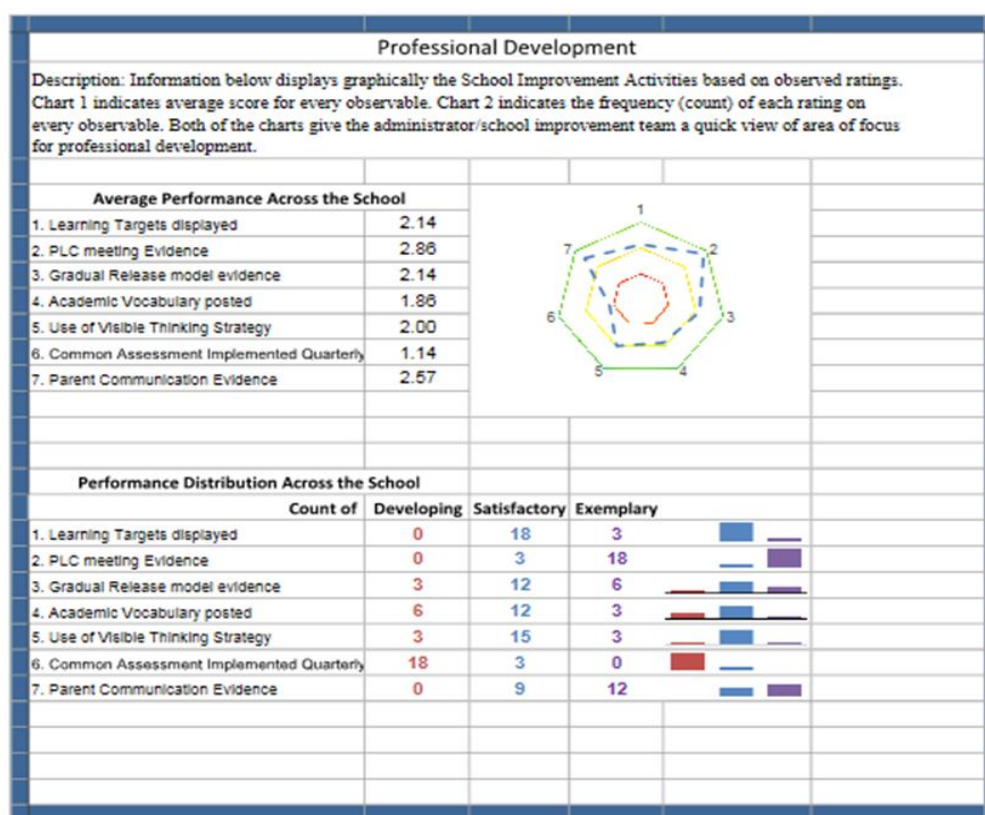


Figure 5-Professional Development

The second chart on the professional development page indicates “performance distribution across the school”. This distribution analysis is another way of viewing strengths and deficits in fidelity of implementation. An observable will be clearly identified as needing attention during professional development trainings. School Administrators will find the data easy to view and utilize in planning specific professional development opportunities.

Teacher Evaluation Tab

The Teacher Evaluation Tab gathers data from the SIP Observation and organizes it by teacher or group. School administrators can use the data as inputs for evidence of teacher

The final page of the School Improvement Monitoring Tool populates the classroom walkthrough data by teacher. This information shows how each teacher is implementing the observables within the context of their work. The school administrator can use this important information to provide informal observational data for the teacher during the teacher evaluation process. The State of Michigan approved Teacher Evaluation Models all include evaluation based on observations and implementation of school improvement strategies. It is important to realize that teachers need to understand that implementation of the school improvement plan correlates to their professional evaluation. The system of accountability should drive expected behaviors resulting in improved outcomes in achievement.

[illegible]

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Methodology

The methodology for this project follows the Action Research Design. The problem of a lack of tools for aligning the administrative plans for school administrators was identified through literature review, a solution of a tool was designed to address the problem, and action was carried out with the tool to discover if the tool addressed the problem. Action Research Design follows the continuous learning process (Hine, 2013). It was chosen because of the solution focus and practical applications of the research design. The method allows for continued learning about the effectiveness of aligning administrative plans.

Action Research requires an action to be taken or an intervention to be completed to determine if the solution makes a difference towards solving the problems identified. The school improvement monitoring tool was developed in the spring of 2017. The tool was shared with professionals identified as potential users to gather feedback on its flexibility and usability. Due to the timing of the project, the tool was not able to be used during the school year for actual implementation. The tool was tested by 4 professionals (one teacher leader, two administrators, and an ISD consultant) who interact within the school improvement process. The tool was also used in simulation with middle school improvement plans from the local ISD. The results from both the feedback from potential users and the simulation provided information that will be used to improve the tool for the future implementation.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Results

A review was conducted of ten local middle school improvement plans to determine the specificity and measurability of activities from the school improvement plan. Below is a list of school activities identified on the school improvement plans. It is clear that many of the activities identified in school district school improvement plans lacked specificity and measurability to the degree that would be required to analyze fidelity, effectiveness, and alignment. School improvement teams did not document on the school improvement plans the specific observables or measurable features of the activities that were being identified. This raises several questions for me related to fidelity and monitoring of the effectiveness of the activities. What measures are being used to determine if the activity is being implemented with fidelity?

Sample Activities from School Improvement Plans (10 Kent County Middle Schools)

- After-School and Summer School
- MTSS Structure: (What really matters in RTI)
- Title 1 push in/pull out/ models of instruction
- Parent Involvement Activities/Family Education Nights
- Moby Math Program
- Reading A-Z Program
- Reading/Writing Interventionist
- Instructional Specialist
- MAP Testing 3x/year
- Discovery Education Assessments
- 60/40 Rule (60% of reading informational/ 40% narrative.)
- Provide Clear Learning Goals/Posted in Classroom
- Using Visible Thinking
- Tier 2: All Staff adding supplemental instruction in writing

There are two questions that school improvement teams need to answer when creating their plans. First, how do we describe the observables? Secondly, how are we going to measure that we are implementing with fidelity? School improvement teams will drive student achievement when they can clearly identify specific observable targets from their activities and they describe how they are going to monitor that the activities are going to be implemented with fidelity. The School Improvement Monitoring Tool will assist the school administrator in completing both of those important tasks.

Specifically, the process used on the Observables Worksheet allowed for deeper thinking about how to develop measurable observables from the list of activities. The process of describing observable behaviors was much more challenging than I originally thought. For example, the activity of hiring a writing interventionist is achievable but how to describe the observables of a writing interventionist moving students from not performing to improved proficiency?

This process was reviewed with a teacher-leader and school improvement chair within a local school district. Her initial question to the school improvement monitoring tool observables requirement was, “How do you measure the variety activities by observation?” She went on to express concern about how many improvement efforts are hard to observe within a short period. These reflective questions guided the development of the observables worksheet. Deeper thinking at the beginning of the school improvement plan development around specific activities for implementation need to answer the question, how will this be observed and what are the specific observables for each activity? The clearly identified observables are the outcomes that guide improvement efforts. The teacher leader also recommended a visual guide for protocol of the tool. The process of the school improvement monitoring tool could be made easier with a flow chart of steps to follow. This suggestion is a potential area for improvement as the tool is used consistently in a school district.

The School Improvement Monitoring Tool was shared with a school improvement consultant with a local school district. The consultant is a curriculum director, title coordinator, and school improvement process team member with numerous districts. He reviewed the tool and provided feedback on the application within the school improvement framework. He stated that he thinks monitoring activities are imperative to continuous improvement efforts and had a few suggestions for improvement. One enhancement to the tool is adding student outcome data

that correlated to the observables. This was something I had not thought of. He also suggested that districts need to measure the fidelity and effectiveness of the activities to determine if they are meeting the goals. A regular monitoring with the outcomes of students would be a powerful resource for school administrators. This would be an area for further consideration of the School Improvement Monitoring Tool.

A local school principal reviewed the School Improvement Monitoring Tool to provide feedback on the usability, flexibility, and simplicity. The principal identified the fact that he understands the importance of regular monitoring of activities from the school improvement plan and connecting that to other administrative plans. He expressed the need for a tool that allows one place to document observations. The principal suggested that walk through data can get lost or not organized in a systematic way to see patterns or iterations. In regards to the usability, flexibility, and simplicity; the principal believed this tool met the expectations. He believed that the tool would be useful starting at the beginning of a school year so that he can gather the observations throughout the year and provide constructive feedback to the teachers he is evaluating and coaching. In addition to the positive feedback, He stated that the language on the tool specifically with “Teacher Evaluation Tab” may create additional anxiety for teachers. He provided constructive feedback about changing the “Teacher Evaluation Tab” to “Monitoring/Coaching”. This feedback aligned with the concerns from the literature review about using classroom observations for evaluation purposes. Finally, the principal identified that this tool could be converted to technology improvements like iPad/Chromebook applications, which would provide even quicker analysis for school administrators. This was helpful in regards to possible future designs of the School Improvement Monitoring Tool. The principal agreed to use the tool in his school in the coming year to improve his monitoring activities as well as align the improvement goals with professional development and teacher evaluation.

The tool was shared with a school improvement consultant with the local ISD. She was involved in the initial development of the project. The consultant described how the need exists for school principals to monitor the fidelity of the activities of the school improvement plan as well as look for ways to use professional development to support the efforts of the plan. She is an expert who interacts with over 20 school districts in the development of their school improvement efforts. The consultant received a copy of the tool and a request to provide any feedback of the usefulness of the tool and its potential use within the school improvement

framework at other school districts. The tool is under review and recommendations will be considered for improvement into the future.

Conclusion

This project's goal was to create a school improvement monitoring tool that would quickly align the administrative plans used by school administrators. The classroom walk-through is a research based method that has benefited teaching and learning in many schools. The School Improvement Monitoring Tool enhances the traditional models of walk-throughs by using school improvement observables that connect directly to professional development and teacher evaluation plans. Overall, the tool is a resource that school administrators can use to improve student achievement and continuous improvement efforts. This paper provides an overview the problem with disconnected administrative plans and a solution to improving alignment of the plans with a research validated method. Following the action research design, this tool is has some initial positive outcomes from individuals and simulations that work within the school improvement process. As a recommendation for further study, the tool should be used by a principal in local school to review its usefulness with real-time information. The suggestions from users will improve the tool in meeting the goals of simplicity, usability, and effectiveness towards aligning administrative plans towards improved student outcomes.

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APPENDIX

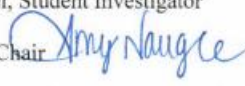
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: October 25, 2016

To: Dennis McCrumb, Principal Investigator
James Vanden Heuvel, Student Investigator

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair 

Re: HSIRB Project Number 16-10-48

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "A Quick Analysis of Alignment of Administrative Plans within School Improvement Framework at the Middle School Level" has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). Based on that review, the HSIRB has determined that approval is not required for you to conduct this project because you are not collecting personal identifiable (private) information about individual and your scope of work does not meet the Federal definition of human subject.

45 CFR 46.102 (f) Human Subject

(f) *Human subject* means a living individual **about whom** an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains

- (1) Data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or
- (2) Identifiable private information.

Intervention includes both physical procedures by which data are gathered (for example, venipuncture) and manipulations of the subject or the subject's environment that are performed for research purposes. *Interaction* includes communication or interpersonal contact between investigator and subject. *Private information* includes information about behavior that occurs in a context in which an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or recording is taking place, and information which has been provided for specific purposes by an individual and which the individual can reasonably expect will not be made public (for example, a medical record). Private information must be individually identifiable (i.e., the identity of the subject is or may readily be ascertained by the investigator or associated with the information) in order for obtaining the information to constitute research involving human subjects.

"About whom" – a human subject research project requires the data received from the living individual to be about the person.

Thank you for your concerns about protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects. A copy of your protocol and a copy of this letter will be maintained in the HSIRB files.

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