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A Phenomenological Study of Practicing Educators' Personal and Collaborative Experiences within a Climate of High Stakes Individual Accountability

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PRACTICING EDUCATORS' PERSONAL
AND COLLABORATIVE EXPERIENCES WITHIN A CLIMATE OF
HIGH STAKES INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

by

Kathy L. Stewart

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PRACTICING EDUCATORS' PERSONAL
AND COLLABORATIVE EXPERIENCES WITHIN A CLIMATE OF
HIGH STAKES INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Kathy L. Stewart, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2016

With the national focus in education turning to increasing student achievement and closing achievement gaps between demographic groups, federal and state policy has extended responsibility and high stakes accountability for student growth and achievement. Overall, student achievement status and elimination of achievement gaps between demographically defined sub-groups of students remain cornerstones of accountability under ESEA and now ESSA. Under the Obama Administration, however, accountability for academic growth was extended to individual classroom teachers and school and district-level administrators through federal policy provisions tying student growth to performance evaluation. As a result, many states, including Michigan, enacted legislation to mandate high stakes teacher and administrator evaluation be connected to student achievement. With statutory changes to the Michigan School Code enacted July 2011, Michigan came on board with performance ratings tied to student growth with implications for contract renewal, layoff, recall, and even compensation.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine how teachers responded to the shift to a high stakes individual accountability system and how they are making sense of the changes related to their individual professional practices and collegial collaborative practices. Specifically, I examined how teachers are experiencing

the implementation of the legislated evaluation requirements in two areas: (1) influences on individual practice as a classroom teacher; and (2) impact on collegiality and collaboration with peers. I also explored how the teachers who participated in this study think about and take personal meaning from their experiences with the accountability measures embedded in the statutory provisions for teacher performance reviews, as well as the implications of those reviews for job security and compensation related to the student growth component required in the evaluation legislation.

This phenomenological study included 14 practicing teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Participants responded to a criterion-based recruitment from a large pool of teachers in eastern mid-Michigan and participated in an online interview experience. Through an extensive, multi-layered, and recursive data analysis method utilizing open-coding and emergent analysis processes, I discovered and gave voice to four themes from the study participants: (a) teachers adjusted to a rubric system for performance evaluation purposes, (b) teachers adapted their professional practices following the implementation the high stakes accountability evaluations, (c) teachers discovered changes in their collaborative practices, and (d) teachers developed specific views on the inclusion of growth data in the performance evaluation system.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all professional educators, past, present, and aspiring. Long before mentors were required by legislation and a focus on student achievement became a federal and state mandate, I was fortunate to serve with educators who wanted the best for all students and were willing to share their talent and experiences with then a fledgling educator. It was through a number of focused mentors that I became the educator I am today. These mentors instilled in me a desire to serve with heart and compassion. Each and every student that enters a classroom deserves a champion who is looking out for their welfare. It is these champions who choose a career in the field of education that I applaud and encourage to seek to give their best to the children we are charged to serve.

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As I reflect on the journey this experience provided me, there are many individuals who deserve acknowledgement. It was their encouragement, praise, guidance, support, and yes, push, that motivated me to complete this educational program. I extend deep gratitude to all I have met along this journey.

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To the many instructors at Western Michigan University: You took a then mid-career educator and helped me expand and stretch my thinking regarding educational research and practices. Thank you.

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Most importantly, I wish to acknowledge the support of my family. Without the support and flexibility of my husband Ron, I would have never reached this educational goal. I recognize the many times that both my work and my education interfered with

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Background.....	3
Legislative Reforms.....	3
Michigan’s Evaluation System.....	6
Collaborative Practices.....	7
Problem Statement.....	10
Practical Problem.....	11
Research Problem	12
Purpose Statement and Research Questions	14
Methods Overview.....	15
Theoretical Foundation.....	16
Conceptual Framework.....	17
Chapter I Summary	21
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	22
Legislative Reforms.....	22
Michigan Public Act 25.....	22

Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER		
	No Child Left Behind Act of 2001	23
	Race to the Top.....	25
	Michigan Public Acts 100-103	27
	Collaborative Practices	35
	Professional Learning Communities.....	36
	Data Teams	45
	Peer Coaching.....	51
	Michigan’s Education Evaluation System.....	56
	Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness.....	57
	Teacher Observation and Evaluation System Findings	60
	Value Added Models	69
	Chapter II Summary.....	77
III.	METHODOLOGY	79
	Research Questions.....	79
	Research Design	80
	Setting, Subjects, and Sampling	81
	Recruitment and Consent Procedures.....	83
	Data Types and Sources.....	84
	Data Collection Procedures	85
	Data Analysis.....	86

Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER		
	Delimitations and Limitations	88
	Assumptions	88
	The Researcher and Reflexivity.....	89
	Chapter III Summary	91
IV.	RESULTS	92
	Description of Unit Analysis: Subjects.....	92
	Participant 1	95
	Participant 2	96
	Participant 3	96
	Participant 4	96
	Participant 5	97
	Participant 6	97
	Participant 7	97
	Participant 8	97
	Participant 9	98
	Participant 10	98
	Participant 11	98
	Participant 12	99
	Participant 13	99
	Participant 14	100

Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER		
	Data Collection	100
	Analysis of Interviews	101
	Analysis of Themes and Subthemes	103
	Theme 1: Teachers Adjusted to a Rubric System for Performance Evaluation Purposes	105
	Theme 2: Teachers Adapted Their Professional Practices Following the Implementation of High Stakes Accountability Evaluations.....	111
	Theme 3: Teachers Experienced Changes in Their Collaborative Practices	114
	Theme 4: Teachers Described Specific Views on the Use of Student Growth Data.....	119
	Chapter IV Summary.....	124
V.	OVERVIEW	126
	Focus of the Study	127
	Interpretation of Findings	130
	Research Question 1: How are Teachers Experiencing the Implementation of Michigan’s High Stakes Performance Evaluation System as it is Being Carried Out in Their Schools?	131
	Research Question 2: How are Teachers Experiencing the Professional Culture in Their Schools Since the Implementation of Michigan’s New High Stakes Performance Evaluation Systems in Their Schools?.....	132
	Relationship of Results to Existing Studies.....	132
	Theme 1: Findings Related to Educators Adjusting to a Performance Rubric Evaluation System.....	133

Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER	
	Theme 2: Findings Related to Educators Adapting Their Professional Practices 136
	Theme 3: Findings Related to Changes in Collaborative Practices.. 138
	Theme 4: Findings Related to Teachers Views on the Use of Student Growth Data 140
	Limitations 143
	Recommendations..... 145
	Recommendations for State Policymakers 146
	Recommendations for Practitioners..... 148
	Conclusion 150
REFERENCES 153
APPENDICES 173
A.	Participant Informed Consent Form..... 173
B.	Interested Teacher Participant Profile Information Collection..... 178
C.	Recruitment Email 180
D.	Interview Protocol Template..... 183
E.	Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement 187
F.	HSIRB Approval..... 189

LIST OF TABLES

1. Participant Demographics	95
2. Emerging Themes by Participant	104
3. Theme 1: Teachers Adjusted to a Rubric System for Performance Evaluation Distribution Across Subthemes.....	106
4. Theme 2: Teachers Adapted Their Professional Practices Distribution Across Subthemes	112
5. Theme 3: Teachers Experienced Changes in Collaborative Practices Subthemes Distribution	115
6. Theme 4: Teachers Described Specific Views on the Use of Student Growth Data Subthemes Distribution	119
7. Comparison of Research for Theme 1.....	133
8. Comparison of Research for Theme 2.....	137
9. Comparison of Research for Theme 3.....	139
10. Comparison of Research for Theme 4.....	142

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Teacher experiences of their field based on basic management and needs theory as related to legislated accountability reforms, educator evaluation systems, and collaborative initiatives. 20

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Due to sweeping changes in federal education policy over the past two decades, Michigan joined other states in passing a number of legislative measures influencing the funding and operational structure of public schools. Increasingly, these legislative changes mandate greater accountability for student achievement results and raise the stakes for delivering those results. Michigan educators, by necessity, adapted to implement these wide-ranging legislative changes affecting the schools and districts in which they serve. Some changes, including the Michigan Merit Curriculum and the Common Core State Standards, raised curriculum and achievement expectations. Other changes created new ways to measure school effectiveness by identifying schools as Priority, Focus, or Reward Schools, and developed rewards and sanctions for schools based on student achievement targets (Michigan Act 451 of 1976).

The most recent round of State legislated school changes intensified the focus on student achievement by holding educators individually accountable for student outcomes (Michigan Public Act (PA) 100-103 of 2011). These changes expanded current policies from rewards and consequences meted out at the district and building level, to incentives and consequences affecting individual teachers and administrators (PA 100-103 of 2011). While there is a long history of state and federal statutory changes to improve schools, this study focuses on major legislated reforms beginning with Michigan Public Act 25 of 1990 and culminating with PA 100-103 of 2011. This period in Michigan public school education illustrates how accountability for student achievement started at the school and district level, and then transitioned down to the classroom level with assessment of

individual teacher and administrator performance as measures of accountability for student achievement results.

As of September 2013, 34 states and the District of Columbia adopted legislation connecting student achievement to educator evaluations (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013). The current study is concerned with the potential tensions teachers in these states, including Michigan the context for this dissertation research, may experience as they adapt to legislation that (a) holds them individually responsible for student achievement and (b) attaches high personal and professional stakes to this accountability. This new layer of responsibility works alongside previous legislated changes that give schools and districts their own set of accountability measures, sanctions, and rewards. The layers of legislated accountability—district, school, and individual—all operate simultaneously.

Simultaneous accountability raises the possibility of emerging conflicts for individual teachers now that job security, job placement, and compensation link directly to judgments of educator and school effectiveness in very explicit ways (Olsen & Sexton, 2009; PA 100-103 of 2011).

This study examines how individual educators, in particular teachers, experience and make sense of the new reality of individual teacher accountability. Of particular interest is going inside the experiences of teachers to examine how they are internalizing the nexus between high stakes performance evaluation as it is being carried out in their schools and their individual teaching practices. The study further examines how teachers describe changes in their involvement in collaborative professional activities and processes since passage of PA 100-103. Finally, the study also explores changes in collaborative teaching practices.

Background

As mentioned, this study examines how teachers deal with the tension, conflict, and uncertainty arising from recent legislation that ties teacher evaluation to student achievement related to their individual professional practices. The study also explores changes in collaborative teaching practices. The paragraphs below provide a brief overview of relevant legislative reforms, components of Michigan's evaluation model, and promising collaborative educator practices resulting in improved student achievement.

Legislative Reforms

Michigan Public Act 25 of 1990 (PA 25 of 1990) established the first comprehensive accountability framework for Michigan's schools. Key elements of the act required schools to: (a) develop a school improvement plan that included accountability processes to measure progress toward the goals cited in this plan, (b) implement a state established core curriculum, and (c) publish an annual education report. Additionally, each school building received an accreditation status that was defined by a state set of standards and made public. Prior to this legislation, school improvement plans and activities were reliant on each individual school's leadership.

Beyond PA 25 of 1990, several federal measures also addressed accountability and student achievement. As part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) authorized federal funds for school districts that served disadvantaged students (Brauer, 1982). However, the act did not include accountability measures as requisites for funding. Local districts, as well as

intermediate school districts, received federal funds for years with little or no provisions tying school funding to expectations for student learning.

Federal accountability requirements changed with the reauthorization of the ESEA. When the ESEA was reauthorized, it became the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The main purpose of NCLB continued to be to provide federal funds to educate disadvantaged students. For the first time, however, the legislation increased the federal government's role in education by: (a) requiring accountability for student achievement progress throughout the elementary grades; (b) reducing red tape by allowing state and local educational entities flexibility in using federal funds; (c) providing disadvantaged children's parents educational options; (d) providing funds to improve reading skills for all children; and (e) requiring that all teachers be highly qualified (NCLB, 2002).

NCLB required state and local educational entities to document compliance with the act's rules and regulations in order to obtain federal funds for education. The act also included remedies state and local educational systems must enact if schools fail to meet accountability requirements. Linking school accountability and improving student achievement to obtaining federal funds through the Consolidated Grant Program (NCLB, 2002) while implementing sanctions for local schools not meeting accountability standards, significantly changed the educational climate in school systems across the country (Rubin, 2009). Resulting state legislation and policy changes made to comply with NCLB requirements focused on individual schools, but not on individual teachers.

NCLB was enacted under a bi-partisan coalition. Despite this fact, members of the Democratic Party have generally demonstrated more favorable action toward

education and educators (NCLB, 2002). With President Obama's first term in office, educators may have hoped to see some relief from the federal government's pressure to improve student achievement. On the contrary, under the Race to the Top (RTTT) provisions of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, President Obama continued to provide legislative direction for school reforms that included an increased focus on improving student achievement. Since its inception, the Race to the Top initiative offered substantial financial incentives for states that implement systemic reforms to improve classroom teaching resulting in improved student educational achievements. The Race to the Top initiative specifically focused on improving teacher effectiveness by requiring the inclusion of student achievement as part of state-level provisions to determine teacher effectiveness.

A 2009 Race to The Top Fact Sheet provided states with information about the application process and requirements to obtain funds available through the program. This information included the following description:

In the coming weeks, the U.S. Department of Education will issue the final application and guidance for states under the Race to the Top. This competition will be conducted in two rounds – the first starting this month and the second in June of next year – with winners announced in April and September 2010. To be eligible to compete, states must have their second round State Fiscal Stabilization applications approved by the U.S.

Department of Education and not have any legal, statutory or regulatory barriers to linking data on student achievement or student growth to teachers and principals for evaluation purposes. (Fact Sheet: Race to the

Top, 2009, para. 5)

Michigan failed to qualify for financial incentives offered through the second phase of Race to the Top grant submissions, due in part to laws and contracts serving as barriers to linking student achievement data to teachers and principals. Failing to receive federal funding raised state legislators' concerns, and those concerns resulted in the Michigan Legislature enacting PA 100-103 of 2011. This legislation expanded the focus of school accountability for student achievement, growth, and success to include monitoring of student achievement growth at the individual teacher and administrator level.

PA 100-103 of 2011 made significant changes to teachers' tenure opportunities, which previously afforded teachers almost iron clad job security. In addition to changes to teacher tenure, the acts provided administrators powers over issues formerly negotiated in professional contracts with teachers. These powers included: (a) sole authority to determine requirements for merit pay based in part on student growth and achievement, (b) rights to dismiss any teacher for reasons deemed not arbitrary and capricious, (c) rights to assign teachers to any position in the district in which the teacher is certified and highly qualified to teach, and (d) power to make staff reduction decisions based job effectiveness measures that include weight given to student achievement growth factors instead of seniority and tenure. Further, the acts required school districts to provide public notice to parents for teachers deemed ineffective for two consecutive years, and the automatic dismissal of teachers deemed ineffective for three consecutive years.

Michigan's Evaluation System

PA 100-103 of 2011 also made specific recommendations regarding evaluation of teacher effectiveness and established the Governor's Committee on Educator

Effectiveness. The acts charged the committee with identifying and recommending evaluation models and student growth factors for the purposes of conducting annual assessments of state educators. In the spring of 2012, Governor Rick Snyder signed an executive order transferring this committee's work from the Governor's Office to the Michigan Department of Education. At this point, the committee was renamed the Michigan Council on Educator Effectiveness (Executive Order, No. 2012-3, 2012). The committee identified four evaluation models for pilot during the 2012-2013 school year: The Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument (Danielson, 2013); Marzano's Teacher Evaluation Model (Marzano, 2007); 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning (University of Washington, 2012); and The Thoughtful Classroom (Silver & Associates, 2011).

The evaluation pilot included a requirement to document growth data, also referred to as *value added data*, as a component of overall performance status. This requirement created an implementation challenge, given no single achievement test exists that completely and accurately measures student knowledge (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010). While debate continues over the use of value added models (VAM) as a component of overall educator evaluation, research indicates a value added measure of teacher quality is a reasonable metric for making personnel decisions (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010).

Collaborative Practices

Concurrent with legislative changes, schools implemented a number of promising practices with the aim of improving student achievement (DuFour, DuFour, Eacker, & Karhanek, 2004; Hattie, 2012; Knight, 2011; Muhammad & Hollie, 2012). The Fels Institute of Government (2010) at the University of Pennsylvania defined a *promising*

practice as “an action, program or process that leads to an effective and productive result in a situation” (para. 2). Amidst the legislative acts that linked student achievement accountability to teachers, educators continued to identify and employ programs and strategies to improve teaching and learning. Schools across Michigan implemented promising practices focused on collegial and collaborative work between teachers and administrators. One of the most notable practices is the professional learning community. The work of professional learning communities, along with data teams, and peer-coaching initiatives moved schools toward needed improvements in student achievement. Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, and Thomas (2006) supported professional learning communities as a promising practice stating, “Developing professional learning communities (PLCs) appears to hold considerable promise for capacity building for sustainable improvement” (p. 221).

Professional learning communities offer educators a nurturing and supportive educational climate. Studies find that a nurturing and collaborative atmosphere in which professional educators can learn, explore, co-create, and co-adapt practices is essential to meeting the needs of students (Chong & Kong, 2012; DuFour et al., 2004; Hattie, 2012; Knight, 2011; Muhammad & Hollie, 2012). Lavié (2006) described *collaboration* as being grounded in shared practices and collective norms, which usually includes a social component to educator collaboration. The collaborative team approach assumes teachers and administrators who work together rather than in isolation achieve a higher degree of successful and sustainable improvements in student achievement (Fullan, 2001; Glaude, 2011).

Moolenaar, Slegers, and Daly (2011) outlined the benefits of collective efficacy. Collaborating teachers who have a sense of efficacy have an increased ability to achieve the goals set by the group. Social networks in education lead to expanded skill sets for teachers, resulting in increased confidence in their ability to instruct students. Student achievement increases when teachers share knowledge, information, and instruction materials through social networks (Moolenaar et al., 2011). Social networks that develop into quasi-professional learning communities assist teachers with building confidence in their ability to affect student learning. Teachers who participate in social networks construct pedagogical knowledge from peers, and benefit from the experience of collegial sharing (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). Further, social networks lead to a decreased sense of isolation typically prevalent among classroom teachers. Isolation may inhibit teacher growth and improvement of teaching skills (Rosenholz, 1989).

Social networks or professional learning communities may lack school administrator support. Buildings without administrative support for teacher collaboration, however, show evidence of social networking between teachers in a less formal manner. Collaboration between these teachers occurs naturally through discussions transpiring during planning hours, lunch periods, and before and after school (Goddard et al., 2007). Again, teacher collaboration directly affects student learning, which is relevant to improving student achievement. Teachers working together to revise pedagogical practices leads to the critical analysis of their classroom instruction and collegial exchanges with supportive peers (Chong & Kong, 2012). With research supporting educator collaboration, how legislated changes that hold educators

individually responsible for student results may or may not inhibit a collaborative culture is of potential concern.

Problem Statement

Administrators, parents, and policymakers may be interested in teacher experiences since passage of PA 100-103 of 2011, which affected the status of educators serving in Michigan. Of utmost concern to all parties involved is student learning. According to the Education Trust (2010), “Teachers make bigger contributions to student learning than any other in-school factor, which makes it especially important for parents to have information on how effective a school’s teachers are and how well they are rated on evaluations” (p. 7). While some studies show that well-designed teacher evaluation systems contribute to overall teacher quality and improve student achievement (e.g., Looney, 2011), most studies focus on the benefits of employing a research-based evaluation framework, providing rater reliability training, and emphasizing research-supported instructional strategies without attention to teacher experience (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2011; Sartain, Stoelinga, & Brown, 2011). These studies, however, stop short of examining how individual teacher accountability measures influence specific teaching practices, as well as the qualitative nature of teacher collaboration in a culture of high stakes accountability.

In addition to qualitative limitations in much of the research concerning teacher evaluation, findings from states that were early adopters of value-added modeling components raise concerns about the reliability of value added models, and the low or negative correlations between practice ratings and value added ratings (Berliner, 2014; Collins & Beardsley-Amrein, 2014; Winters & Cowen, 2013). Additional studies suggest

teachers often have low understanding of and trust in the value-added models that influence their performance ratings (Anderman, Anderman, Yough, & Gimbert, 2010; Harris, 2009). Overall, in this environment of research limitations, low understanding, and low trust, it seems prudent to explore teacher experiences as individual practitioners along with a focus on what is happening to the collaborative processes schools have worked so hard to instill in their culture and professional responsibilities.

Practical Problem

As previously stated, PA 100-103 of 2011 attached high personal and professional stakes to individual teacher accountability for student achievement, which may be a problem for teacher practice. Michigan laws require that all state school districts report yearly on teacher effectiveness. In this reporting, districts must use the labels of *highly effective*, *effective*, *minimally effective*, and *ineffective* to designate the status of each teacher. Teacher status information is uploaded into the state Registry of Educational Personnel (REP). June 2012 was the first time Michigan required school districts to provide teacher effectiveness status information. In October 2012, the Michigan School Data website made public aggregate educator effectiveness information identified by individual school name. Data viewed at this site represents the number of teachers per effectiveness label in each school building. Thus, the public gained access to aggregate teacher evaluation data for each building, but not by individual teacher names. Nevertheless, while teachers are not individually identified on this public website, requiring parent notification after teachers are deemed ineffective for two consecutive years and automatic dismissal after three consecutive years potentially adds to the stress

of teachers who may be already struggling, and may do little to actually improve teacher practice or student achievement.

Another practical problem of concern in this study is the fundamental shift in teachers' work conditions, position security, and compensation resulting from PA 100-103 of 2011. Longevity and tenure no longer protect the individual teacher from lay-off and recall. Traditionally, tenure protected all educators, even those perceived as the lowest performers. Now, according to Coleman, Schroth, Molinaro, and Green (2005), "The future of tenure for public school teachers at times seems questionable, but it is safe to assume that in the present atmosphere of increased accountability for student achievement and teacher quality, challenges to the current system will remain" (p. 227). Essentially, the right of assignment no longer exists in teacher contracts, but now belongs to the school administrators. Since student achievement and growth now factor into overall effectiveness ratings, teachers are no longer assured continued employment. As a result, legal action is anticipated from teachers who lose their positions due to effectiveness labels rather than the traditional tenure status, which could be financially costly to local school districts. Again, this may have a negative impact on the school environment, and therefore negatively affect teacher collaborative practices.

Research Problem

Given the radical nature of the legislative changes under study in this dissertation, it is likely that the next several years will see a wide range of legal and statutory challenges to evaluation ratings and local district compensation, hiring, lay-off/recall, and dismissal decisions. Amidst this new environment of risk, it is reasonable to look to unintended consequences in how these changes affect the collaborative teaching

experience. Research (Albert & Levine, 1988; Demirtas, 2010; Latham, 1998) regarding teacher morale and efficacy is available for the years prior to the 2011 enactment of PA 100-103, however, there are few studies that explore these issues after the passing of the law. According to Latham (1998), “One of the best ways to strengthen the teaching profession would be to make teaching a more satisfying career” (p. 82). More recent studies of teacher efficacy and job satisfaction are available for teachers serving in countries outside of the United States (Anari, 2012; Shah, Rehman, Zafar, & Riaz, 2012). Studies of Michigan teacher experiences with these legislated acts and their potential impact on individual professional practices and the potential impact on collaborative efforts of teachers, however, are not available.

Finally, it is possible that the new environment of individual accountability for student results may have some influence on the degree of success schools have in continuing to develop and strengthen collaborative cultures among teachers and administrators. Because of the wealth of research that associates collaborative practices with improved student outcomes, this is an area that should be studied carefully (Dufour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005, Harris & Jones, 2010; McLaughlin, 1993). It is unknown if the current legislative focus on the individual teacher’s impact on student achievement may result in a resistance to collaborative efforts. According to Ballou and Pogursky (1993), support for annual evaluation with a value added model is unknown among teachers. What is known from some early studies, however, is that teachers report confusion about how the value added models work and often question the conclusions of those models regarding teacher performance (Anderman, Anderman, Yough, & Gimbert, 2010; Harris, 2009). Less is known through research concerning how these models influence the

building and fostering of collaboration among teachers. As mentioned above, collaborative practice is an important aspect of teachers' professional development. It is therefore important that researchers develop an understanding of the ways current laws may or may not influence collaborative practices.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

This study sought to go inside the experiences of teachers and examine how they internalized the nexus between high stakes performance evaluation related to their individual professional practices as it is being carried out in their schools and the culture of collaborative professionalism in their school. Specifically, this study describes how teachers are experiencing the change in teacher evaluation systems and processes and any change in the culture of collegiality and collaboration in their schools since those changes were enacted. Accordingly, the following overarching questions and sub-questions were used to guide this research:

Research question 1: How are teachers experiencing the implementation of Michigan's high stakes performance evaluation system as it is being carried out in their schools?

Sub-questions:

1. How do teachers describe their experiences with performance evaluation before the changes in Michigan's laws
2. How do the teachers describe their personal experience with their school's new evaluation system and process?
3. Where and how do teachers' descriptions of their experiences indicate any tensions, discomfort or insecurity?

4. Where and how do teachers' descriptions of their experiences indicate changes in their behavior or practices since the implementation of the new evaluation system and process?

Research question 2: How are teachers experiencing the professional culture in their schools since the implementation of Michigan's new high stakes performance evaluation system in their schools?

Sub-question:

1. How do teachers compare their experiences of collegiality and collaboration with other teachers before and since the implementation of the new evaluation system and process?

Methods Overview

This study employed a phenomenological research methodology. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), "phenomenological approaches seek to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experience" (p. 19). In discussing lived experience, Moustakas (1994) emphasized the importance of understanding the *depth* of the human experience and noted that, "Any phenomenon represents a suitable starting point for an investigation" (p. 26). Within a phenomenological design, researchers bracket out personal experiences prior to collecting data from others who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The results from a phenomenological study are then organized in a more literary fashion. It is the aim of the phenomenologist to describe what the participants have in common while giving equal value to each individual's description of the experience studied (Moustakas, 1994).

The selection of an appropriate research methodology involves the researcher's level of comfort with the structure of the research and the manner in which the results will be produced (Creswell, Hanson, Plan, & Morales, 2007). A phenomenological methodology is appropriate for this study as the researcher seeks to understand the shared experience of the participants experiencing the phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007). The selected research design emphasizes the value of studying the individual personal experience of each teacher to create a representation and meaning of the transcriptions during data analysis (Pascal, Johnson, Dore, & Trainor, 2010). This phenomenological study may lead to a deeper understanding of how practicing educators have experienced the legislative changes as outlined in Michigan Public Act 100-103 of 2011.

Theoretical Foundation

A number of theories could be applied to the information gleaned from this study; however, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and McGregor's theory X and theory Y serves as the foundational theories for this study. Maslow asserted that unmet needs influence human behavior. Maslow proposed that the most basic, essential human need was a sense of safety. Formerly, threats of safety for humans involved disease or animal attacks. In modern times, threats perceived by adults include the risk of failure, fear of embarrassment, lack of control, loss of efficacy, and fear of isolation (Gregory & Kuzmich, 2007). The theory can be applied in this study, as teachers may perceive that the new teacher effectiveness evaluation threatens the safety of job security previously provided by tenure.

Maslow's (1943) work was based on a hierarchy of needs, the highest level being that of self-actualization. The self-actualization level of human development is described

as transcending oneself and working toward a calling (Maslow, 1943). At this high level of development, humans move from focusing on self to demonstrating concern for others (Green & Burke, 2007). The field of education requires a dedication to students and their well-being. It may be possible that teachers are not able to reach this highest level due to the threats to their position security.

McGregor's (1960) work focuses on two management theories he identified as theory X and theory Y. The premise of theory X is that workers are interested solely in working to meet basic safety and physiological needs, and seek reward through salary and benefits while trying to avoid consequences. Theory X workers are viewed as incapable of self-direction, and require top-down direction. Conversely, the premise of theory Y is that workers are self-motivated and hold themselves accountable for achievements in their work. McGregor's theories offer an additional framework for understanding how teachers make sense of the legislative actions related to teacher evaluation, changes in tenure, and the focus on student achievement results by providing the additional context of teacher motivation.

Conceptual Framework

Several topics discussed throughout this chapter inform the conceptual framework of this research. These topics include (a) legislative accountability, (b) collaborative initiatives, (c) educator evaluation, (c) individual teacher experience, and (d) Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and McGregor's (1960) theory X and theory Y. The researcher conceptualizes individual teacher experience to be influenced by each of the other topics presented in the list above. The relationship among these variables is depicted in Figure 1, and discussed in the paragraphs below.

The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 included the first legislated policy requiring consequences for schools failing to demonstrate student achievement increases as evidenced by a measure called Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This was the first time school districts that previously accepted federal funds through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act faced consequences for failing to show progress in student achievement. The student achievement progress represented by AYP requirements include achievement thresholds requiring all students to reach proficiency on their state's assessment measures by the year 2014. The student achievement requirements also include a student attendance rate of 90% for schools not providing a diploma, an 80% graduation rate for diploma awarding schools, and an assessment participation rate of 95% (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). McGregor's theory X is visibly inherent in the NCLB legislation. The federal government's action indicates a belief that states needed additional motivation to ensure that schools focused on improving student achievement.

Even though schools were surprised by this legislation, initiatives to improve school culture began gaining momentum once NCLB was passed (Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005). Buildings started implementing shared leadership practices paired with the concept of professional learning communities. Functioning as a professional learning community provided sustenance for the continuous improvement of teaching and learning (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Schmoker, 2006). School improvement teams began to understand the seriousness of the mandate to improve student achievement, and collaborative teams began to form for the purposes of analyzing performance data and making instructional decisions. Effective professional learning communities require

professional trust and confidence. A degree of safety is evident in schools exhibiting collegiality (Weller, 1982). This basic level of safety is likely to support teachers in moving toward self-actualization (Maslow, 1943), which would allow teachers to be more focused on the care of their students rather than job security.

In addition to professional learning communities, schools organized data teams after the NCLB legislation. Similar to school improvement teams and professional learning communities, the charge to data teams was to conduct collaborative problem solving sessions for the purpose of identifying and suggesting strategies teachers could use to improve individual student achievement. Encouraging team members to recognize and share best practices that result in increased student achievement is essential to the effectiveness of data teams (Schmoker, 2006). Yet, this practice could be negatively influenced by the focus on individual teacher's student achievement results.

The Race to the Top initiative may have further turned the focus of student achievement from a collective, collaborative responsibility to one focused on individual teacher's student achievement results. The weight of student achievement results in Michigan's educator evaluation legislation increased incrementally from: (a) 25% for the 2012-2013 school year, to (b) 40% for the 2013-2014 school year, to (c) 50% during the 2014-2015 school year (Senate Fiscal Agency, 2011). The 50% level was subsequently changed to 25% in the 2015-2016 school year (Ruga, 2015). In 2015, legislators instituted changes that set the weight for student growth at 25% through the 2017-2018 school year (Michigan Public Act 173 of 2015). Michigan legislative acts eroded the security of individual teachers by weakening the strength of teacher tenure. These actions further indicate a legislature that functions from the premise of McGregor's

(1960) theory X. Individual classroom teachers have the most significant impact on student learning, thus, the experiences teachers have in their practice and their collaborative efforts are of interest.

Finally, Michigan lawmakers enacted legislation requiring annual evaluations of teachers. The state designated committee identified and piloted four educator observation models. Districts that were using binary-based evaluation systems and simply rating teachers as unsatisfactory and satisfactory were required to shift to a system of identifying teachers as highly effective, effective, minimally effective, or ineffective. The system of evaluation was included in the list of non-negotiables outlined in PA 100-103 of 2011. Figure 1 provides a diagram of how each component described in the paragraphs above are conceptualized to contribute to an individual teacher's experience.

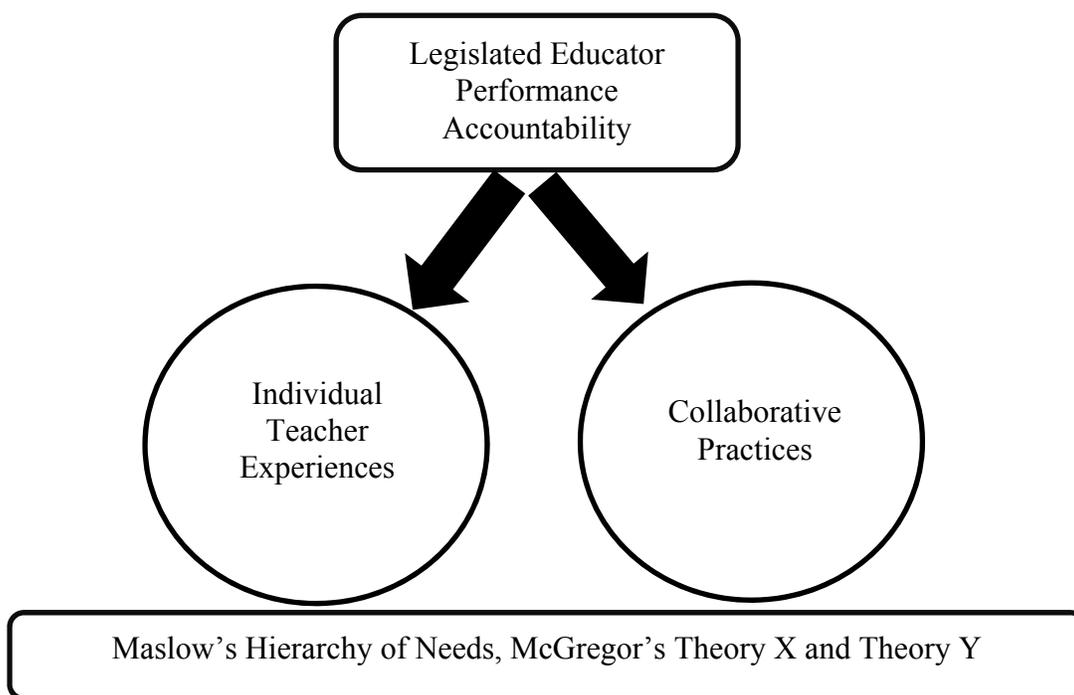


Figure 1. Teacher experiences of their field based on basic management and needs theory as related to legislated accountability reforms, educator evaluation systems, and collaborative initiatives.

Chapter I Summary

This study focuses on how teacher individual experiences may be affected by legislative actions and evaluation systems, with particular interest on the possible impact of these variables on the collaborative culture of their schools. Educators implemented school reform initiatives based on collaboration and cooperation as promising practices to improve student achievement. However, it is not known whether recent legislative changes focused on individual teacher performance, including student achievement results, is changing the quality of teacher's individual experiences, especially their desire to collaborate with peers. This phenomenological study is designed to obtain information about teachers' perceptions of how the legislation and policy changes have impacted their individual professional practices and their roles as collaborative educators. The remainder of this dissertation reviews literature relevant to this study in Chapter II, and presents its methodological procedures in Chapter III. Chapter IV presents data obtained through the study's methodological procedures, while Chapter V discusses this data within the context of the research aims of the study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Schools are learning organizations influenced by many factors. No longer are one-room schoolhouses the norm wherein one teacher is the deciding factor in the learning and policies of the school. The traditional system of local control over schools and school districts in the state of Michigan was significantly weakened by state and national legislation through the past two decades. These legislation acts began with impacting school buildings collectively and have shifted to a focus on individual teacher performance. From Michigan's Public Act 25, to the federal No Child Left Behind Act, to present day, the individual teacher's position has been eroded by outside forces. This qualitative study explores how teachers' experiences have been affected by the legislated focus on the individual teacher's performance. The following literature review provides: (a) an historical perspective of the legislated reforms, (b) promising practices that teachers have used to improve student achievement, and (c) information about Michigan's teacher evaluation components.

Legislative Reforms

From the state legislative level to the federal government level, a history of legislated educational reforms exists in this nation. An overview of legislation related to a focus on student achievement from the 1990s to the present day is presented below.

Michigan Public Act 25

PA 25 of 1990 demonstrated a significant shift from minimal fulfillment of time, staffing, and facilities to establishing an accountability system for public schools through an identifiable school improvement process that included parent and community

involvement (Strengthening Accountability, 2000). Plan development required the involvement of parents, teachers, and administrators. Absent from the original language of PA 25 of 1990 was a means for determining the effectiveness of the school improvement plan and process. PA 25 of 1990, amended in 1995 by the Michigan state legislator, required that accreditation standards include student performance on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program tests. However, inherent problems continued to persist with this accountability system. Gaps continued to be evident between various subgroups of students included the economically disadvantaged and the non-economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities and non-students with disabilities, genders, and ethnic subgroups.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

The first obligation of NCLB, annual testing, was one requirement of this policy that qualified it as a regulatory policy. By the 2005-2006 school year, schools were required to annually test students in grades 3 through 8 in the areas of reading and mathematics and in one grade at the high school level. By the 2007-2008 school year, the subject of science also had to be tested at least once in the elementary grades, once in the middle school grades, and once at the secondary level. In addition, sample groups of students must be tested in 4th and 8th grade using the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in reading and math every other year (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). Not only must students be tested across these grades in the aforementioned subjects, but a further goal of NCLB was to bring all students to a proficient level by the 2013-2014 school year.

School buildings were required to meet state identified Adequate Yearly Progress

(AYP) targets using the state assessment results not only for the general student population, but also for federally identified subgroups determined by various demographic factors. This requirement included closing the achievement gap for students with disabilities, the economically disadvantaged, minority groups, English language learners, and transient and delinquent students (NCLB, 2002). Schools were not penalized for gaps in gender achievement. In addition, secondary schools were required to meet an 80% four year cohort graduation target and elementary, and middle schools must indicate an average daily attendance of 90% or better.

Failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress across consecutive years results in consequences that include offering students the choice to attend other schools and the opportunity to participate in district funded after school tutorial programs. Continued failure to meet Adequate Yearly Progress could result in corrective actions as serious as removing the building's administration. Included with meeting the academic requirement, schools and districts must also publish annual report cards outlining their progress toward meeting the achievement thresholds as outlined by the state (NCLB, 2002).

No Child Left Behind required all teachers to be highly qualified in the core content area they were assigned to teach. The deadline for this requirement was at the end of the 2005-2006 school year. However, teachers of special education students were provided with an extended deadline until July 1, 2009 to meet this requirement. In addition, not only did teachers have to meet the definition of highly qualified, paraprofessionals supported by Title I funds also were required to meet identified requirements that demonstrated knowledge and ability for teaching and instruction

(NCLB, 2002). Any new teachers, as well as paraprofessionals assigned to school-wide Title I buildings or directly servicing Title I students, could not be employed by a district unless they met the current highly qualified definition.

Funding changes were instrumental in the alteration of the Title I funding formula with this reauthorization. NCLB legislation required funds to be targeted to school districts and buildings with high concentrations of economically disadvantaged students. With the amount of funds provided to schools, this policy could be considered distributive except for the obligations and requirements that districts and school buildings have for improving student achievement with the threat of consequences that could be implemented for failing to meet the outlined requirements (NCLB, 2002). However, consequences outlined focused on buildings and not individual teachers.

Race to the Top

NCLB was legislated during a Republican presidency. With the election of Barack Obama supported by the Democratic Party in 2008, educators may have been anticipating an easing of the onerous consequences of failing to meet the requirements outlined by NCLB. The Obama presidency began with providing states and local districts with American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (RTTT) funds during the time of the recent great recession experienced in the United States. States and districts anticipated being able to use the funds to maintain personnel and positions that were at risk of being lost due to the economic down turn. The RTTT provisions for competing among the states for larger amounts of RTTT funds put forth new requirements, however, among them the requirement to institute a high stakes version of educator evaluation tied, at least in part, to student academic outcomes. The prospect of

competing with other states for these funds unlocked the door in Michigan to changing the manner in which teacher and principal evaluations were conducted. They also created an opening for districts to add a system of merit pay based on student achievement for both certified teachers and administrators. This was the beginning of a shift from the focus of improving student achievement from a collective school responsibility to an individual teacher responsibility. In addition, linking student achievement to increases in pay was originally interpreted as required in Michigan due to accepting ARRA round one funds.

Following the first federal funds that were available through round one of ARRA funding, came a second round of funds that were disseminated based on competitive grants. Individual states could apply for the funds through a written grant application process. One of the assurances that states had to provide evidence of for the round two ARRA application included this wording:

I certify that the State does not have any legal, statutory, or regulatory barriers at the State level to linking data on student achievement (as defined in this notice) or student growth (as defined in this notice) to teachers and principals for the purpose of teacher and principal evaluation. (p. 14 of initial grant application)

Because of Michigan's inability to provide assurances that locally bargained teacher and principal agreements did not contain language barring the use of linking student achievement to teacher and principal evaluations, the bid to attain subsequent ARRA grant disbursements failed.

As these events occurred, a special interest group called Students First (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013), began to gain financial backing and influence. Led by Michelle Rhee,

former superintendent of Washington, D.C. schools, the Students First group set as one of its agenda items to influence legislation in individual states across the nation to link student achievement data to principal and teacher evaluations. In addition, the group has worked to eliminate tenure for educators and replace the rail system of pay increases for teachers with increases in salary based solely on student growth and achievement.

Michigan Public Acts 100-103

Influenced by federal grant requirements and the Students First initiative, Michigan legislators enacted sweeping changes during the summer of July 2011 through revisions to Public Acts 100-103 (Michigan Public Acts 100-103, 2011). Public Act 100 (2011) amended the teacher tenure law to: allow the dismissal of a tenured teacher for a reason deemed not arbitrary or capricious; place a suspended teacher's salary in escrow in the event criminal charges were filed; and required a teacher to verify the ability to perform the functions of the position following involuntary placement on leave for physical or mental reasons. Public Act 101 (2011) continued amending the teacher tenure law. This act: specified that probationary teachers rated effective or highly effective are not subject to displacement simply due to other more experienced teachers with continuing tenure; increased the probationary period from four years to five years unless the probationary teacher is ranked highly effective for the previous three consecutive years; required notification of nonrenewal for a probationary teacher move from 60 days to 15 days; allowed for the dismissal of probationary teachers at any time during the probationary period; required the board to determine the format and number of observation sessions for both probationary and tenured teachers; and also repealed the right of laid-off tenured teachers to fill the first vacancy in the district for three years after

the lay-off. Public Act 102 (2011) enacted the following changes for Michigan educators: eliminated seniority and tenure as the primary factors for determining lay-offs and recall; required that performance serve as the major factor for determining staff reductions; and that service years and tenure only serve as a determining factor when the effectiveness rating of educators is equal. In addition, a major change enacted in Public Act 102 (2011) required the dismissal of a teacher rated ineffective three consecutive years and required year-end performance ratings include a weighting of student growth. Public Act 103 (2011) added prohibitive subjects of bargaining, including: teacher placement; personnel decision policies for eliminating and recalling staff members; classroom observation standards and processes; merit pay compensation; and parental notice of ineffective teachers.

Following the summer 2011 legislative changes, Governor Snyder appointed a Michigan Council on Educator Effectiveness (MCEE) whose task it was: (a) to recommend an evaluation model for districts to use for both teacher and administrator evaluations; and (b) to recommend a system under which student growth data points can be used in an increasingly weighted model to determine educator effectiveness (Senate Fiscal Agency, 2011). This council, composed of five appointed voting members, was given a date of no later than April 30, 2012 to submit to the state board and governor recommendations for a statewide evaluation tool and a student growth and assessment tool (or process). At the request of the Council, the recommendation's due date was extended to July 2013.

In addition to the study and subsequent recommendations the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness was charged with conducting, the 2011 statutory provisions

also required local districts to either adopt the MCEE recommended and legislatively affirmed evaluation models for teachers and administrators, or stipulate that the district was using an alternative model or approach to teacher and/or administrator evaluation that met all the requirements stipulated in law. Thus, local districts had to decide whether or not to notify the state of their intent to stay with their current evaluation model(s) or adopt the MCEE recommended (which turned out to be four teacher and two administrator evaluation models) and State Legislature approved evaluation models at such time as the Michigan Legislature passed additional legislation to clarify the options and requirements after consideration of the MCEE Report (2013)

Under the original statutory changes enacted in 2011, the local district educator evaluation model was required to include characteristics of teaching related directly to improving student achievement. In addition to including a weight for student growth, the annual evaluation must also be based on classroom observations that include a review of the lesson plan, monitoring of student engagement, and the use of state standards used in the lesson (Public Act 100 of 2011). Prior to the passage of Michigan's and other states' new educator evaluation statutory changes, many evaluation systems across the nation were binary in nature meaning that teachers either received a satisfactory or unsatisfactory rating with little to no evidence included related to student learning or the quality of teaching practice (National Council on Teacher Quality [NCTQ], 2010). Effectiveness ratings mandated in the 2011 statutory changes, made the binary option obsolete by requiring ratings at four levels: highly effective, effective, minimally effective, or ineffective. The age of the binary system of evaluation was over in Michigan.

The 2011 statutory changes and subsequent recommendations from the MCEE ushered in a renewed interest in performance assessment models that are standards based, behaviorally articulated, and reflective of developmental stages of practice. As a result, the MCEE piloted and reviewed evaluation models that provided rubrics for assessing a teachers' and administrators' state of development and practice along developmental levels of practice around specific performance criteria. If a district was already using such a model, an adaptation of such a model, or could argue that their current model met at least the minimum requirements stipulated in the 2011 statute, they were not required to adopt a new evaluation system for teachers or administrators pending further legislation or guidance from the MCEE study.

In July 2013, the MCEE published its report and final recommendations to the Michigan State Legislature in a document titled, "Building an Improvement-Focused System of Educator Evaluation in Michigan: Final Recommendations." In that report, the MCEE recommended that the four teacher evaluation models Michigan piloted, with a research team from the University of Michigan providing the pilot evaluations. The research team also conducted extensive focus group reviews of extant administrator evaluation models. After analyzing the results of the focus group reviews and ratings of the administrator evaluation models, the MCEE also recommended two models they believed complemented and aligned with the piloted teacher evaluation models.

The MCEE was also charged with recommending a value added model for creating student growth ratings for teacher evaluations. In their final report (July 2013), the MCEE provided a review of the various approaches to calculating value-added ratings. After extensive expert and literature based review, the MCEE concluded the

following:

“Student growth and assessment tools” and “value-added modeling” are not interchangeable concepts. Growth and assessment tools are tests that measure the achievement and growth of individual students, and when used on more than one occasion, can assess changes in students’ achievement. Value-added models (VAMs) are statistical techniques that use data produced by growth and assessment tools to estimate the effects of teachers (and schools) on their students’ achievement. In this report, we explain each in turn.

Although there is much interest in using both student growth and assessment tools and VAMs, considerable scientific concern exists about their instability and measurement error. To ensure care in estimating educators’ contribution to student growth, multiple measures should be used to assess student growth. Thus, we recommend the use of a suite of student growth and assessment tools in ways that meet the spirit of the law while also acknowledging the limitations of current assessments and models for establishing an educator’s “value-added.” We also recommend that the state be vigilant in examining the use of these tools and in tracking their strengths and limitations. (p. 18)

Despite the caution expressed in the above direct quote from the MCEE (2013) report, the MCEE concluded educator evaluations should be based on a 50/50 blend of the rating from the practice based performance evaluation model and a growth rating comprised of measures and analytics from multiple data points representing student growth and outcomes. Based on their study of teachers and student achievement in North

Carolina, Goldhaber and Hansen (2010) concluded value added measures for teacher effectiveness are better at predicting student achievement levels than the observable characteristics of teachers, and even went on to suggest that this metric is valid enough to make personnel reduction decisions. The conclusion reached by these researchers is illustrative of similar arguments made in favor of value-added ratings, but other researchers such as Harris (2009), LaVigne (2014), and Konstantopolous (2014), conclude that the evidence of “instability and measurement error” (MCEE, 2013, p. 18) raise serious questions about using value-added ratings for high stakes decisions such as layoff, termination, compensation, etc.

Nonetheless, the 2011 statute called for student growth ratings to reach a level of 50% weight in creating an overall educator effectiveness rating by the 2015-2016 school year after a progression of moving from growth ratings being only a “significant factor” to “at least 50%” (Michigan Public Act 102, 2011). The 2011 legislation would have increased the rate that educators will be judged on student achievement growth gradually over five years as follows: Beginning with the 2013-2014 school year districts were required to weight student growth as 25% of the overall evaluation effectiveness rating; with the 2014-2015 school year, student achievement growth was to be weighted as 40% of the performance rating; and in the 2015-2016 school year 50% of a educator’s evaluation was to be weighted on student growth and achievement (Ruga, 2014; Senate Fiscal Agency, 2011). In the summer of 2014, however, the state Legislature passed what became as the “delay bill” (Michigan Public Act 257, 2014), which kept the requirement at “significant” until the 2015-2016 school year, at which time it jumped to 50%. The legislators continued to adjust the student growth achievement weight

changing it back to 25% through the 2017-2018 school year in the fall of 2015 (Michigan Public Act 173 of 2015). Additionally, the state assessment system is in the early stages of being rebuilt and, therefore, provides no usable data or analytics to assist districts in creating the growth ratings.

Under the provisions of the 2011 amendments to Michigan Public Acts 100-103 (2011), districts that had collective bargaining agreements with teachers associations expiring prior to July 19, 2011 were required to implement the legislated changes beginning with the 2011-2012 school year (Senate Fiscal Report, 2011). Many districts were in the middle of bargaining such contracts when they learned certain subjects of bargaining were legislated as nonnegotiable. Subjects included in the areas not subject to bargaining were the tool used to evaluate teachers, the data points for determining student growth and achievement, and procedures and steps for determining reductions in staff. By virtue of the 2011 revisions to the Tenure Act (Michigan Public Acts 100-103, 2011), power was eroded and even stripped from one of the most powerful unions in the state, the Michigan Education Association, through the new limitations to collective bargaining. The result was that, at the same time Public Act 103 (2011) limited teachers (and administrators) collective bargaining prerogatives for influencing performance evaluation, changes to Public Acts 100-103 (2011) made the impact of performance ratings high stakes by linking those ratings to job security and other professional considerations (e.g. compensation, layoff-recall, certification). Additionally, revisions enacted through Michigan Public Acts 100-103 (2011) reduced statutory protections for teacher tenure and job protection.

During the summer of 2012, petition signature gatherers were observed at many community and state events seeking signatures to place a proposal on the ballot that was seeking, essentially, to nullify many of the legislative acts that had been approved including those acts that weakened both tenure rights and bargaining rights for teachers. Members of the Michigan Education Association and other unions organized a drive to place a proposal on the November ballot for state citizens to consider approving. Proposal 2, Michigan's "Protect Our Jobs" Amendment of 2012, would have added the right to collective bargaining for public and private employees to the state constitution. In addition to collective bargaining being added to the constitution, the ballot language would have overridden state laws that regulated conditions of employment and laws that conflicted with local collective bargaining agreements. Michigan voters elected not to approve this constitutional amendment by a margin of 57% to 42% (Ballotpedia, 2012).

While local districts and educators focused on adapting to all of the statutory changes regarding performance evaluation, a number of entities and interests focused on what was happening with performance evaluation ratings. Since requirements in the statute call for districts to submit a report to the state and place on their public web site the aggregate performance ratings of teachers and administrators, it was easy to see what, if any, impact the new requirements made on the distribution of performance ratings. Of interest to many was any evidence the new requirements were resulting in a greater distribution of reported ratings between the four levels required by law: *ineffective*, *minimally effective*, *effective*, and *highly effective* (Michigan Public Act 102, 2011). A fall 2012 report issued by Education Trust-Midwest (Lenhoff, 2012) provided first year implementation statistics for educator evaluation ratings for Michigan schools. Among

the districts surveyed, serving more than 140,000 students, 99.4 % of the teachers received effective or highly effective ratings. With Michigan students falling behind other states in core subject areas, Lenhoff (2012) called for achievement trends to reverse. Fourth grade math achievement as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress had fallen to a rank of 41 out of 50 states, low-income student math achievement had fallen to a rank of 43rd in 8th-grade, and Michigan had the second largest gap in 4th-grade reading between black and white students (Lenhoff, 2012). The coincidence of what appears to be inflated or, at least, positively skewed distribution of performance ratings alongside evidence of continued decline in student achievement comparisons, became a bell-ringer for both the need to link student growth to performance ratings and the overall need for more reliable performance ratings. This report and others like it renewed the call for a statewide system of educator evaluation that would produce more dependable results in both performance ratings and in improved student achievement.

Collaborative Practices

The Fels Institute of Government (2010) at the University of Pennsylvania defined a *promising practice* as “an action, program or process that leads to an effective and productive result in a situation” (para. 2). As the consequences for school buildings began to mount as a result of the No Child Left Behind legislation and Michigan’s School Improvement legislation, school leaders including administrators and teachers searched for strategies to improve student achievement. While the art of teaching is usually an individual experience, it is the collective knowledge of educators paired with their skills and experience that result in a valuable resource to improve student learning (Glaude,

2011). This sharing of ideas has resulted in a number of promising practices that are collaborative in nature. According to Fullan (2001), “Collaborative cultures, which by definition have close relationships, are indeed powerful” (p. 67). Three examples of educator collaborative practices indicating improvements in student learning are discussed. These include professional learning communities (PLCs), data teams, and peer coaching practices.

Professional Learning Communities

Collaboration among educators is often impeded by a culture of privacy and isolation that discourages meaningful professional interactions (Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan, 2008). Professional learning communities (PLCs) were developed to change this culture by fostering a sense of trust, teamwork, and passion for teaching (Owens, 2015). While the exact nature of PLCs may vary across school buildings or districts, most exhibit the following characteristics: (a) peers are viewed as colleagues; (b) there is common sense of purpose and direction; (c) individual and group reflection is encouraged; (d) members are able to seek and provide assistance; and (e) success is celebrated (Doolittle et al., 2008; Many & King, 2008). These characteristics help educators overcome the feeling of seclusion typical to teaching (Nelson, 2010). Moreover, they help teachers develop shared beliefs, values, and vision, which are common elements in successful school environments (Doolittle et al., 2008, Many & King, 2008; Nadelson, Harm, Croft, McClay, Ennis, & Winslow, 2012).

According to Andersen and Herr (2011), PLCs provide opportunities for the instructional inquiry and critical questioning educators need to change practice. In this way, beyond fostering teamwork, PLCs also help to increase student engagement through

their focus on student results (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Harris & Jones, 2010). A long-term study (McLaughlin, 1993) indicates PLCs have a positive impact on schools and are vital to improving student achievement. During the 2007-2008 to 2011-2012 school years, Grant Schools in Michigan moved from being identified in the bottom 5th percentile in student achievement to the 92nd percentile through the implementation of PLC concepts and weekly collaboration focused on improving student learning (Lambertson, 2014). This growth is consistent with findings from Schneider, Huss-Lederman, and Sherlock (2012) who noted, “There is mounting evidence that professional learning communities contribute to improved student achievement” (p. 376). Even students within a PLC system report deeper learning of standards (Owens, 2015). The active engagement promoted through PLCs, therefore, not only helps teachers increase their professional knowledge and expertise, but also results in enhanced student learning (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). The paragraphs in the remainder of this section explore *authentic inquiry* and *collaboration*, two critical components of PLCs that lead to both enhanced teacher partnerships and increased student achievement.

Authentic inquiry. Authentic inquiry is central to the work of PLCs. Nelson (2010) described authentic inquiry as the willingness to wonder and ask questions. This includes questioning and analyzing both teacher instruction and student performance (Anderson & Herr, 2011; Carmichael & Martens, 2012). As Nelson (2010) suggested, critically questioning the relationship between teaching activities and student learning is important to student outcomes. It promotes mutual adaptation, which is the successful implementation of outside innovations teachers have altered to meet their needs at the local level (Anderson & Herr, 2011). Moreover, the intellectual work implemented

through the authentic inquiry process of the PLC model results in improved student achievement, increased student engagement, and a school-wide culture focused on improving classroom instruction. The authentic inquiry process characteristic of PLCs honors and respects the professional and pedagogical knowledge and expertise of teachers, as well as their capacity and ability to implement agreed upon innovation (Carmichael & Martens, 2012).

Authentic inquiry promotes innovation in several ways. First, authentic inquiry serves as a conduit for teachers to reflect upon and refine their practices (Harris & Jones, 2010). Scheduled team meetings provide time for on-going reflection to assess quality of instruction, examine student work, and propose educational strategies (Carmichael & Martens, 2012). Inherent to the authentic inquiry process is a level of trust that allows educators to engage in reflective practice in a safe environment (Nelson, 2010). As O'Keefe (2012) noted, meaningful PLC work and teacher collaboration cannot be coerced. A perception of mutual trust must be evident (Sigurdardottir, 2010).

A second way in which authentic inquiry offers educators the opportunity to develop innovation is through its focus on interdependence. PLC work views the school as the unit of change, not the individual teacher. Quality PLC implementation establishes a culture of collective professionalism. Staff members move from individual professionalism to interdependent work (Harris & Jones, 2010). Interdependence is a condition of collaborative learning among educators (Sigurdardottir, 2010). Harris and Jones (2010) insist that deep implementation of PLC practices support the idea that the sum is greater than the parts.

High-risk conversations, a third aspect of authentic inquiry, move PLC groups toward a deeper understanding of how to improve practice. Because the inquiry process involves the ability of the group to conduct substantive dialogue, PLCs foster positive communication styles that allow group members to address tension and defensiveness, and provide meaningful feedback (Doolittle et al., 2008). This feedback further encourages reflection. Reflection, especially deep reflection, on practices and actions through the PLC structure results in increases in pedagogical and content knowledge leading to a culture of support (Nadelson et al., 2012; Riveros, Newton, & Burgess., 2012). This ultimately helps to improve teacher efficacy, and enhances teacher effectiveness and agency (Harris & Jones, 2010; Nelson, 2010; Riveros et al., 2012).

Teacher agency is essential to the effectiveness of PLCs (Riveros et al., 2012). Teacher agency is the promotion of the individual teacher and how they contribute to the group discussion and decision-making. Implementing PLCs entails risk for teachers when examining student work, which can make teacher agency difficult. Supportive and distributive leadership contributes to the effective implementation of PLC practices and helps to lessen this difficulty. Supportive leadership does this by promoting a high-trust environment where collective knowledge based on trust and collegiality creates a safe place for teachers to share practices and change, and innovate their instruction.

The research supporting authentic inquiry is significant. Carmichael and Martens (2012) reporting on an Iowa Department of Education initiative implemented for five years, found “Schools implementing authentic intellectual work scored significantly higher in 26 comparisons, with higher percentages of students proficient in 32 comparisons” (p. 23). Teams in the study met four to six hours a month, and each

meeting included scoring student work artifacts. Identified meeting protocols were used to inspire the generation of ideas and strategies to consider implementing. Schools employing this type of PLC authentic intellectual inquiry work reaped significantly higher scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Iowa Test of Education Development (Carmichael & Martens, 2012). The administrators facilitating the authentic intellectual work practice deemed the level of collaboration among teachers as unprecedented. A benefit of the process was that administrators provided teachers with more relevant feedback related to the practice identified for implementation.

Many and King (2008) reported on the impact of the professional learning process in districts located in Kildeer, Illinois and Blue Valley, Kansas. With over 10,000 students, Blue Valley was the only district of its size to make Adequate Yearly Progress in Kansas and the only district larger than 6,000 students to have each individual school in the district reach the required Adequate Yearly Progress targets (Many & King, 2008, p. 32). Kildeer, Illinois went from 75% to 80% of students meeting or exceeding state standards in 2001, to more than 96% of all students meeting or exceeding state standards in 2007. Even more impressive is that over 80% of Kildeer's middle school special education students met state standards in reading and math. Also, Kildeer students moving from middle school to high school went from 24% qualifying for at least one Advanced Placement or honors course, to 49% qualifying for extended learning experiences (Many & King, 2008, p. 32).

Sigurdardottir's (2010) study found the existence of a significant relationship between a school's effectiveness level and the level of PLC implementation. Teachers in Sigurdardottir's (2010) study assigned to schools that scored the highest in implementing

PLC processes and procedures also indicated a significantly higher satisfaction of working in their school as compared to the teachers from the second school involved in the study. In addition, the study found that a higher level of fidelity to the PLC model resulted in dramatic improvements in student achievement outcomes.

To conclude this section, schools that implement PLCs develop a system to ensure all students are learning. Built into this system is a means to quickly identify students that need additional supports for learning, intervene with students prior to failure, and require students to access additional assistance and support until mastery has occurred. Schools implementing such a system have identified teams of educators to closely monitor student achievement (DuFour et al., 2005). This team approach results in multiple educators taking an interest in individual student learning. As individuals, they monitor and meet with the student to assist with resolving the problem. This approach to supporting students ensures that students receive the interventions needed to prevent failure. This approach also requires a sense of shared responsibility for student learning among teachers. In an environment where teachers can find themselves on a layoff list or worse because another teacher's student data leads to a better performance rating for that teacher, this sense of shared responsibility could be compromised. This study is concerned about that potential and is interested in exploring if that potential is expressed in the way teachers are experiencing and responding to the way in which Michigan has enacted high stakes performance evaluations.

Collaboration. As stated previously, educators functioning in a PLC recognize that a collaborative school culture focused on student achievement is essential to student learning. However, this collaboration goes well beyond congeniality, camaraderie, and

determining operational procedures. According to DuFour et al. (2005), “The powerful collaboration of professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice” (p. 36). The common purpose of this team is to focus on continuous improvement in making the school more successful. As teachers work in teams, they engage in deep professional learning while questioning one another on practices and providing one another with feedback. Time is spent analyzing student achievement data and determining critical outcomes for student learning to improve achievement. Once the critical outcomes have been determined, common assessments are developed to monitor student achievement toward success on the identified critical outcomes. The team works together to agree on the quality of work expected from students, to determine the schedule for administering the assessments, and to develop the protocol for collectively examining student results. Together, the learning team converses about and agrees upon new strategies for re-teaching or extending student learning. What was once private to teaching becomes quite public within the confines of a PLC. Collaborative conversations following protocols such as Glauco’s (2011) “Do You See What I See” become the centerpiece of collaborative conversations.

PLC effectiveness can be evaluated based on student learning results. Specifically, the collective work of staff members is evaluated based on close, timely analysis of student assessment results. Schools with access to a data warehousing tool are often deemed data rich, but information poor (DuFour et al., 2005). However, teams of teachers working in unison as a PLC turn this data into useful, relevant information essential for making instructional decisions to improve student learning. Beyond this,

PLCs engaged in this type of action research benefit from the collective expertise and knowledge of the group conducting the data analysis (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Glaude, 2011). This is because analyzing student data with colleagues allows for reflection on practice, as well as the acquiring of knowledge, expertise, and strategies from teaching peers. This idea is supported by a study by Chance and Segura (2009), which indicates that principals who provide time for teacher collaboration contribute to continuous learning that benefits students.

One of the initiatives a PLC may focus their attention on is overseeing a building's school improvement process. School improvement initiatives involve the action of diagnosing of whether or not the school is accomplishing what they have identified as the school's goals. With focused actions, one particular rural school involved in a study showed improved and sustained student achievement across a five-year period (Chance & Segura, 2009). Areas indicating improvement resulting from intentional focused leadership in the study included pass rates on proficiency assessments at the high school level, improvements in daily attendance and graduation rates, and achieving Adequate Yearly Progress. Integral to the success of this school was making time for collaboration. Chance and Segura (2009) described this school improvement collaborative process:

There was time scheduled for teacher collaboration. Collaboration among teacher planning groups was structured and focused. Leadership ensured that planning was student-centered and that teachers and administrators were held accountable for their actions. (p. 7)

Levine (2011) noted that school improvement and PLCs have the responsibility to not only change the newest teachers, but also to help experienced teachers change their patterns of practice. To successfully implement PLCs, respect for experienced teachers, trust among staff members, and traditions supporting and building morale must be readily apparent. PLCs honor the knowledge and expertise of novice and veteran practitioners and the implementation of researcher theory to practice (Vescio et al., 2008). Veteran teachers involved in intense collaboration scenarios included in the PLC model note a positive impact on morale (Levine, 2011). It is through the PLC process that educators become comfortable with being uncomfortable; this occurs in a trusting culture between both newer and more veteran educators in an established trusting work environment (Many & King, 2008).

To conclude, in the face of politically legislated initiatives for staff reductions based on effectiveness ratings, are the collaborative culture and professional relationships among teachers essential for high functioning professional learning communities being affected? Walker (1994) argued, “To improve teaching and learning, teachers cannot work in isolation: collaboration is essential” (p. 38). PLC strength is based on a climate of mutual caring, understanding, and respect. In schools where PLCs are strongly established, evidence exists of higher morale, increased satisfaction, and lasting change (Harris & Jones, 2010; Huffman & Jacobson, 2003). A recent study indicates that a climate of trust is imperative (Chance & Segura, 2009; Giles & Hargreaves, 2008; Harris & Jones, 2010).

The statutory requirements for teacher evaluations in Michigan could be implemented in ways that undermine that trust by placing teachers in a state of

competition with one another for performance evaluation rankings. Although Public Act 102 of 2011 called for ratings among four performance levels and not rankings, provisions in Public Acts 100-102 required districts to base layoff and recall on performance ratings. In order to break ties within performance rating categories, some districts instituted point systems that also place teachers into performance rankings; thus introducing an extra element of competition for both ratings and rankings. The question is then, how does a teacher's need to achieve performance rating and ranking advantage impede the professional trust and mutual support needed to serve as a collaborative team member?

Data Teams

Since enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), schools have implemented a variety of data analysis strategies for the purpose of improving student achievement. Some of the most popular data analysis strategies among educators have been: (a) multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), once better known as response to intervention teams (RTI); (b) school improvement teams; and (c) student study teams. Collectively referred to as *data teams*, these strategies allow schools and groups of teachers to better analyze the high volume of school-level data that must be reported to meet NCLB requirements (Love, 2004; Sharrat & Fullan, 2012). Historically, the analysis of this information had depended upon the heroic work of just a few individuals, making the task incredibly difficult and overwhelming. With data team approaches, however, analysis of student data is a collective responsibility, ensuring that the methods of analyzing information needed to improve practices leading to greater student achievement are sustainable.

Characteristics of data teams. Similar to other professional learning communities, one of the main characteristics of any data team is trust. Trusting relationships allow data team members to share strategies that work in their classrooms in order to help improve learning outcomes among their colleagues. In fact, trust in data teams is typically at such a high level that teachers often take the risk of discussing taboo or implicitly prohibited topics (Love, Stiles, Mundry, & DiRanna, 2008). A primary building block of this type of trust within data teams is a focus on information related to student learning, and not the success or failure of individual teachers. As Wayman, Midgley, and Stringfield, (2006) noted, “Educators are rightly suspicious of data initiatives, because data have been used to punish educators for so long” (p. 9). Data teams, however, help to lessen this air of suspicion by creating and maintaining a positive, non-threatening data culture for educators. In essence, they provide the psychological safety necessary for effective school-wide discussions (Rhude-Faust, 2010).

As mentioned above, one of the most popular types of data teams is the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), previously known as response to intervention teams (RTI). Because of its frequent use among educators, it is discussed in some depth here. One of the core beliefs of an MTSS system is that all students can reach high levels of achievement. Accordingly, the MTSS movement shifts the responsibility for helping all students be successful from just the Title I and special education teachers, to the entire school staff (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009). MTSS does this by providing a unified problem solving system wherein educators collaboratively study student difficulties and

then recommend and monitor the implementation of interventions by classroom teachers (Buffum et al., 2009).

Typical of most MTSS systems are recommendations for variations in the amount of time and the type of instruction used depending on student needs (Fisher & Frey, 2010). A general description of MTSS includes progress monitoring of student achievement to ensure early interventions and supports for students at risk of falling behind. The regular collection of data along with the analysis of the data by teams of educators enables thoughtful decision making to ensure students are receiving needed supports for success and growth. Robust MTSS systems include data-based decision making, analysis and reflection on the collected data, instructional planning based on student strengths and needs, and appropriately tiered interventions (Fisher & Frey, 2010).

Successful implementation of a systemic MTSS initiative has several requirements. First, strong first core instruction must take place in the classroom. This level of instruction is generally referred to as *Tier 1* instruction (Fisher & Frey, 2010). Similar to PLCs, Tier 1 instruction includes identified benchmark evaluations and the refinement of instruction based on student achievement results. Another requirement in the implementation of an MTSS system includes the establishment of a working committee of not only teachers and principals (Love, 2004), but of parents and other expert educators as well (Fisher & Frey, 2010). This committee is charged with examining patterns of teaching and learning at the classroom and grade level (Fisher & Frey, 2010). Finally, a third requirement is a focus on improving student performance using a collaborative approach among educators (Hilliard, 2009). Accordingly, distributive leadership is encouraged, as is collaboration between this group and other

school improvement groups. By working together, a culture of ownership is fostered among teachers and administrators, and collaborative problem solving occurs (Love, 2004).

With a key component of an MTSS system being quality classroom instruction, teachers must establish a common purpose for instructing students. Identifying common practices throughout the school building, therefore, is part of the responsibility of an MTSS team. A first step in this process is examining the proficiency level of all students, which leads staff to dialogue and problem solve regarding implementation of core instruction. This is essential, as supporting teachers in the implementation of identified instructional strategies ensures that all students in a school are receiving similar first core instruction. In fact, in their description of data team interventions, Buffum et al. (2009) argued, “A school that has significantly less than 75% of its students at or above grade-level proficiency has a core program problem, not an intervention problem” (p. 74). Essentially, what these authors argued is that without a system of strategies that is ingrained into the very culture of the school and does not allow individual teachers to opt out, individual interventions are unlikely to have a lasting impact on overall student achievement. It is only with the collective, collaborative efforts of teacher teams that an MTSS system can experience success (Fisher & Frey, 2010).

Effectiveness of data teams. Several studies support the use of data teams to increase teaching effectiveness. In a study conducted by Nelson, Slavit, and Deuel (2012), it was found individual and collective analysis of student achievement data promoted improvements in instructional techniques. Specifically, in their research, Nelson et al. (2012) conducted a multiyear analysis of seven collaborative teams that took

place in a mathematical-science study known as the Partnership for Reform in Secondary Science and Mathematics (PRISSM). This particular research analyzed the interactions of over 40 teachers across five years. Findings indicated that the teachers involved in this project shifted from thinking about the students they served as individual teachers, to constructing a wide perspective of the responsibility to improve the achievement of all students. Furthermore, the researchers concluded that observed cognitive conflict arising from data analysis was actually healthy in a trust-based data team environment (Nelson et al., 2012).

In a dissertation study completed by Rone (2009), the district being studied took a no-fault stance for student achievement, and instead built a model of continuous improvement through collegial dialogue systems. Rone's (2009) study compared 4th and 5th-grade achievement in three elementary schools one year prior to the implementation of the data team and the same grades at the same school during the year as school data teams were implemented. Using a causal-comparative approach, teachers were trained in using a data dialogue process following a district determined protocol, and time was scheduled for collegial conversations centered around student work and identifying student learning needs. Using a pre/post survey of teacher perceptions, teachers indicated increases in team effectiveness after implementing the data team model.

Another dissertation study conducted by Walters (2012) compared mathematics achievement for teachers engaged in data teams. Scores from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) were collected annually for the same group of students from 2008 to 2011. Data teams defined in this study were small content teams that met every other week to collaboratively examine student work. The study found a significant

difference in student achievement scores for students moving from the 8th-grade to the 9th-grade, particularly in the number of students receiving a 'commended' rating. The improvements mathematics achievement from grade to grade were not consistent, however, and Walters (2012) suggested the transition from 9th to 10th-grade was a possible cause of no improvement at that grade level. Further study results indicated data teams had an impact during the first year of implementation, as teachers became more precise in their teaching. Teacher collaboration provided the sustenance for the school data teams.

In a case study research project, Jenkins (2013) examined teacher engagement in the data team process. This three-month research project was conducted at an elementary school with nine teachers. The teachers and the principal met weekly from March through May of 2013. Interview data results with teachers revealed that placing teachers in collaborative data teams is beneficial. This type of data collaboration shifted the focus from individual students and classrooms to all students in the building. The data team process facilitated a sense of shared goals. Moreover, the collaborative process led teachers to share their expertise and together create a deeper understanding of student learning. In fact, interdependency was identified as a salient theme from this case study research (Jenkins, 2013).

Data teams are a venue in which teachers are even more vulnerable than other professional learning and work teams, because they are sharing and examining data that reveals the learning results of the students they teach. Again, while the evidence that teachers who work with each other to unpack, interpret, and act upon student data leads to greater adaptation and differentiation of instruction, and thus, improved student results,

teachers need to feel safe and motivated to share their own student data and assist colleagues in examining their data. This reciprocity is central to the data team process and is what leads to the collective problem solving around problems of practice and solutions for improved student results. This understanding brings us back to the central concern of this study: as teachers experience high stakes performance evaluation ratings (and, in some cases, rankings), how are those experiences influencing their predispositions to engage fully and willingly in such highly collaborative and vulnerable professional engagements as working in data teams?

Peer Coaching

For the purposes of this study, *peer coaching* is defined as a relationship in which two or more professionals collaborate to: (a) reflect on current practice, (b) refine those practices, and (c) share ideas with one another in order to solve challenges experienced in the classroom (Robbins, 1991). Major components of peer mentoring and coaching according to Joyce and Showers (1983) include: (a) providing companionship, (b) giving feedback, (c) analyzing instruction collaboratively, and (d) adapting to student needs. Quality peer-coaching experiences are also non-evaluative. As Ackland (2010) noted, “Perhaps the most important reason for emphasizing *peer* is to ensure that peer coaching will not be used to evaluate a teacher’s classroom performance” (p. 23).

Peer-coaching done right results in a safe, non-threatening environment wherein teachers are able to learn and implement new teaching strategies. This environment, characterized by collegial trust and respect, facilitates the learning and implementation of new teaching strategies in several ways (Swafford, 1998; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). First, peer coaching provides the scaffolding teachers need to evaluate and build

on their current skill level. Through peer coaching, teachers receive constructive feedback on their teaching styles, as well as instruction on how to improve student learning and become more effective practitioners. Second, peer coaching provides teachers the opportunity to enhance their own critical thinking skills through the process of analysis and reflection with a trusted colleague (Cox, Gabry, & Johnson, 1991). In these instances, teachers engage in higher-order forms of thinking in which refining, not fixing practice is typically the goal. Finally, as Donegan, Ostrosky, and Fowler (2000) noted, successful peer coaching promotes personal growth and strengthens relationships among colleagues as teachers develop a healthy belief in their capacity to share something of worth with their peers, as well as a desire to learn from their peers.

The importance of trust in the peer coaching relationship. In a well-developed peer coaching culture, teacher cooperation replaces teacher competition. As mentioned, successful peer coaching hinges on the establishment and fostering of trust among participants. Ladyshevsky (2006) argued that trust building in the peer coaching model is instrumental in creating a learning culture. Slater and Simmons (2001) also argued that trust is instrumental to peer coaching, stating, “Lack of trust can be the downfall of the peer coaching process” (p. 68). Without trust, teachers may feel uncomfortable being critiqued by their colleagues. This is particularly true as it relates to classroom observations, although observations conducted within the context of a trusting peer coaching relationship help to dispel anxiety and promote an interactive collegial process (Ackland, 2010; Cox et al., 1991; Slater & Simmons, 2001).

In a study by Henderson and Prystash (2003), interviews conducted with teachers indicated that a prominent factor leading to successful peer coaching experiences was the

component of trust. Additionally, the teachers involved in the study described peer coaching as positive experience and worth the additional time it took for peer observations and the ensuing dialogues that followed the observations. The relationships between the peer coach and the individual teacher improved as well, as collaboration among teachers within their grade levels expanded. Overall, peer coaching produced a general climate of excitement in which teachers felt eager to share their ideas with one another (Henderson & Prystash, 2003).

Peer coaching enhances teacher instruction. Several studies indicate that peer coaching enhances teacher instruction. Most studies show that in general, peer coaching helps teachers gain insight and initiate self-prescribed changes to their instruction (Kohler, Crilley, Shilley, & Good, 1997; Swafford et al. 1998; Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen, & Bolhuis, 2007, 2009). Murray, Ma, and Mazur (2008), for example, found that teachers cite increased collaboration and interaction, improved communication, and the opportunity to share strategies and techniques for better instruction as the key benefits of peer coaching relationships. Similarly, Greene (2004) also found that teachers view peer coaching as a positive, supportive experience that allows practitioners to assess and modify their instruction.

In a study conducted by Kohler et al. (1997), the most direct outcomes of peer coaching were procedural changes and refinement in teaching practices. This particular study involved four teachers and found that all four refined their teaching practice as a result of collaborating with a peer coach. Following peer coaching sessions wherein teachers identified and analyzed student engagement, incidents of student talk increased

from an original range of 13 to 20% to a range of 73 to 76%. Routines and procedures not discussed during the peer coaching session, however, saw little to no refinement.

An action research study conducted by Pollara (2012) points to findings similar to those of Kohler et al. (1997) in the area of peer mentoring. According to pre- and post-survey results, those participating in the study reported they learned how to implement a practice or strategy best by watching others. Furthermore, teachers involved in the study indicated an increased willingness to implement a new strategy for their classroom practice with the involvement of a peer mentor. Peer coaching also had a positive impact on classroom management practices, and opportunities to learn about integrating technology into instruction were cited as a positive outcome of observing peer teachers through the mentoring program in this action research.

Sparks and Bruder (1987) examined peer coaching at the elementary school level. Videotapes of teachers instructing for 20 minutes were recorded to use for coaching sessions, and not for evaluative purposes. Pre-project data indicated 52% of teachers rated advice received from their peers as helpful. At the conclusion of the first year of implementation, 75% of teachers indicated advice received related to instruction as very helpful. Before peer coaching was implemented, 25% of participants reported they received feedback on their instruction, compared to 89% after peer coaching. The level of discussing effective teaching strategies increased from 25 to 45%.

Isolation in the classroom has built generations of teachers seeking feedback. In a study conducted by Slater and Simmons (2001) at the secondary level, peer mentoring was found to help overcome the barrier of isolation for classroom teachers. Peer coaching enhanced teaching skills, and assisted teachers with gaining new knowledge,

acquiring new practices, and constructing a positive teaching/learning culture. An extended benefit of peer coaching was increased discussion of teaching practices outside of the formal peer coaching experience. The level of professional discussions increased across the school day. Based on these results, Slater and Simmons (2001) concluded peer coaching at the high school level does indeed have the potential to develop more expertise in teaching.

Peer coaching improves student learning. Overall, teachers report that peer coaching improves student learning (Cox et al., 1991; Sparks & Bruder, 1987); however, the results of various studies have been mixed. Troen and Boles (2010), for example, found that a team peer coaching model implemented at the elementary level resulted in a 10% average increase on accommodated in-class assessments, with 70% of the students receiving a grade of C or better. In the same classes, the percentage of students who failed homework assignments decreased from 50 to 0%. In another study, Bruce and Ross (2008) found that peer coaching had an influence on the mathematics instruction of teachers in grades 3 and 6, with peer coaching having a significant impact on both teacher self-efficacy, the implementation of effective mathematics teaching strategies, and the quality of tasks assigned.

In contrast to the research cited above, a study conducted by Stichter, Lewis, Richter, Johnson, and Bradley (2006) found that peer coaching did not produce significantly different results when compared to traditional in-service professional development at the elementary level, although both methods did result in increased academic achievement among students. Stichter et al. (2006) also found changes in teacher behavior were slightly greater among teachers who received peer coaching, while

improvements in student achievement were slightly greater for teachers who received in-service professional development. Similarly, the Murray et al. (2008) study mentioned previously examined 14 teachers at six different schools, and found that no improvements in student mathematical achievement took place as a result of peer coaching. The authors did note, however, that the lack of improvement in student achievement could be due to the short timeline that peer coaching was implemented, and that typically, a full year of peer coaching is needed to improve student learning.

To conclude, as shown throughout this portion of the literature review on peer coaching, teachers generally perceived peer coaching as positive and beneficial to student learning. Michigan requires that mentors be assigned to new teachers during their first three years in the profession. The trust and collegiality that is built through peer coaching has an impact on instruction and student achievement. Of interest is how might the legislative changes enacted in Michigan in July of 2011 influence teachers' thoughts on, dispositions towards, and engagement with the practices of peer mentoring and coaching. Of particular interest is the level of interest more experienced practitioners have in a peer coaching model due to the possible impact of effectiveness labels on tenure, lay-off, and merit-based pay as described in Michigan's educator evaluation legislation. This study hopes to fill this and previously discussed gaps in the literature related to collaborative professional processes and practices among teachers in a school environment in a climate of high stakes accountability.

Michigan's Education Evaluation System

The increasing focus on educator evaluation is due in part to the belief that schools are not performing and improving student achievement as they should (Natriello,

1984). It is essential that evaluations denote the criteria used to judge the performance of educators. Sampling and appraisal need to occur through direct observation followed by assigning an evaluation value to the performance. Discretion is an inherent component of evaluation practice. The appraisal is followed by communicating the evaluation to the educator and engaging in developing a plan for improvement (Natriello, 1984). In addition to the observation protocol, Peterson (2004) recommends including student achievement data, stakeholder survey data, and peer review of materials as part of the evaluation system.

In a study conducted by Natriello (1984), results indicate that the effect of increasing the frequency of educator evaluation leads to teachers working more effectively. Further findings suggest that administrators and policymakers are on the correct path of using educator evaluation to enhance teacher perceptions of their effectiveness.

Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness

According to its website, the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness was established by Public Act 102 in June 2011 to “develop a fair, transparent, and feasible evaluation system for teachers and school administrators” (“MCEE About,” n.d.). First cited in the state legislation as the Governor’s Council for Educator Effectiveness, the MCEE (with the approval of Governor Snyder) was renamed the Michigan Council on Educator Effectiveness in March 2012, and was charged with the “ambitious agenda” (MCEE, 2103, p. 4) of providing a report to the state legislature that recommended the following:

- A student growth and assessment tool.

- A state evaluation tool for teachers.
- A state evaluation tool for school administrators.
- Changes to the requirements for a professional teaching certificate.
- A process for evaluating and approving local evaluation tools for educators that is consistent with the state evaluation tool for teachers and administrators and the act. (MCEE, 2103, p. 4)

While the MCEE was charged with the agenda described above, in its interim progress report dated April 2012, the MCEE indicated that its two primary focal objectives would be: (a) identifying a student growth and assessment tool, and (b) developing observation protocols for teachers. To accomplish these objectives, MCEE members believed that collaboration would be key (MCEE, 2012). Accordingly, the MCEE conducted a pilot study of educator evaluation tools with 13 local school districts during the 2012-2013 school year (MCEE, 2013). Included in the pilot were four evaluation models: (a) Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching; (b) Marzano's Teacher Evaluation Model; (c) 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning; and (d) The Thoughtful Classroom. Each of these models follows a rubric with descriptions of educator performance dimensions instead of a checklist of behaviors, competencies, or duties, as checklists have been found to be ineffective in identifying levels of educator effectiveness (Peterson, 2004).

In addition to the four evaluation models, the MCEE pilot study consisted of several other components. These components included a student pre-test in September 2012, the inclusion of a growth/value-added model, pilot of an administration evaluation tool, and a request to develop student growth tools for at least one non-core subject. This

method was deemed appropriate, as according to the MCEE (2013), other states have instituted pilots while developing a statewide educator evaluation system with subsequent decisions based on the feedback and data resulting from the pilot implementation.

After the pilot was completed, the MCEE issued its final report in July 2013. This report provided key recommendations important to the current research study. Of particular note, the MCEE (2013) recommended that the state identify through a Request for Proposal process, the adoption of Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching, Marzano's Teacher Evaluation Model, The Thoughtful Classroom, or the 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning. Integral to the adoption of the observation tool was the requirement to include a training component for observers using the observation system, along with training in the areas of coaching teachers and providing effective feedback to those observed. Furthermore, the MCEE (2013) final report also included a number of recommendations for the inclusion of student growth in the educator evaluation system. This would consist of the use of a value-added model (VAM) provided by the state, the adoption of assessments in non-core content areas, the option for assigning growth data to students not assigned directly to the teacher, and the possibility of using school-level VAMs to promote the collaborative work of teachers (MCEE, 2013).

The MCEE disbanded after it released its final report in June 2013 ("MCEE About," n.d.). To date, the Michigan legislative body has experienced several false starts in providing directives to educational institutions regarding implementing one of the four models mentioned in the MCEE's final report. During the 2014 legislative year, proposed legislation supporting the choice of one of the four models for districts to use in part to determine educator effectiveness failed to garner enough support from both

legislative bodies. Opponents deem other legislation as lacking rigorous standards and not providing districts options to create their own systems. Another concern is the financial commitment it would take to implement recommendations suggested by the MCEE. Without legislative support with funding included, many districts may find it difficult to create and or adopt a system that includes rigorous research-based standards, thus, leading to a climate that may result in arbitrary and capricious removal of teachers.

Teacher Observation and Evaluation System Findings

Teacher observation and evaluation systems have received a considerable amount of attention within the field of education over the past decade. Many educators find that a major weakness of traditional teacher evaluation is the fact that teachers receive very little constructive, evidence-based feedback regarding their performance. Without this feedback, many teachers are left without critical information needed to improve instruction and student outcomes. Several school districts and education organizations are now working to develop and research effective, evidence-based observation and evaluation tools for this reason. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2011), for example, supports extensive research with additional collaborators on the various educator evaluation components known as the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project. Prior to the extensive MET project, Chicago Public Schools implemented the Excellence in Teaching initiative as an effort to revitalize the manner in which teachers are evaluated, and the type of feedback they receive on their performance. Through this research and the work of others, it has been determined that training and feedback are two major variables in reliable educator evaluation systems, as well as transparency and trust (Aldeman & Chung, 2014; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010, 2013, 2014; Myung

& Martinez, 2013). The next two sections discuss research conducted as part of the Chicago Public Schools and MET initiatives in greater detail. Following these sections, reliability, training, feedback, and trust in teacher evaluation are also discussed.

The Chicago Public Schools teacher evaluation project. Chicago Public Schools (CPS) implemented a study of a robust evaluation system three years prior to the legislative changes enacted in Michigan with PA 100-103. Starting in 2008, CPS began their project, titled, Recognizing Educators Advancing Chicago's Students (REACH Students), with the goal of: (a) improving teaching and learning; (b) developing a strong professional learning climate; and (c) fostering a constructive educator evaluation climate (Sartain, Stoelinga, & Brown, 2011). For 30 years prior to the study, CPS had used a binary system of teacher evaluation before transitioning to the study's observation rubric system, which was paired with student achievement data components. The binary system included a simple checklist with two ratings of strength or weakness, and failed to provide teachers with a strong definition of effective teaching practices. In addition, the binary system did not assist with the identification and eventual removal of low performing teachers.

Beyond use of an observation rubric and student achievement data, the CPS REACH Students project also introduced several other components into the district's teacher evaluation method (Sartain et al., 2011). Specifically, REACH Students introduced principal and external observers to the evaluation process, as well as training for both principals and teachers in use of the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching. Using this instrument, principals and external observers were required to observe classroom instruction twice per school year for each teacher participant of the

study. The Danielson observation tool was deemed to be reliable and valid by the developers of the study, which was confirmed by the study's results (Sartain et al., 2011).

Initially, not all CPS schools implemented the REACH Students teacher evaluation method. In partnership with the Consortium of School Research at the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute (CCSR), CPS randomly selected four schools for a pilot study. Within each school, teachers were randomly selected to participate. The total sample consisted of 501 teachers of grades 4 through 8 English language arts and/or mathematics. Half of the schools implemented the system in the 2008-2009 school year, while the other half implemented the system during the 2009-2010 school year. As mentioned, teachers in the pilot were observed by both the school's principal and an external observer (Sartain et al., 2011). A total of 955 observations were made. Overall, results indicated that the teachers with the lowest framework score also had the lowest value-added measure. As framework designations increased, so did student English/language arts scores. These results held true for mathematics teachers as well. As Sartain et al. (2011) noted, "The relationship between framework ratings and value-added measures [was] statistically significant for all components" (p. 11).

The second phase of the CPS study was implemented during the 2012-2013 school year, and was described by Sporte, Stevens, Healey, Jiang, and Hart (2013) as a massive undertaking. According to these authors, this initiative "required a large-scale investment of time and energy from teachers, administrators, and CPS central office staff, and the teachers' union" (Sporte et al., 2013, p. 1). It included: (a) data collected from surveys completed by 1,195 principals in December 2012 and then again in May 2013; (b) a sampling of surveys completed by 2,000 teachers in January 2013, with all teachers

completing the survey in March 2013; (c) random sample interviews with 31 teachers and six principals from six schools; and (c) interviews with nine central office staff (Spote et al., 2013). Overall, the results of the study were again positive, with the majority of teachers indicating that the various aspects of the evaluation method supported teacher growth, identified areas of strength and weakness, and improved the quality of professional conversations among teachers. Over half of the teachers, however, believed the system relied too heavily on student data.

The MET teacher evaluation project. The Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project was developed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2009 (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010, 2013, 2014). According to its website, “The MET project was designed to find out how evaluation methods could best be used to tell teachers more about the skills that make them most effective and to help districts identify and develop great teaching” (<http://www.metproject.org/>, para 2). More specifically, this project focuses on ensuring every student has an effective teacher every year in every classroom. This focus is based on the belief that more effective teacher evaluation leads to more effective teaching, which in turn leads to improved education for all students. In fact, the authors of the MET project argue that if all students experienced the top quartile of teachers, the learning gap between the United States and Japan would close in as little as two years (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010). The MET project, however, is not based solely on student achievement, and includes several additional components including classroom observations and student and teacher perception surveys.

At the start of the MET project, more than 3,000 teachers from six urban districts volunteered to be part of this research. Panoramic digital video cameras were used to

collect evidence on over 20,000 lessons. Additionally, as mentioned above, information was also gathered on the following attributes: (a) student achievement gains on assessments; (b) classroom observations and teacher reflections; (c) teachers' pedagogical content knowledge; (d) students' perceptions of the classroom instructional environment; and (e) teachers' perceptions of working conditions and support. During the 2009-2010 school year, teacher effectiveness was assessed using the measures just described. Then, during the 2010-2011 school year, students were randomly assigned to teachers who taught in the same grade, subject, and school, and data was collected to determine if the previous year's measure of teacher performance accurately predicted student achievement. The results indicated that students with the teachers who had the highest composite ratings on the MET measures of teacher effectiveness did in fact demonstrate the most academic gains. The data showed it is possible to identify groups of teachers that are more effective in helping students achieve (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013).

Reliability. Reliability is an important issue as it relates to teacher observation and evaluation. Although principals are often at the center of evaluation, use of multiple raters fosters a more reliable observation system (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013; Myung & Martinez, 2013). In particular, reliability is strengthened when multiple observers observe the same lesson and compare their findings; that is, reliability increases through the use of inter-rater comparison of principal ratings to the ratings of trained, expert observers. Additionally, as Aldeman and Chuong (2014) noted, use of multiple raters, while time intensive, assists in mitigating biases associated with implementing complex observation tools. Pairing outside observers with principal observers reduces

the in-school bias a school administrator may bring to the observation setting and increases the reliability of the observation feedback score (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013). Research conducted by Sartain et al. (2011) found that principals rated teaching practices reliably at the low and middle of the scale; however, principals were more likely to select distinguished when the trained second observer gave the same lesson a proficient rating. Principals indicated the reason for the distinguished rating was to preserve relationships with teachers.

Beyond the research conducted by Sartain et al. (2011), other studies also reveal the importance of multiple observers to reliability. In the MET study, it was determined that the addition of a second rater significantly increased the reliability of observation scores (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013). For example, results showed that reliability ranging from .66 to .72 could be achieved by implementing a system that included: (a) two 45-minute lesson observations by the principal, (b) one 45-minute lesson observation by a different rater, and (c) three 15-minute observations all conducted by different raters (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013). Teachers also have more confidence in individual evaluation ratings that are obtained with multiple observers.

To conclude, it is clear that use of multiple raters helps to increase the reliability of teacher observation and evaluation. However, administrators often cite dedicating time to conducting reliable observations and collecting evidence as a challenge (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations, 2013; Sporte et al., 2013). Administrators involved in the MET and REACH Students projects, for example, expressed a concern with the amount of time implementing the system placed on their daily routines. In their research on the REACH Students project, Sporte et al. (2013) found “Sixty-six percent of administrators

agreed or strongly agreed the new teacher evaluation system took too much time” (p. 25). In addition, principals reported spending an average of six hours on each observation cycle per teacher. Administrators indicated strong support for using the framework to improve instruction, but cited the necessity of trade-offs to dedicate time to the evaluation process. Such trade-offs included spending less time talking to students and parents, decreased time cultivating the school climate, and fewer grade level/department meetings (Sporte et al., 2013). Using multiple raters provides relief to these time constraints. Thus, a solution to the challenge of finding time to conduct observations is having multiple raters observe in 15-minute segments (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013).

Training. Both the REACH Students and the MET projects required that all observers receive training (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013; Sporte et al., 2013). Administrators in the REACH Students project received in-depth training on use of the performance system through an online training process that included viewing videos and comparing their scoring accuracy to expert scorers, culminating with a certification assessment (Sporte et al., 2013). More than 30 hours were spent on the certification process. Coordinated with the certification process, administrators participated in face-to-face learning sessions across the school year. During these learning sessions, administrators reported their levels of proficiency in the recording of evidence and alignment of that evidence with the performance rubric to determine observation ratings. More than 80% of administrators reported confidence in using the observation system reliably.

While administrators tend to receive adequate training and express confidence in their ability to implement observation tools, training for teachers presents a very different picture (Sporte et al., 2013). Teachers in the REACH Students project reported that training on the observation rubric depended heavily on school leadership. CPS offered two sessions of training for teachers with only 400 of the 20,000 teachers participating (Sporte et al., 2013). Thus, training on the district's evaluation measures for teachers does not appear to be a priority for some school districts. Nevertheless, as noted within the MET study (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013), ongoing training for both administrators and teachers is vital to improving the strength of the observation component of the evaluation performance system.

Feedback. Beyond reliability and training, feedback is another key component in teacher observation and evaluation. This includes pre- and post-observation dialogue between the teacher observed and the principal conducting the observations (Sporte et al., 2013). Sporte et al. (2013) report that the quality of conferences is based on a principal's ability to provide constructive feedback during the process. In the REACH Students project, administrators expressed confidence in their ability to implement the observation tool, however, they also indicated a high or medium priority need for professional learning in the area of providing teachers with substantive, useful feedback during a dialogue process to improve their teaching practices. A particular weakness demonstrated by principals during the conference segments of the REACH Students project was the inability to pose high level questions; in fact, 65% of the questions asked were deemed low level; 25% medium level; and only 10% were deemed high level (Sartain et al., 2011). An additional area of concern identified in the study was the

domination of principal talk during the conference. About 75% of the conversation consisted of principal talk, leaving only 25% of the dialogue attributed to teachers (Sartain, et al., 2011). Moreover, some teachers indicated a threat perception during conversations with administrators following direct observations (Myung & Martinez, 2013). Teachers believed that this process could threaten their professional image and potential livelihood.

Trust. Trust is a final component of effective teacher observations and evaluations. Several authors suggest that quality implementation of a high stakes evaluation system depends on the level of trust among staff members and administration (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014; Myung & Martinez, 2013; Spote et al., 2013). Yet, fostering the culture of trust that is required for learner focused feedback dialogue is often challenging due to the tensions that arise with use of an observation system for accountability purposes. As mentioned, Myung and Martinez's (2013) interview findings reveal teachers often have a threat perception versus a challenge perception following direct observations:

A teacher being critiqued can view the same feedback either as a threat to her core self or as challenge for improving her abilities. Crucially, how a teacher defines the interaction (or how the administrator portrays it) can have profound effects on whether it leads to improved practice – effects that happen both in the mind and on a biological level in the body.

(Myung & Martinez, 2013, p. 4)

Myung and Martinez (2013) further noted that teachers described the evaluation as terrifying; that their core capacity for teaching was under intense scrutiny and

question. Based on this finding, it can be assumed that fostering trust is necessary to have a positive observation/evaluation process. If teachers have an understanding of the evaluation process, trust based relationships with the administrator, and a sense of belonging in the school community, the evaluation experience will be seen as a moment of challenge and not threatening (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014; Myung & Martinez, 2013). As a challenge experience, teachers see the evaluation process as an opportunity to share strengths and receive feedback for improvement. If the experience is seen as a threat, lacking all the components present in a challenge situation, the teacher will interpret the experience differently. How might this type of environment influence a teacher's willingness to contribute to a collaborative practice to assist another teacher improving their practice?

Value Added Models

Consistent measures of teacher performance have long been the focus of research and political activism in the field of education (Kimball, White, Milanowski, & Borman, 2004; Lavigne, 2014). More recently, however, the focus on teacher performance based on student achievement data and its use in employment and tenure decisions has intensified. In Michigan, PA 100-103 set an incrementally increasing weighted use of student data for annual year-end evaluations for Michigan educators. Beginning with the 2013-2014 school year, 25% of the summative educator evaluation required that the final effectiveness label included student growth and achievement. In the 2014-2015 school year, 40% of the evaluation was weighted on student growth and achievement, and in the 2015-2016 school year, 50% of the year-end evaluation will be weighted on student growth and achievement improvements. However, Michigan legislators continued

changing the impact of student achievement growth on final evaluation results. Public Act 173 of 2015 set the weight back to 25% through the 2017-2018 school year.

Methods of teacher evaluation that include use of student achievement data for employment and tenure decision-making are known as value added models (VAMs). VAMs as the primary criteria for measuring teacher quality represent a seismic shift in policies focusing on teacher evaluation (Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010). Some see VAMs as a more objective measure of teacher effectiveness than observation models (Collins & Beardsley-Amrein, 2014). Others oppose value added models because of difficulties associated with their implementation and the potential for decisions to be made based on inaccurate data (Anderman, Anderman, Yough, and Gimbert, 2010). The sections below discuss the primary assumptions of value added models, as well as difficulties and issues of reliability and validity in value added models.

Assumptions of value added models. In an analytic essay, Lavigne (2014) suggested that the primary assumption in the use of VAMs is that the removal of ineffective teachers will result in increased student achievement. It is further assumed that VAMs will improve instruction and learning, and help identify low achieving students (Anderman et al., 2010; Winters & Cowen, 2013). In fact, research does show that VAMs provide a more reliable and longitudinal picture of student growth across time. Findings from Cantrell and Kane's (2013) study on Michigan's weighted teacher evaluation system show the following:

Our data suggest that assigning 50 percent or 33 percent of the weight to state test results maintains considerable predictive power, increases

reliability, and potentially avoids the unintended negative consequences from assigning too-heavy weights to a single measure. (p. 15)

Although student achievement measures are a required component of Michigan's educator evaluation system, it is important that the data used is reliable and valid. Peterson (2004) recommends teachers select and control the data points being included in the evaluation to the extent of excluding specific results. It is important to note, however, that not all data can be excluded. VAMs add objectivity to teacher evaluation measures, as excluding student achievement data may lead to the inclusion of more minor characteristics of teacher quality such as popularity or volunteerism to determine effectiveness.

A VAM in its simplest form analyzes the difference following inputs and outputs in a productive process (Harris, 2009). Findings from the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project indicate that adding value added data to the observation scores received from principals creates stronger evidence of effective teaching than just using observation ratings alone (Cantrell & Kane, 2013; Kane & Staiger, 2012). Peterson (1994) suggests that an evaluation system that excludes student growth data leads to public losses of credibility and support from the various stakeholders. Adding student survey data to educator VAM further increases the reliability of the overall rating.

Finally, Collins and Beardsley-Amrein (2014) argue that it is imperative that high stakes decisions regarding teacher tenure and job security not be based on test scores alone. Similarly, Konstantopoulos (2014) recommends teacher evaluation systems be comprehensive in nature, and include a combination of value added data statistical data,

observation data, and professional attributes. Michigan is a state pairing assessment data with an observation model.

Difficulties associated with value added models. One might assume teachers are opposed to the controversial use of merit pay and VAMs being used for annual educator evaluations. According to Ballou and Pogursky (1993), teachers' unions have indeed long been opposed to performance-based pay, and have lobbied extensively against legislation that includes the use of student achievement in determining teacher performance ratings. In fact, opposition of teachers to merit pay and the value added model is a major reason for its failure in being implemented effectively. Teachers see little to no advantage in using end-of-the-year assessment information, and many of the VAMs in place are used annually instead of across the year to inform instruction. An additional reason for lack of effective implementation of a valid VAM is the complexity of constructing such a system and the expense associated with the construction (Aderman et al., 2010; Collins & Beardsley-Amrein, 2014; Harris, 2009). Making use of such a model across the school year is cost prohibitive.

While there is support for using VAM in part for determining a teacher's overall effectiveness, researchers are beginning to issue caution in using student achievement data carelessly for such high stakes decisions, including the termination of teachers, merit pay, and teacher lay offs (Anderman et al, 2010; Berliner, 2014; Collins & Beardsley-Amrein, 2014; Harris, 2009). If growth is not carefully measured and accurate, decisions impacting teacher employment could be based on inaccurate data (Anderman et al., 2010). Other concerns regarding VAMs include, but are not limited to, the lack of random assignment of students to classrooms, teachers, and buildings; and failing to

account for socioeconomic status, including school attendance rates and other potential demographic data, and are seen as a weakness in determining teacher effectiveness using VAMs (Anderman et al., 2010; Harris, 2009; Konstantopoulos, 2014).

Regarding student demographic data, use of VAMs appears to place schools and classroom with populations of high poverty and racial diversity at a disadvantage (Anderman et al. 2010, Collins & Beardsley-Amrein, 2014). Many mean assessment score differences result from biases built either into the assessments themselves or ignoring the demographic differences between students. This disadvantage transfers to educators in these diverse schools and classrooms when assessment results are used for individual evaluation purposes. Although statisticians argue to include demographic variable when implementing a VAM for evaluation purposes, 43% of 46 states responding to Collins and Beardsley-Amrein's (2014) inquiry indicated no plans for including demographic data and other variables in the state implemented model. Although Michigan developed a data system to provide districts with annual assessment results associated to individual teachers, the current growth model is district determined (Collins & Beardsley-Amrein, 2014).

To illustrate this point, Berliner (2014) describes a retired teacher that served in the state of California. This teacher was rated a great teacher for her first 10 years, a poor teacher her middle 10 years, and a great teacher her last 10 years. This educator taught in the same district for her entire career. She attributed the change in her quality of teaching rating to a change in student populations over time. The first 10 years, her students were American-born and upwardly mobile. In the second 10 years, the student body transitioned to poor immigrant Hispanic students with language difficulties. In the final

10 years, the population shifted to Asian immigrants with language problems, but with educated families and little to no poverty (Berliner, 2014). This shows how instead of an individual teacher necessarily making the primary impact on student achievement, other causal effects including peer or classroom composition effects, curriculum, school leadership, climate, technology integration, or per pupil expenditures may also have a strong impact on student achievement (Berliner, 2014; Gabriel & Lester, 2013).

Reliability and validity of value added models. One of the characteristics of VAMs is the random assignment of students into various classrooms. True random assignment is difficult to achieve, however, as families typically determine where they reside and many parents select the schools and classrooms they wish for their children to attend. Experts indicate that failing to account for unobservable differences related to student achievement growth and failing to randomly assign students to teachers and classrooms has an impact the validity of a VAM (Konstantopoulos, 2014). Reliable VAMs take into account previous learning of students, socioeconomic conditions, attendance, and other covariates to more accurately estimate teacher influence on student achievement. Michigan currently does not have a true VAM that includes the aforementioned covariates (Collins & Beardsley-Amrein, 2014; Konstantopoulos, 2014).

Beyond random assignment of students, ensuring reliability and validity in a VAM used for educator evaluation also involves a large amount of mathematical processing. These calculations are complex and expensive to arrive at. Only a small number of specialists have the capacity and knowledge to carry out such calculations to arrive at effectiveness conclusions (Lavigne, 2014; Marder, 2012). Many expert statisticians agree that great caution should be used in analyzing and taking action based

on the results. If evaluation measures are indeed used for high stakes decisions resulting in the firing of teachers, high levels of reliability are warranted (Konstanatopoulus, 2014; Lavigne, 2014).

Several studies show that the types of statistics used to calculate VAMs can have a significant affect on outcomes. A study conducted by Collins and Beardsley-Amrein (2014) indicates a lack of reliability across the majority of VAMs in use for determining teacher effectiveness. A teacher deemed effective one year has a 25 percent chance in being deemed ineffective the following year. Another study conducted by Goldhaber, Goldschmidt, and Tseng (2013) spanned grades 10 through 12, and included 23 schools, 205 teachers, and 8,002 students. Data used for the study was collected from ACT core subject end-of-course assessments. Findings showed that running three different formula models (i.e., (a) traditional and student-fixed effects; (b) student-fixed effects and fixed effects with lagged scores; and (c) traditional and student-fixed effects with lagged scores) resulted in a considerable amount of teachers being moved from one quintile to another, strictly dependent on which of the different model specifications was implemented. In fact, about 9% of the teachers that fell in the lowest quintile using one of the models moved to the highest quintile using a different model (Goldhaber et al., 2013). These same researchers concluded that VAM specifications, due to use of different formulas, can have a significant impact on estimated teacher effect size and influence the effectiveness rating. A final study conducted by Marder (2012) using data scores from New York City teachers, found that due to size of error, half of student gains and losses attributed to teacher effects are really due to a technical mistake in attempting to find a straight line of data that describes a curve.

Sanders and Horn (1998) conducted a study on the implementation of the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS). Since 1993, TVAAS has issued reports on district, building, and teacher effectiveness for students in 3rd through 8th grade, and selected high school mathematics content courses. Their method of statistics for determining effectiveness includes the use of a mixed-model theory and methodology enabling a multivariate, longitudinal analysis of assessment data. An important fact about TVAAS is that it can be the sole factor in determining teacher effectiveness (Sanders & Horn, 1998). The system measures cumulative average gains using three years of data. Research findings related to the use of TVAAS have found that race, socioeconomic status, and the mean school achievement are unrelated to the cumulative gains for grades 3 through 8. Students serve as their own control; thus, including variables as mentioned is not necessary. Results from the TVAAS study indicate that only the top 20% of teachers provide instruction to the highest level students, which results in academic gains, and almost all low achieving students benefit from all but the least effective teachers (Sanders & Horn, 1998).

To conclude, the literature indicates that VAMs have many potential benefits as it relates to teacher evaluation, however, these benefits must be considered within the context of difficulties with implementation and reliability and validity. There can be a significant impact on morale when removing effective teachers falsely identified as ineffective. As Lavigne (2014) noted in an analytic essay, a potential impact of a VAM system resulting in the firing of teachers is the loss of trust between faculty and administration leading to further criticism of the teaching profession. Even some of the strongest proponents of VAMs fear pitting teachers against one another, thus impacting

collaboration and collegiality (Harris, 2009). There are also concerns that VAM data is not used appropriately. A simulation study conducted by Winters and Cowens (2013) using data from 4th and 5th grade teachers in Florida predicted that very few dismissals result based on unsatisfactory rates, as so few teachers are deemed ineffective.

Moreover, false positive ratings are possible using value added models, and teachers in grades kindergarten through 2nd, and those serving high school grades often do not serve students that complete annual high stakes assessments (Winters et al., 2013). Overall, as Konstantopoulos (2014) noted, “In sum, the reliability and stability of the teacher effects estimates seem modest and, to some degree, questionable” (p. 13).

Chapter II Summary

While collaboration is not the remedy of all school problems, consistent collaboration among educators has the potential to create the basic changes needed to create a climate conducive to increases in student academic achievement (Chance & Segura, 2009). In addition, Peterson (2004) indicates that merit pay itself sets up a competitive system among educators and actually has the effect of discouraging educator collaboration which is a component of well-functioning systems. With teacher effectiveness ratings standardized and now a basis for position security with, at least, 25% of this rating based on student achievement through school year 2017-2018 where it moves to 40% of the overall evaluation rating (Michigan Public Act 173 of 2015), how might the pressure of being accountable for individual student achievement be described by teachers? The effects of large scale, standardized reforms in educator evaluation have the potential of undermining relationships and security inherent to strong professional learning communities.

Mandated reforms have the potential to strain connections and communications among teachers. As standardized pressures mount, wedges are created between educators. Pressures of reforms have the capacity to set teachers against one another at a time when mutual support is most needed. Reforms have a negative impact on resilience (Giles & Hargreaves, 2008). Many researchers, educators, and policy experts alike express fears that accountability and standardization at the classroom teacher level will lead to an atmosphere of less-open dialogue, an essential attribute of collaborative practices (Servage, 2008; Wells & Feun, 2007). A precondition to change in American schools is the presence of a warm and trusting collegial culture. Critical professional dialogues and sharing requires a level of psychological safety. As Servage (2008) noted, “Teachers are asked to lay bare their assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses before their colleagues” (p. 71). Critics of state mandated high stakes performance evaluation systems argue that it is possible that these systems create a climate of dispirited blame and shame. They further worry that such a climate can and will undermine the collaborative practices that demonstrate improved student achievement and positive culture conducive to teaching and learning. This study sought to go inside the experiences of teachers and examine how they are internalizing the nexus between high stakes performance evaluation as it is being carried out in their schools and the culture of collaborative professionalism in their school.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Michigan has a long history of school reform with an overall goal of improving student achievement and success. Traditionally, student achievement was evaluated at building and district levels. However, due to recent statewide legislative reforms (i.e., PA 100-103 of 2011), individual teachers and school administrators in Michigan are now also evaluated and held responsible for student performance. Few studies are available that examine how these reforms influence the qualitative nature of teaching, especially in relationship to the culture of professional collaboration and collegial interdependency among teachers. The purpose of this phenomenological study, therefore, was to understand how teachers make sense of their profession in a post PA 100-103 of 2011 era. This chapter outlines the methodology used to conduct the study. Accordingly, the sections below describe the study's: (a) research questions; (b) research design; (c) setting, subjects, and sampling; (d) recruitment and consent procedures; (e) data types and sources; (f) data collection procedures; (g) data analysis; (h) delimitations and limitations; and (i) assumptions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the researcher and a chapter summary.

Research Questions

In order to understand the shared experience of the teaching profession post PA 100-103, the following overarching questions were used to guided this study:

1. How are teachers experiencing the implementation of Michigan's high stakes performance evaluation system as it is being carried out in their schools?
2. How are teachers experiencing the professional culture in their schools since the

implementation of Michigan's new high stakes performance evaluation system in their schools?

After describing their experience with the changes that have occurred to education since the summer of 2011 and their experiences with the legislated changes, the following additional questions were examined regarding each participant's personal experiences with the new environment of high stakes performance evaluation tied to student achievement and student growth:

1. How do teachers describe their experiences with performance evaluation before the changes in Michigan laws?
2. How do the teachers describe their personal experiences with their school's evaluation system?
3. Where and how do teachers' descriptions of their experiences indicate any tensions, discomfort, or insecurity?
4. How do teachers compare their experiences of collegiality and collaboration with other teachers before and since the implementation of the new evaluation system and process? (i.e. professional learning communities, data teams, peer mentoring and coaching, etc.)?

Research Design

This study utilized a transcendental phenomenology research design. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), "Phenomenological approaches seek to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experience" (p. 19). Transcendental phenomenology is a specific approach in which the researcher brackets out his or her own experience, and then collects data from others that have experienced a phenomenon

(Creswell, 2007). The approach was developed by Moustakas (1994), who described transcendental phenomenology as a type of research in which “everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (p. 34). The researcher has selected this research design due to its effectiveness at gathering the perceptions and experiences from those that have experienced the phenomena. In the current study, this type of phenomenological research led to a deep understanding of the how practicing educators are experiencing the legislative changes outlined in PA 100-103 of 2011.

In describing transcendental phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) discusses the term *epoche*. *Epoche*, also known as *bracketing*, is the process by which the researcher sets aside his or her own experience to get a “fresh” perspective of the phenomenon. As the researcher conducted the study, it was important to refrain from judging the responses of the participants and to be open to a new way of perceiving the phenomena. The researcher must examine her biases and be open to possible new ways of understanding the phenomena being studied. The researcher begins this process in the section titled *Researcher* at the end of the chapter.

Setting, Subjects, and Sampling

Public Acts 100-103 of 2011 were written specifically for educators serving in K-12 and intermediate school districts. This research study was conducted using an electronic meeting format, with the participating subject selecting the site to connect for the interview to ensure anonymity. Purposeful sampling of site selections was used in this study. This type of sampling provided the researcher the opportunity to select sites to purposely approach the central phenomena of the study (Creswell, 2007). Districts that had collective bargaining agreements that were not in effect as of July 19, 2011 were

required to implement the legislative changes beginning with the 2011-2012 school year (Swem, 2011). The potential pool of participants was recruited from districts located in the mid-Michigan area from eight counties. The districts represent small rural districts, medium size rural districts, and districts located in an urban area. Many of the districts have within their boundaries public and private universities and community colleges. Access to educators in these districts was sought through communication with each district superintendent. Electronic contact was made with each district superintendent to explain the study, share the questions that were to be asked, and provide assurance that once the study was completed, a copy would be provided to the superintendents of the districts involved in the study. It is through contact with local superintendents that the recruitment message was disseminated via the superintendent to the teachers serving in his or her district.

The intent of qualitative analysis is not to study many participants, but to study fewer participants while collecting more extensive details and information from each individual (Creswell, 2007). Evidence collected for the study must be derived by first person interviews of participants experiencing the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). It was anticipated that 10 to 20 participants would be involved in this phenomenological study. Criterion sampling was used to select specific participants for the study, as this works well with individuals that have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

When approval was provided by the district superintendents, teachers with 10 or more years of experience were encouraged to submit a form indicating their eligibility and willingness to participate in the study (Appendix A) from the core subjects of math, language arts, science and social studies. Having 10 or more years of experience in the

field of public education ensured that participants had a minimum of five years since the passage of Public Acts 100-103 of 2011, and a minimum of five years of experience previous to 2011 allowing the experience of reaching tenure status in the field when tenure offered more protections. Teachers with a minimum of 10 years experience served under more favorable tenure systems and less onerous evaluation practices. Of the 10 to 20 participants, the recruitment goal was to secure an equal number of elementary school teachers, middle school teachers, and high school teachers to participate in the research. The recruitment process included measures to insure the final pool of consented study participants all experienced the phenomenon of change that has occurred since the legislation was enacted. Specifically, inclusionary criteria for recruiting teachers into a prospective participant pool included:

- Ten or more years of experience teaching in one or more of the core content areas (i.e., mathematics, science, language arts, social studies).
- At least three years of participation in one or more collaborative teacher teams that work on improving student achievement (i.e., professional learning communities, data teams, coaching and peer mentoring, etc.).
- Growth in student achievement has been a part of the teacher's overall rating on a four-part rating scale (i.e., Ineffective, Minimally Effective, Effective, Highly Effective) for at least two years including the current year.

Recruitment and Consent Procedures

Upon receiving responses from teachers with 10 or more years of experience from each school district, an electronic correspondence was sent to each potential participant that provided information regarding the study, including the reason for the study; the

criteria for participating in the study; the nature of the data to be collected (including the interview process and types of questions) along with the time commitment required of participants; and background information regarding the researcher. An electronic response was requested within a week of receiving the electronic correspondence. By the end of the week, follow up correspondence in the form of phone calls and e-mails took place.

During the recruitment process, an initial pool of possible participants was identified from those who responded to the initial recruitment notice. In order of response to the recruitment notice, participants were contacted to review the details of the study and to have any questions answered about the consent form. The first five to seven participants who agree to the consent form at each level (i.e., elementary, middle school, and high school) were accepted. Upon the acceptance of the 10 to 20 participants, the broad pool of participant was contacted thanking them for their response and that the selection of participants was concluded.

Data Types and Sources

“The phenomenologist has only one legitimate source of data, and that is the views and experiences of the participants themselves” (Goulding, 2005, p. 302). Accordingly, an interactive, open-ended interview method was selected for this study. This form of interview is more structured than an informal type of interview, but designed to foster a deep and rich conversation with each participant regarding their personal experiences with the phenomenon in question and the ways in which those experiences shape meaning for them as professional educators. Additionally, this open-ended, in-depth interview elicited a description of how the meanings participants derive

from their experiences with the new high stakes performance evaluation system are or have shaped their professional dispositions, actions, and engagements in their school community. In this fashion, the interview protocol was shaped to align with the purposes of a transcendental phenomenology. The interview for each participant was scheduled at a specific time with a list of topics prepared prior to the interview (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Data analysis and reduction focused on the thematic content concerning the common experiences of practicing teachers post PA 100-103 of 2011, the meaning derived from those experiences, and the influence those meanings have on the participants professional dispositions, actions and interactions in their school environment.

Data Collection Procedures

Electronic interviews took place at the site of each participant's choosing to ensure anonymity, for as Moustakas (1994) noted, participants must feel comfortable to respond in an honest matter and share comprehensive responses to the inquiry statements. Advice shared by Rossman and Marshall (2011) includes always being prepared for the interview, ensuring the recorder has practiced using the interview format, and having ample pens and pencils for additional note taking. With each participant's approval, the interview was audio recorded. Assurances were given both orally and in writing that the interview would be kept confidential. The details of the informed consent document helped to ensure participants were clear that all identifying information would be removed including the participant name, school, and district. Participants were also made aware that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time (Moustakas, 1994).

In addition to recording the interviews, a note taking instrument will be created outlining the interview protocol (Appendix B). The interviewer, interviewee, and the position of the interviewee were also noted on the document (Creswell, 2007). Written notes taken during the interviews were kept in a secure file in the researcher's office to assure confidentiality during the study process. After the transcription of each participant's interview the digital recording of each interview was deleted. Additionally, the researcher returned the individual transcribed interview to each participant and invited them to read it, reflect upon what they shared during the interview, and add to the interview in any way they believed would add further clarification, detail, or texture to the rendition of their experiences. This procedure, called member checking (Moustakis, 1994), provided an opportunity for each participant to be reflective and to employ reflexivity to the rendition they provide regarding their experiences with the phenomenon and the manner in which they have been affected by the phenomenon (i.e., high stakes performance evaluation).

Data Analysis

Creswell (2007) shared that analyzing data collected during a qualitative study can be a challenging task for researchers. Analysis consists of a number of steps including preparing and organizing the data for analysis, developing themes and applying these themes through the use of coding, and then producing a written report of the findings. As suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2011), the researcher for this phenomenological study began with the research questions and the literature review as guidelines for the data analysis. Organization of the data began with the transcribed interviews and ensuring every statement relevant to the topic received equal value and

consideration (Moustakas, 1994). Upon the completion of each interview, the recorded interview was transcribed and then deleted. Other procedures followed by the researcher included organizing and immersion into the data, identifying categories and themes, coding the data according to the identified categories and themes, interpreting the data, and finally presenting the data.

To organize and immerse herself in the data, the researcher conducted a full reading of each interview text to gain a sense of the complete picture of the experiences of the participants (Goulding, 2005). This type of reflection was conducted in a logical, systematic sequence to arrive at essential descriptions of participant experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Information received through each interview was then reduced to individual statements and quotes. An electronic system was used to analyze the data more deeply. The essence of the shared experience included both the textural and structural descriptions to encompass the conditions, situations, and context in which the phenomenon has been experienced (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007).

Coded data was combined into clustered categorical themes as relationships between statements were identified (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, as themes and subthemes were identified, the researcher was continuously immersed in writing about the clusters and patterns that began to accumulate (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). Clustering was used to create diagrams of the relationships. Finally, the interpretation of the data as discussed in Chapter V brought meaning and coherence to the stories shared through the interview process. It is through conducting a thorough reflection of the narrative analysis that leads to deep judgments and understanding of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

Delimitations and Limitations

The purpose of a phenomenological study is to understand how participants have experienced a phenomena within the context of their perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). It is important to identify any major limitations that may be inherent in the current research study. Because of the affiliations the researcher has in the region, participants involved in the study may have felt pressure to say what they thought the researcher wanted to hear. The researcher, therefore, provided full disclosure of career history to participants that volunteer for the study.

Assumptions

Michigan teachers have been faced with important changes to their profession. With the erosion of tenure, the loss of seniority for determining lay off and recall, and administrators receiving the right to assign teachers to positions, the researcher assumes the following: (a) teachers feel disheartened by the impact of PA 100-103 of 2011; (b) teachers feel pressure to give up family time in order to earn service to the profession points to retain their position now that seniority has been replaced with evaluation status for staff reductions; (c) teachers have little or no say in the data points identified for student growth factors; and (d) merit pay is so small that it is given little value by teachers. However, with discussions the researcher has had with a few of the teachers serving in the same region, the researcher could have found the following: (a) despite PA 100-103, teachers have positive feelings toward their profession; (b) teachers freely volunteer for extra duties; (c) student growth data points are collaboratively determined between teachers and administration; and (d) with or without merit pay, teachers are focused on student achievement.

The Researcher and Reflexivity

Because the role of the researcher is to collect information through the examination of documents, interviewing participants, and analyzing the data, the researcher is the key instrument in a qualitative study (Creswell, 2006). Following a transcendental approach, the researcher sets aside prejudgments and biases (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) further states that the researcher needs to attempt to eliminate presuppositions and prepare to view the phenomena in a fresh new way. This presents a challenge because in a phenomenological study, the researcher investigating the matter has a personal interest in the subject. The paragraphs in this section describe the researcher's experience as an educator, and with PA 100-103 of 2011.

As a beginning teacher over three decades ago, the researcher realized the importance of the creating relationships with mentors. At that time the state did not require the assignment of a professional mentoring teacher. It was through trial and error that the researcher sought out the best teachers in the building and formed partnerships with them to discuss best practices. Those partnerships evolved into strong relationships. Knowing the stressors of beginning teachers, the researcher realized the importance of having role models and mentors that would provide feedback and share strategies and ideas to create a successful classroom. These mentors assisted the researcher in becoming a confident successful classroom teacher long before state and national legislation enacted accountability rules for buildings and individual classroom teachers.

The researcher had the opportunity to plan and organize a statewide conference with a consortium of colleagues that featured Charlotte Danielson and the Danielson Consulting Group in June of 2011, just prior to the July 19, 2011 enactment of PA 100-

103. Upon returning from the conference, the summer was spent organizing Danielson's Framework for Enhancing Professional Practice into an electronic format that would assist school principals in using the rubrics more easily than using paper copies. The researcher facilitated both an organizational and regional committee that submitted a proposal to the state of Michigan for a system of evaluating educator effectiveness.

The researcher has been connected to the region in which the research is proposed for over 30 years. Because the researcher also facilitated the professional learning of teachers with other educational topics, some of the educators involved in the research may be familiar with the researcher. With these educators, the issue of trustworthiness has been established. Due to the current position of the researcher, to ensure anonymity an electronic interview format was selected. Because of work the researcher has conducted in the region outside of the study, credibility and dependability are in stages of being developed. However, ensuring that time is taken in the setting with the participants being interviewed and sharing the data and interpretations of such data through member checks will lead to further development of these two trust characteristics (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

In addition to ensuring confirmability of the findings through rigorous note taking throughout the study, a detailed log trail of both the data collection and data analysis processes, and the use of member checking to allow participants to exercise their own reflexivity and sensitivity to the ethical issues involved in the research study are vital. Researchers must be grounded in the respect for persons and their right to participate and remain anonymous, hold beneficence for others in ensuring no harm is done during the research, and justice for those that will benefit or not benefit from the research (Marshall

& Rossman, 2011). As both the researcher and the instrument of data collection, the researcher holds a high degree of respect and appreciation for teachers. The researcher holds empathetic disposition toward the manner in which high-level policy decisions cascade down to the classroom level and impact the lives of teachers. With these dispositions toward the study participants, the research maintained full openness to the truth of their lived experiences and the value in learning from those experiences.

Chapter III Summary

This chapter presented the methodology utilized to conduct this study. This study was conducted using a transcendental phenomenological approach. Participants include teachers from a specific region in the state of Michigan, and data was collected using interviews. The ultimate aim of this research was to fully understand the experiences classroom teachers are having following the Michigan legislative acts that have essentially eroded the individual teacher's security and have the potential to impact educator overall salary. It is through presenting a description of the individual teacher's experiences and identifying commonalities shared by teachers that readers of this research will come away with a deeper understanding of the reality of the impact of this legislation (Creswell et al., 2007).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Chapter IV provides a description of the study participants, a comprehensive analysis of each subject's interview, and the themes developed from the interview transcripts of the 14 participating teachers. Using a transcendental phenomenological approach, the interactive, open-ended interview method was the applied practice of this study. Interpretations of the findings were the result of multiple immersions into the data and a thorough analysis as described by Moustakas (1994) to fully understand the lived experience of the participants concerning high stakes professional performance accountably both individually and collegially.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to draw upon the experiences of teachers and examine how they were internalizing the nexus between high stakes performance evaluation as it was being carried out in their schools and the culture of collaborative professionalism in their school. Specifically, this study examined how teachers were experiencing changes in educator evaluation systems in Michigan related to both their individual professional practices, as well as any changes in the culture of collegiality and collaboration in their schools since those changes were enacted.

Description of Unit Analysis: Subjects

This study used criterion sampling to identify participants; that is, all of the subjects were required to meet a set of predetermined identified criteria. This criteria consisted of the following inclusionary requirements: 10 or more years of experience in education; serving in a general education setting teaching a core subject; a minimum of three years of participation in one or more collaborative teacher teams focused on

improving student achievement; and an effective rating of Ineffective, Minimally Effective, Effective, or Highly Effective based in part on student growth for at least two years including the year this study took place. Potential participants were recruited from eight different counties in the central mid-Michigan area.

Superintendents in local education agencies were sent an electronic email communication describing the study and were asked to forward the communication to teachers serving in their districts. This communication included an overview of the purpose of the research, a description of the inclusion criteria, and the research questions. Upon receiving replies from interested teachers, contact was made with each educator via email to provide further information regarding the study. This communication to interested individuals included a request for information related to the inclusion criteria, the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) consent requirements, a description of the data collection protocol, and the possible risks of participation. Of the 21 responses received from practicing teachers, four did not send back a signed consent form and three did not meet the identified inclusionary criteria.

The resulting 14 teachers each participated in an individual online interview conducted and audio recorded via Go To Meeting. Interviews took place at an agreed upon time and a venue of the participant's choosing. All interview questions were used for all participants. A coding system using letters and numbers was used to identify each participating teacher to ensure confidentiality: P denotes participant and the number denotes the participant number. This system was used to protect the identity of the subjects both in their individual schools and districts, as well as across the entire eight county region. A masculine pronoun was selected to further eliminate the potential of

subject identification. Table 1 provides an overview of the participant sample including level of teaching at the time of participation in the study and total number of years serving in the teaching profession. In the fourth column, Table 1 notes the overall effectiveness rating the participant received in his most recent performance evaluation. The state of Michigan requires districts to develop overall performance ratings for each teacher using the following four designations: Ineffective, Minimally Effective, Effective, and Highly Effective. Thirteen of the 14 study participants received an overall Highly Effective rating in the most performance review, while one participant received an overall Effective rating. Finally, in column five, Table 1 identifies how many different types of collaborative experiences each participant reportedly experienced over his teaching career. This data was derived from the interview as participants described specific activities of a collaborative nature in which they engaged over their career. As Table 1 illustrates, all participants reported being involved in at least two types of collaborative experience over their careers. While the mode for the number of different types of collaborative experiences reported by participants was three; four participants reported a higher number of different types of collaborative experiences ranging from four to seven.

The profile of these participants indicates that, as a whole, they are: (a) experienced (reporting 11 to 41 years in teaching); (b) balanced between elementary, middle school, and high school; and (c) have a history of being actively involved in collaborative experiences with their peers as they participate in the school and district. After Table 1, a short paragraph describes each participant on all four characteristics identified in this demographic profile.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Demographic Attributes	Level	Years of Service	Effectiveness Rating	Number of Self-Reported Collaborative Experiences
Participant 1	Elementary	27	Highly Effective	3
Participant 2	Elementary	11	Highly Effective	5
Participant 3	Elementary	16	Highly Effective	3
Participant 4	Elementary	24	Highly Effective	3
Participant 5	Middle School	21	Highly Effective	3
Participant 6	Middle School	18	Effective	3
Participant 7	Middle School	12	Highly Effective	2
Participant 8	Middle School	14	Highly Effective	2
Participant 9	Middle School	14	Highly Effective	4
Participant 10	High School	16	Highly Effective	6
Participant 11	High School	16	Highly Effective	3
Participant 12	High School	41	Highly Effective	7+
Participant 13	High School	24	Highly Effective	3
Participant 14	High School	11	Highly Effective	3

Participant 1

Participant 1 (P1) was an elementary school 1st-grade teacher with 27 years of experience in education. With a Highly Effective rating in his most recent performance review, this participant submitted evidence of the following collaborative experiences: staff development chair – five years; professional learning community balanced assessment/formative assessment – four years; and various school improvement teams

including health, social studies, and language arts – 15 years. This participant serves in a rural district setting.

Participant 2

Participant 2 (P2) is an elementary school 5th-grade teacher with 11 years of experience in education. With a Highly Effective rating in his most recent performance review, this participant noted the following collaborative experiences: curriculum committee – two years; positive behavior intervention support committee – one year; science committee – one year; handwriting committee – one year; and security committee – one year. This participant serves in a rural district setting.

Participant 3

Participant 3 (P3) is an elementary school kindergarten teacher with 16 years of experience in education. With a Highly Effective rating in his most recent performance review, this participant referenced the following collaborative experiences: school improvement team – 16 years; peer mentor – on and off during the past 10 years; and grade level data team – five years. This participant serves in a suburban district setting.

Participant 4

Participant 4 (P4) is an elementary school kindergarten teacher with 24 years of experience in education. With a Highly Effective rating in his most recent performance review, this participant described the following collaborative experiences: peer mentoring – six years; school improvement team – three years; and curriculum associate – five years. This participant serves in a rural district setting.

Participant 5

Participant 5 (P5) is a middle school 7th-grade science and writing teacher with 21 years of experience in education. With a Highly Effective rating in his most recent performance review, this participant provided descriptions of the following collaborative experiences: peer mentoring – 10 years; science curriculum associate – eight years; and 7th-grade team member – seven years. This participant serves in a rural district setting.

Participant 6

Participant 6 (P6) is a middle school 7th-grade English language arts teacher with 18 years of experience in education. With an Effective rating in his most recent performance review, this participant made reference to the following collaborative experiences: professional learning community – five years; school improvement team – eight years; and data team – four years. This participant serves in a suburban district setting.

Participant 7

Participant 7 (P7) is a middle school 7th-grade and 8th-grade social studies teacher with 12 years of experience in education. With a Highly Effective rating in his most recent performance review, this participant submitted evidence of the following collaborative experiences focusing on improving student achievement: North Central Accreditation team – five years and school improvement – five years. This participant serves in a rural district setting.

Participant 8

Participant 8 (P8) is a middle school 6th-grade science and language arts teacher and a 7th-grade science teacher with 14 years of experience in education. With a Highly

Effective rating in his most recent performance review, this participant related evidence of the following collaborative experiences: North Central Accreditation team – three years and school improvement – three years. This participant serves in a rural district setting.

Participant 9

Participant 9 (P9) is a middle school 6th through 8th-grade English language arts teacher with 14 years of experience in education. With a Highly Effective rating in his most recent performance review, this participant noted the following collaborative experiences: student study team; data team; faculty council; and English language arts team. This participant serves in a rural district setting.

Participant 10

Participant 10 (P10) is a high school grade 9-11 English teacher with 16 years of experience in education. With a Highly Effective rating in his most recent performance review, this participant described the following collaborative experiences: school improvement team – 14 years; district improvement team – four years; K-12 strategic planning committee – two years; regional writing board – two years; regional writing fellow – five years; English language arts network leader – three years; literacy leaders committee – three years; and teacher mentor – six years. This participant serves in a rural district setting.

Participant 11

Participant 11 (P11) is a high school chemistry and math teacher with 16 years of experience in education. With a Highly Effective rating in his most recent performance review, this participant described the following collaborative experiences: math

curriculum associate professional learning community leader – two years; science curriculum associate professional learning community leader – three years; and standardized testing committee – four years. This participant serves in a rural district setting.

Participant 12

Participant 12 (P12) is a high school English language arts, freshman transitions, and senior capstone teacher with 41 years of experience in education. This participant through the years has also served as a special education teacher, physical education teacher, and counselor. With a Highly Effective rating on his most recent performance review, this participant reported the following collaborative experiences: district wide school improvement – eight years; building wide school improvement – eight years; student teacher supervising teacher – four years; committee member creating of freshman transitions; Michigan Merit Exam and senior capstone classes; mentor teacher – three years; district wide evaluation team; and association leadership positions – 20 plus years. This participant serves in a suburban district setting.

Participant 13

Participant 13 (P13) is a high school grade 11 and 12 English teacher, as well as a digital media, speech, and debate teacher with 24 years of experience in education. With a Highly Effective rating in his most recent performance review, this participant noted the following collaborative experiences: English department team – 24 years; technology committee – 14 years; and association leadership – 17 years. This participant serves in a rural district setting.

Participant 14

Participant 14 (P14) is a high school grade 9-12 math teacher with 11 years of experience in education. With a Highly Effective rating in his most recent performance review, this participant reported the following collaborative experiences: school improvement team – four years; data team – three years; and professional learning community – four years. This participant serves in a rural district setting.

Data Collection

Interviews for this study took place across a five-month span. As the process included an interview conducted through a synchronous digital connection (i.e., Go To Meeting), each subject had the capacity to select the site to experience the interview. Most interviews took place using the subjects' classroom computers, but a few of the subjects participated in the interview from home. Thirteen of the 14 interviews took place outside of the school day on a weekday following the end of school or in the early evening. One of the interviews took place during the school day during the participant's prep time. The interviews were electronically recorded. Participants were made aware when recording of the interview commenced and when the recording ended. Participants were assured that they could request that the interview end at any time. During the online interviews, no screen shots of the participants were taken or identifying individual names recorded. As the interviews were in process, the researcher took notes regarding the tone and tenor of the conversation. Upon completion of each interview, the recording was downloaded as an MP4 file and sent to a transcriber. The transcriber took 48 to 72 hours to transcribe each interview and return it to the researcher. The researcher compared the transcription document with the recorded interview to check for accuracy. All interviews

were transcribed verbatim for each participant, even including specific notes for pauses such as laughter, sighs, etc., and accurately reflected each participant's experience with the phenomenon of the study.

Important to any qualitative research is member checking the contents of the transcripts (Moustakas, 1994). Not only did the researcher listen to each recorded interview and compare it to the written transcript, each interviewee was sent a copy of the transcript through e-mail to individually verify the contents. Participants were asked to check for accuracy of meaning and to also indicate if any additions or amendments were warranted. Ten of the 14 participants responded to the transcript check request. Of the 10 that responded, no amendments or additions were suggested.

Analysis of Interviews

The discovery of emerging themes in the data requires intentional, skillful exploration (Creswell, 2007; Richards, 2009). In seeking emergent ideas, multiple readings of the transcripts took place prior to any attempts of coding (Richards, 2009). Using an emergent analysis practice, transcript analysis went through a five-stage process. Through the emergent, multi-layered analysis approach, I came up with four strong themes shared by participants with 17 supporting subthemes.

As stated, I read through the 14 transcripts and analyzed the contents in five different stages. The initial reading of each transcript took place after receiving the detailed transcripts from the professional transcriber. As I sought to eliminate bias, no analysis of the data was conducted during this first reading. The first stage of analysis took place after the final interview transcription was received serving as an exploratory step to determine the possibilities and direction of coding (Creswell, 2007).

This intentional exploration commenced with the second stage of reading through the 14 transcripts and the beginning of note taking in the margins. Prior to note taking and reading, each transcript was marked with a color-coded line in the margin relating back to each individual participant. Interesting words, phrases, and statements were underlined to indicate potential relationships. Realizing the complexity of coding using a manual method, I decided to use electronic coding application software for deeper investigation of the narrative experiences of the participants. Although reticent at first to using the system, I was surprised how quickly I adapted to the online coding system, Dedoose (Lieber, Weisner, & Presley, 2003; SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC, 2016) and learned the many attributes of the system to assist with identifying the emerging themes, along with the corresponding subthemes.

Prior to the third reading, all transcripts were uploaded into the electronic coding software program Dedoose (Lieber et al., 2003; SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC, 2016). During the third reading, the first passage coding began and 248 sentences and phrases were identified using the open-ended research questions to focus the scanning action. It was during this reading that phrases took on deeper meaning due to their recurrence within and across multiple narratives (Richards, 2009). Following the identification of the sentences and phrases, categories of ideas started to emerge.

During the fourth reading of the transcripts and the identified phrases comprising the categories of ideas, patterns formed in the data, out of which four broad themes emerged. These broad themes provided the overarching schema for reorganizing the 248 sentences and phrases (codes) into large groupings, looking for sub-groupings within each major grouping and using the sub-groupings to discover more narrow themes or

subthemes. During this fourth reading, 30 subthemes were identified. This amount of subthemes broke the data patterns into such small sub-categories that meaning began to diminish. To distill a set of subthemes that work as a meaningful frame for understanding each participant's experiences, I conducted a fifth reading and analysis, looking for axial relationships that captured the essence of participants' experiences while also remaining sensitive to the nuanced variances between participant responses. This final phase of the analysis narrowed the subthemes to 14 and further solidified the four previously identified themes.

As a result of the multiple interfaces I experienced with the transcribed narratives of the participants, data was coded and organized into themes analyzed through the lens of the open-ended research questions and literature review involved in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). As promoted by Moustakas (1994), every statement related to the topic received equal value and consideration. Deep immersion into the data led to identifying categories and themes through the open-coding process. A logical, systematic sequence provided essential descriptions of participant experiences which were then reduced to individual statements and quotes. Data interpretation and analysis brought meaning and coherence to the stories shared by the participants. It was through conducting a thorough reflection that a deep understanding of the phenomena experienced by teachers was created (Moustakas, 1994).

Analysis of Themes and Subthemes

Using multiple readings and both inductive and interpretive reasoning, four major themes were identified from deep analysis of the transcribed participant narratives. The four major themes were:

1. Teachers adjusted to a rubric system for performance evaluation purposes.
2. Teachers adapted their professional practices following the implementation of high stakes accountability evaluations.
3. Teachers experienced changes in their collaborative practices.
4. Teachers developed specific views on the inclusion of growth data in the performance evaluation system.

Table 2 provides an overview of the response of each of the 14 teachers related to the four identified themes, illustrating that all four themes were applicable to each participant's story and interpretation of their lived experience adjusting to the new teacher evaluation system in Michigan.

Table 2

Emerging Themes by Participant

Emerging Themes	Teachers adjusted to a rubric performance system	Teachers adapted their professional practices	Teachers experienced changes in collaborative practices	Teachers developed specific views on the use of growth data
Participant 1	X	X	X	X
Participant 2	X	X	X	X
Participant 3	X	X	X	X
Participant 4	X	X	X	X
Participant 5	X	X	X	X
Participant 6	X	X	X	X
Participant 7	X	X	X	X
Participant 8	X	X	X	X
Participant 9	X	X	X	X
Participant 10	X	X	X	X

Table 2—Continued

Emerging Themes	Teachers adjusted to a rubric performance system	Teachers adapted their professional practices	Teachers experienced changes in collaborative practices	Teachers developed specific views on the use of growth data
Participant 11	X	X	X	X
Participant 12	X	X	X	X
Participant 13	X	X	X	X
Participant 14	X	X	X	X

Theme 1: Teachers Adjusted to a Rubric System for Performance Evaluation Purposes

Each narrative descriptive provided by participants included a description of how they adapted to a high stakes evaluation system that included a rubric based observation tool. All participants indicated that this was a significant shift from the former check-off system used prior to the adoption of one of Michigan’s four recommended evaluation tools. Six subthemes supporting this overall theme were identified: (1) Increased Stress, (2) Acceptance Influences, (3) Frequency Changes, (4) Consistency Concerns, (5) Specific Feedback, and (6) Time Intensive. Table 3 provides information regarding the distribution of participant responses related to six subthemes associated with Theme 1.

Through the analysis of the narrative descriptions provided, 11 of the 14 participants indicated increased stress associated with the use of the rubric system, five described the influences that supported the acceptance of the rubric system, six indicated an increase in the frequency of observations and annual evaluations, 10 described an increase in receiving more specific feedback, and three participants shared their concerns with consistent application and use of the rubric.

Table 3

Theme 1: Teachers Adjusted to a Rubric System for Performance Evaluation Distribution Across Subthemes

Theme 1 Subthemes	Increased Stress	Acceptance Influencers	Frequency Changes	Consistency Concerns	Specific Feedback	Time Intensive
P1	X	X	X		X	X
P2		X	X		X	
P3	X		X	X	X	X
P4	X	X			X	
P5					X	X
P6	X		X			
P7	X					X
P8	X	X				X
P9	X					
P10	X	X		X	X	X
P11	X	X		X	X	X
P12	X		X		X	
P13	X		X		X	
P14					X	

Increased stress. As participants described their experiences with implementing the extensive rubric system for performance evaluation purposes, Participant 6 illustrated the subtheme of Increased Stress with this significant statement:

Having two or more observations every year, unannounced. Plus, walk-throughs. It gets stressful when my administrator walks in, even just for a walk-through because right away I'm scared like, oh no, am I doing something wrong? What is he looking for? Or, if I am at my desk one

time and I'm not in front is he going to be worried about that or is he going to send me an e-mail saying that I'm doing something wrong? I don't having the administrator in my room, but the fact that it seems like it's, it's never a casual visit. It always feels like they are looking for something and not just, oh, "I just want to see what's going on in your room," but it's always, it feels like more "what are you doing wrong" is what it feels like.

Participant 12 affirmed the experience of increased stress with this statement:

There's a great deal of fear and uncertainty among teachers, especially if administrators are changing or they're in the process of going through their as far as their ability to evaluate from different perspectives and different types of teachers.

Acceptance influencers. Five of the 14 participants described practices and attributes that influenced the acceptance of the rubric based performance evaluation system. General comments made pointed to the impact of the principal and the manner in which the rubric system was implemented and used during the first few years of implementation. Participant 1 illustrated how the principal influenced his acceptance with the following statement:

We did extensive training the first year and a half on exactly what that would look like, what the evidence finders should look like. My principal was very good about the first year using a lot of staff meeting time to get our head wrapped around what we needed to do. Both observations those years were planned. She didn't do any unannounced observations.

Participant 2, who also referenced the influence of the principal on his level of acceptance, provided the following statement:

We have a good, we have a principal that I completely believe, she leads in a way that we all, she just kinda' fosters those relationships and by doing that it creates the environment that we have where we all want to work together as well as work with her.

Frequency changes. Participant 12 described experiencing the changes in frequency of observations and evaluation through the following statement:

Okay prior to 2011 I actually have been in the teaching profession for 41 years so I've seen the complete spectrum from teacher evaluation that was little to none. During my first 20 years of teacher I was evaluated in my first two years and I wasn't evaluated until the new evaluation procedure started. During that time I did get continuous feedback from my administrators, but I had no formal evaluation per say.

Participant 13 also referenced changes in the frequency of evaluations with the following statements:

Yeah, I went seven years with a principal never once stepping a foot in my classroom and since the new principal came in, it's been interesting, Because he will pop in, but I don't even know he's in there. He sneaks in and he's sitting among the kids and I don't even know it. I just go on about my business and suddenly I just, you know you realize something is different, he will be sitting there 20, 30 minutes. That's the way I want it. I want him to see me the way I am. I don't put on an act for anybody, but

they are very honest. I think our evals lately, in the last two years have become very honest tools to improve.

Specific feedback. Ten of the 14 participants shared statements relating to specific feedback received with the implementation of the new rubric based performance system. Participant 4 shared the following:

I didn't feel like it was as specific on what I needed to do, what my weak areas were, what my strong areas were. I think that the rubric and the current evaluation system, it's a lot more specific. I get a lot more specific feedback from my administrator than I used to.

Participant 2 also provided supporting statements related to specific feedback:

Um, just that I believe it's more specific now. Which I think kinda' helps make it more valid.

Consistency concerns. Three participants (all rated Highly Effective) indicated concerns with consistent application of the performance rubric.

Participant 3 expressed his concerns about consistency with this statement:

But, I do think that there's a lot of subjectivity of, in our evaluation system that like in any profession if you have an administrator that is, that does not care for you, unfortunately, there's still that subjective area where you may not receive a good evaluation.

Participant 10 went into further detail related to consistency and described pressure individual teachers might place on an administrator if the teacher is not pleased with his evaluation results:

So, like some teachers who were disappointed that they received minimally effective in certain areas were able to talk their way up to effective in those areas. Um, after their interview with the principal. Which I mean, I guess that it is what evaluation is supposed to be, like, more of a dialogue, I can see that but when we have areas when we were consistently testing low and scoring low and we weren't seeing a lot of motivation by staff to be better, the fact that they could continually move their evaluation forward.

Time intensive. Half of the participants provided statements supporting the belief the new rubric system for performance evaluations equates to more time dedicated on the process for both teachers and administrators. Participant 11 described the issue of time intensiveness in his most recent performance review with the following statements:

It's requiring so much extra work, um, just to prove. You are constantly proving that you are doing the job instead of being, instead of it being understood that you are a professional and that you are working to teach students and make sure students learn. I feel like we are spending a lot of time proving that that is what we are doing instead of actually doing it. Or in addition to doing it, I guess.

Participant 8 further expounded on the amount of time dedicated to the performance evaluation rubric system through describing the procedures implemented in his district:

Having to go, we adopted the Stages evaluation tool, have to go through and do a self-assessment, um for multiple pieces of teacher instruction, professionalism, I'm trying to think of the other categories, I think there are five total categories.

Um, you have to write a narrative for each piece of the rubric which can be time consuming. We also do a collegial visit so we need to observe another class or co-worker, so that's a prep time given up during your school day. Only once, but it's still a prep and those are very coveted times we all know. Um, so we do that then you have to write a reflection from that collegial visit so you have a written self-evaluation, you have a written collegial visit, you have to write your goals at the very beginning of the year, and you have to keep like for myself, I keep an Excel document of pre and post test data. An then we are also supposed to, if we'd like to, it's an option thing, to include evidence so that might mean keeping track of student projects or e-mails from parents or any kind of awards or whatever that you accumulate throughout the year. Those are some of the things that I think are really time-consuming.

Theme 2: Teachers Adapted Their Professional Practices Following the Implementation of High Stakes Accountability Evaluations

Analysis of the 14 participant interviews resulted in identifying a second theme that emerged indicating that all teachers included in the study changed their professional practices following the implementation of a rubric based high stakes accountability evaluation system. Twelve of the participants described at least one of three ways of altering their professional practice following the implementation of the new teacher evaluation system and rubric based on high stakes accountability for improved instruction, and ultimately, student learning. These three ways are illustrated in Table 4, as subthemes for this theme and include: (1) Focused Instruction, (2) Increased Reflection on Practice, and (3) Adjusted Instruction Based on Student Achievement.

Table 4

Theme 2: Teachers Adapted Their Professional Practices Distribution Across Subthemes

Theme 2 Subthemes	Focused Instruction	Increased reflection on practice	Adjusted instruction based on student achievement
P1	X		X
P2	X		X
P3	X	X	
P4	X	X	
P5	X		
P6	X		
P7	X		X
P8	X	X	X
P9	X	X	X
P10	X	X	X
P11			X
P12			X
P13		X	X
P14	X	X	

Table 4 illustrates that three participants (i.e., 8, 9, and 10) all experienced changes in all three areas of professional practice identified in the data. Another seven participants (i.e., 1-4, 7, 13, 14) described changes in two of the three areas, and two participants (i.e., 6 and 12) only noted changes in one of the three areas. Only two participants (i.e., 5 and 11) referenced no changes in their professional practice during their interview. Through the analysis of the participant transcripts, 10 of the 14 participants provided statements supporting the finding that their instruction became

more focused, seven cited statements indicating increased focus on their professional practices, and six adjusted their instruction based on student achievement data.

Focused instruction. Eleven of the 14 research participants indicated that their instructional practices became more focused following the implementation of high stakes educator performance evaluations. Participant 2 shared the following statements supporting this finding:

I make sure that I'm hitting those standards. I always knew what I needed to teach and what the standard was, but I'm very specific about meeting every single strand, every single standard and content areas. And, I know my content area better. I know what those specific standards are, I can tell you, you know, I have a better understanding of them so I'm able to, even with the I CAN statements that I do with my kids.

Participant 9 further supported this finding through the following statements:

Um, I think that, I think that I'm more aware of some of the basic um, ways to allow my kids to know exactly what they are learning and why they are learning it than I use to be. Instead of hey, this is what you have to do today this is the reason and this is how it's going to help you in the future. I'm much better at doing those kinds of things and communicating to students than I was before.

Increased reflection on practice. Seven of the 14 research participants provided evidence that they increased reflection on their professional practices. The data yielded substantiating statements from Participants 3 and 8. Participant 3 shared:

So there's definitely more reflection on my part because I, and you know, I hold myself accountable, you know to a high standard and I always want to, even if I

may be at a you know a highly effective rating, I want to be highly effective in every single area.

Participant 8 commented:

I think it's good to be reflective. I think it's also important to use data. Um, teachers to use data and to really think about their instructional practices.

Adjusted instruction based on student achievement. Nine of the participants provided feedback on the importance of adjusting instruction based on student achievement data and feedback. Participant 2 provided these supportive statements:

Honestly, I think it's extremely important. Because it (data) helps me have a more clear picture of what my kids are understanding. So, from there I'm able, I can, well what I did this time, I created groups so the kids that don't have a clear understanding, I know exactly what to work with them on. And then the ones that are sort of higher or did well, I can move those kids into the next set in a sense.

Participant 9 shared:

I love using data. I don't like using it for the purpose of being evaluated though. I like using it for the purpose of driving my teaching.

Theme 3: Teachers Experienced Changes in Their Collaborative Practices

In their responses to the interview prompts, all participants contributed responses indicating the influence of high stakes accountability on their collaborative practices.

Deep analysis of the changes in the collaboration theme lead to identifying the following subthemes: (1) Sense of Camaraderie, (2) Focused Collaboration, (3) Mentoring Focus, and (4) Influence of Competition. Table 5 provides information regarding the

distribution of participant responses to Theme 3 and each of the identified subthemes.

Every participant made reference to at least one change in collaborative practices.

Table 5

Theme 3: Teachers Experienced Changes in Collaborative Practices Subthemes Distribution

Theme 3 Subthemes	Sense of camaraderie	Focused collaboration	Mentoring focus	Influence of competition
P1	X	X	X	
P2	X	X	X	
P3	X			
P4	X	X		X
P5		X		
P6				X
P7	X			
P8	X	X		X
P9	X	X	X	
P10	X			X
P11	X	X	X	X
P12				X
P13	X			
P14	X	X		

Through analyzing participant responses nine of the 14 participants provided statements and phrases pointing to a sense of camaraderie, eight shared statements related to focused collaboration, four shared their sense of obligation to mentor others, and six indicated that competition influenced their practice and culture.

Sense of camaraderie. Nine of the 14 participants provided evidence indicating a sense of camaraderie following the implementation of the high stakes performance

evaluation based on accountability. Participant 4 stated, “I feel strongly that teaching is a tough job and if work together and support each other it’s going to benefit teachers and students much more significantly.” Participant 3 also shared:

Everybody is willing to share, very much so. Yup. Very much so. I think that’s always been high, you know. I haven’t had anybody that I’ve come across that is not willing to share.

Participant 14 supported the camaraderie subtheme with this statement, “We’ve still continued to get along great.” Participant 11 added, “I think that we are still supportive of each other.”

Focused collaboration. Participants discussed collaborative practices and compared the status of such practices prior to and after the legislative changes implementing high stakes accountability. Eight of the 14 participants responded with statements comparing the two different phases, indicating that after their school followed high stakes performance accountability, collaboration between peers became more focused. Participant 8 shared his views on more focused collaboration:

We have many teachers on my staff (who) have collaborated on goals and written goals together. For example, myself and another colleague picked the same goal and really by the two of us addressing it in our different content areas, I think our students are benefiting and then obviously for our evaluation purposes our students are definitely showing growth because they’re getting my perspective and her perspective and those skills from the both of us.

Participant 2 shared a short, but powerful phrase, “...what they are getting out of the collaboration is much deeper.”

Mentoring focus. The importance of mentoring colleagues was shared by four of the 14 participants. Four discussed their obligations to both experienced and less experienced colleagues and providing a supportive culture for one another as they adjusted through the changes of high stakes performance evaluations. The points made by these four participants relative to feeling a stronger sense of wanting to mentor colleagues links well with the idea of greater camaraderie. Participant 12 provided the following statements about working with his colleagues to share solutions or ideas in response to common challenges:

Like, let me show you how to do this, let me show you how you can set this up so that your life is easier. I probably had seven or eight of our staff come to me about growth data. And, for me I sat there and showed them, because they were already doing it and they were doing great things, but they didn't know how to package it.

Participant 1 specifically discussed mentoring new teachers:

Especially new teachers that we mentor when they come onto our team, not only are they fun to mentor, but they are part of our team and we, it really makes a difference for that new person especially coming on.

Influence of competition. In light of the findings of the first three subthemes under this theme, I found the statements shared by participants relating to competition among and between faculty members of particular interest. Six participants described some increase in competition among staff; yet, four of those six also noted one or more of the other three subthemes as well (focused collaboration and sense of camaraderie). Two participants (6 and 12) described none of the three themes regarding increased

collaboration, cooperation, etc., but were pretty clear on the issue on increased competition. Along with focused collaboration and sense of camaraderie, six of the 14 participants shared evidence supporting the finding of the influence of competition. Participant 6 had this to say about increased competition, “It feels like teacher against teacher and don’t let them know what you’re doing in your classroom because what if they steal your idea and what if they have a higher evaluation than you do?” On the other hand, Participant 4 who noted an increase in both camaraderie and focused collaboration, also acknowledged the increase in competition with this statement, “Some people view it more as competition rather than a cooperative type thing. They keep their ideas to themselves. Maybe their kids achieve more.” Participant 10 who described an increase in camaraderie, expanded further on the concept of competition as follows:

And I’m not going to say that’s true for the entire staff, I think in some ways, we’ve become a lot more competitive with each other since high stakes evaluation has come through. Kind of like high school. Everybody wants to know everybody else’s score and everyone wants to see everyone’s evaluations and how did you do on this and I know what happens in your classroom really because I hear about it from the kids. You know what I mean? It seems like sometimes we turn it into high school nitty-gritty instead of pushing each other up.

Participant 8, who also referenced increases in focused collaboration and camaraderie, added this observation regarding the influence of competition and the importance of not letting competition undermine teamwork:

I just think we have to find ways to make it so it’s not us versus them. And that’s really hard not to do when you give teachers a number system to fight against.

It's so important that we remember we have to be a team and we have to work together. But, when you put us in a competitive you against me for highly effective, you know when there only a small number of English teachers in my building, it's easy to feel competitive against the other teachers to maintain what I consider my awesome job.

Theme 4: Teachers Described Specific Views on the Use of Student Growth Data

In their responses to the interview prompts, all participants weighed in on the use of student growth data used for high stakes education evaluation. Deep examination of this theme crystalized four subthemes linked to the use of student growth data: (1) Sense of Confusion, (2) Increased Accountability, (3) Increased Stress, and (4) Questioned Fairness. Table 6 depicts data presenting the distribution of participant responses identified for Theme 4 and for each of the identified subthemes.

Table 6

Theme 4: Teachers Described Specific Views on the Use of Student Growth Data Subthemes Distribution

Theme 4 Subthemes	Sense of confusion	Increased accountability	Increased stress	Questioned fairness
P1	X	X	X	
P2		X		
P3		X	X	
P4	X	X	X	
P5		X		
P6				X
P7		X		
P8	X	X	X	X

Table 6—Continued

Theme 4 Subthemes	Sense of confusion	Increased accountability	Increased stress	Questioned fairness
P9			X	
P10			X	
P11				X
P12		X		X
P13	X	X	X	
P14		X		X

Deep examination of the data provided evidence that four of the 14 participants provided statements indicating that they were experiencing a sense of confusion related to the use of student growth data for high stakes evaluation, 10 shared statements related to increased accountability, seven shared their experiences with increased stress, and five questioned the fairness of the use of student growth data for the purposes of high stakes evaluation.

Sense of confusion. Although only four of the participants identified confusion related to the use of student achievement data for developing teacher performance ratings, almost all of the four pointed to state legislation changes as the cause of the confusion. They also identified the challenges of truly defining what is and what is not usable data. Participant 14 described his confusion with these statements:

Well, I just think in the end it would be beneficial if, and I don't know if it's at the State level or if it's just as the district level, um, if there was a little more clarity in what everyone's doing. Um, because I do think the biggest concern I have is that

um, it's still kinda' random in terms of how people are determining student growth.

Participant 8 discussed confusion regarding what student information fits as data for developing a student growth rating. He also raised the issue of what equates, in his opinion, to changes in student achievement. He expressed concern that some important indicators of student growth might not easily fit into an Excel file:

Yet, one of the struggles I have is some of those things I would like my students to achieve don't necessarily show a percentage increase as much as like, love of reading for example, that's a hard way, you can't prove that but you can have a kid come up to you and say "this is the first book I've actually finished in my whole life." Or, "can you give me another book by that author?" Things like that. Those are not things that you can put in an excel document but they are equally in my opinion, meaningful as a teacher. I think it shows teacher success more so than even maybe um, how many new vocabulary terms that they have acquired throughout the school year.

Participant 1 added, ". . . little confusion because one week they'll tell us oh, you have to have 25% growth to meet minimal standards and the next week they say 40% and the next week nobody knows." This statement illustrates the confusion that many faculty members have about what the statute really requires. This is likely the result of the gap in time between the passage of the first round of legislation and the last round with several versions of both House and Senate bills in play between the two points.

Increased accountability. With the significance of 10 of the 14 participants citing statements relating to increase accountability, this subtheme spanned across the majority of the interview transcripts. Participant 8 stated:

I think proving yourself too, I think a lot of my teachers say to me, I feel like I have to prove that I'm good enough and I think that's a difference between now and then. I don't feel like it was such a proving prior to 2011 as it is now. It's proving my worth.

Participant 5 added, "Yes. It's more based on student, more based on student performance." Participant 14 described increased accountability using student growth data in this way:

The biggest changes are just in terms of the data pieces. Meaning the tracking of student growth, that's the biggest change and so that's now this evidence side that we're always being asked to provide for a part of our evaluation, um, to be able to say yes, our students are experiencing growth in our classrooms. And, that's the biggest change that I've seen so far.

Increased stress. Seven of the 14 participants shared responses related to the increased stress subtheme. Participant 3 expressed, "That teachers are under, and myself included, under a significant amount of more stress and so our job in some ways isn't as enjoyable as it used to be." Participant 4 expanded on the subtheme of increased stress with these statements:

Well, um, it is, that's a lot of pressure I think because although we want all students to learn, of course and we would never you know, leave anyone behind, um, some students don't learn in the same manner and that's concerning when

your evaluation is based on that and maybe your students are cognitively impaired or have emotional issues that impact their learning.

Participant 13 shared these thoughts relating to the fears of younger teachers:

I know talking to people one-on-one and confidentiality, a lot of it is fear, especially younger teachers. You know I could be dismissed, you know you get three years in a row that you don't have efficient, effective, or highly effective, they can release you by law, they have to and we look at that. They know it's their livelihood, they know it's their life and they are starting to really realize it. So, you know I see a lot of them and when we are in department meetings, especially teacher meetings, you know, test scores, MWS, M-Step, all the pressure with this and then the way they are readjusting the curriculum to teach towards the test.

Questioned fairness. Five participants provided evidence of support for identifying the subtheme of questioning fairness of using student growth data for high stakes performance evaluation purposes. Participant 11 stated, “. . . data portion of the evaluation that has come about in the last few years, I feel like that portion has been unfair in the way that it has been done, in this district at least.” Participant 12 added:

Um, there was a great, there still is, a lot of the teachers that teach in disciplines such as special education and some of the non-core areas are very concerned about how that evaluation process will accurately reflect what they do with their students in the classroom.

Participant 6 provided an expanded response citing other careers:

Um, and then to take in the standardized test scores is difficult too because as you know in Michigan we have the new M-Step and so we've got something we've never worked with before and then yet our kids scores are still out responsibility. Not that they are not our responsibility but the fact that they are used in our evaluation, especially at a middle school level, that can seem very difficult. Cause even when a teacher is a phenomenal teacher doing everything that he or she needs to do, if their students don't score high as administration would like, I mean that could, could mark down their evaluation. Which, it's difficult to think that what a student does or doesn't do could affect my job as far as how I get evaluated. Um, I don't know that's necessarily fair because other um, careers I mean, do they get evaluated based on their clients or patients or people that come into their store; do they get evaluated on that? You know what that old joke about a dentist, are they still a good dentist if their, if people have cavities? If they don't do what they are supposed to do? Does the dentist get, you know, evaluated tough? Or you know, more strictly?

Chapter IV Summary

Through an extensive, multi-layered, and recursive data analysis method utilizing open-coding and emergent analysis processes, I discovered and gave voice to four themes that emerged as the 14 participants in this study reflected on their experiences since the 2011 emergence of high stakes performance evaluation for teachers. Through those reflections, the participants were able to explore the meanings that this change have for them and their professional experience as teachers. Through a process of data reduction and crystallization, I found that the language the participants used assigned meaning to

their practitioner experiences with high stakes performance evaluations as follows: (1) teachers adjusted to a rubric system for performance evaluation purposes, (2) teachers adapted their professional practices following the implementation the high stakes accountability evaluations, (3) teachers experienced changes in their collaborative practices, and (4) teachers developed specific views on the inclusion of growth data in the performance evaluation system.

All of the participants expressed their perspective of changes taking place in both their individual professional practices and their collaborative practices based on the implementation of high stakes performance evaluations. They provided reflections on how the changes are impacting both their own individual lives as teachers and the lives of their colleagues. Descriptions of the themes from the participants substantiated the identified themes and the overall changes in their profession based on the context high stakes personal accountability coupled with highly explicit evaluation criteria. Furthermore, the rich responses provided by participants offer a window into the current climate and culture in the practitioners' classrooms, buildings, and districts while they continue to focus on and address the needs of their students.

CHAPTER V

OVERVIEW

Study after study indicates that teachers play a significant role in student achievement. Mandated increased accountability for student achievement has the potential to influence teacher professional practices, as well as the collaborative environment classroom practitioners experience on a daily basis. The legislative changes expanding accountability to individual teachers and administrators increase the potential for tensions educators are feeling in their profession. Research regarding teacher classroom practices and collaborative initiatives is available prior to the legislation enacted in Michigan in 2011 (Albert & Levine, 1988; Demirtas, 2010; Latham, 1998). In addition, studies of teacher practices and collaborative relationships are available for educators serving outside of the United States (Anari, 2012; Shah, Rehman, Zafar, & Riaz, 2012). Currently, however, little research exists on the impact of high stakes individual accountability for student achievement on teacher practices and collaborative initiatives. This study was conducted to begin to explore that impact by giving teachers an opportunity to reflect upon and express how they are experiencing and making sense of working in schools in a state where recent legislation raises the bar significantly on both the practice of performance evaluation and the implications of evaluation ratings.

In 2011, Michigan legislators enacted Public Acts 100-103, resulting in significant shifting of accountability for student achievement from a building level perspective to individual classroom teachers and administrators. Concurrent with legislated individual accountability for student achievement through the implementation of high stakes performance evaluation systems, a number of promising practices related

to teacher collaboration with the focus of improving student achievement were being implemented (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004; Hattie, 2012; Knight, 2011; Muhammed & Hattie, 2012). As a former classroom teacher, building and district administrator, intermediate school district instructional consultant, and (at the time of this study) an intermediate school district superintendent, the researcher recognized the challenges faced by individual classroom teachers. In my work as an educator and educational leader, I continue to be concerned about and attentive to how education policy trickles down to the teacher and student level and impacts the lived experiences in the mutual roles within schools. I have watched teachers seeking professional learning experiences and pursue the strength of collaborative practices to improve one's practice. Because of the power of both, I became significantly interested in the impact of legislated accountability related to the implementation of high stakes performance evaluation systems on individual classroom practices and collaborative educator experiences.

Focus of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, discover, and describe how individual classroom teachers are experiencing the shift in focus to individual accountability for student achievement related to both the implementation of Michigan's high stakes performance evaluation systems and the professional culture relating to collaborative relationships. Recognizing the importance of collaborative practices on individual experiences, this study sought to acquire the perspective of individual classroom practitioners related to the shifts in accountability at both the state and national level. This qualitative study was designed to examine individual experiences with the legislated changes in accountability for student achievement in two areas: (1) individual

experiences with the implementation of Michigan's legislated high stakes performance evaluation systems, and (2) experiences with collaborative relationships and professional culture. Two overarching questions relating to the implementation of new evaluation system based on legislated mandates provided the focus of this study:

1. How are teachers experiencing the implementation of Michigan's high stakes performance evaluation system as it is being carried out in their schools?
2. How are teachers experiencing the professional culture in their schools since the implementation of Michigan's new high stakes performance evaluation system in their schools?

Chapter II examined the literature related to implementing a high stakes performance system. Specifically reviewed was research related to legislative reforms increasing the accountability for student achievement related to individual practitioners, promising collaborative practices, and the components of Michigan's recommended and legislated performance evaluation systems. This review is briefly summarized in the paragraphs below.

A history of legislated accountability for student achievement exists at both the state and national level. Michigan legislated PA 25 in 1990, creating a system calling for school improvement processes that included the involvement of educators, parents, and community members (Strengthening Accountability, 2000). This original act did not include requirements to determine the measurement of the effectiveness of the school improvement plans created through this process. The act was amended in 1995 to include measures of student achievement relating to student performance. Followed closely by the No Child Left Behind Act, specific accountability measures required by

the federal government focused on student performance, including subgroup performance at the building and district level were enacted (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). When Michigan failed to qualify for a second round of Race to the Top federal funds due to the failure of requiring student achievement results attributed to individual educators, state legislators enacted PA 101-103 July 2011 (Michigan Public Acts 100-103 of 2011). This legislation included the requirement that districts implement high stakes performance systems that include individual accountability for student growth. Insufficient research exists on the impact of implementing this legislated high stakes performance system on individual classroom practitioners.

In addition, research on the impact of promising collaborative practices indicates that implementing such practices results in improved student achievement. Owens (2015) described professional learning communities (PLCs) as an activity that fosters a sense of trust, teamwork, and passion for teaching students. Moreover, PLCs increase student engagement resulting in improved student achievement (McLaughlin, 1993; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Harris & Jones, 2010). The current study focused on capturing the experiences of individual classroom teachers in a high stakes performance evaluation system relating to a teacher's need to achieve a high performance rating to retain his or her position, to the professional trust and support needed to serve as a collaborative team member.

Finally, a thorough review of Michigan's educator evaluation requirements was also included. This research provided an overview of the recommendations given by the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness (MCEE, 2013), teacher observation and evaluation system findings, and value added models. How implementing the MCEE

recommendations, observation and evaluation systems meeting state legislative requirements, and using value added models resulting in a summative rating for individual teachers may influence both the individual teacher professional practices and the willingness to contribute is still at question. Researching this phenomena and each teacher's individual experience was the focus of this study.

Chapter III described the research methodology of this study. A phenomenological design was selected to capture individual teacher's experiences with the implementation of the legislated high stakes performance evaluation system. Through this method, interviews took place with teachers. Findings resulting from the interview narratives resulted in deep analysis of the results. This analysis produced themes and subthemes organized and described in Chapter IV.

Interpretation of Findings

Interview data was collected from 14 practicing classroom teachers experiencing the implementation of Michigan's high stakes performance evaluation system. Participants' experience as classroom teachers ranged from 11 to 41 years. All participants had experiences with a variety of collaborative practices. Demographic information regarding participants is presented in Table 1 and identified themes are presented in Table 2 in Chapter IV. Subsequent tables in Chapter IV describe the subthemes identified and the number of participants supporting the subthemes. In this section, I will discuss how the findings described in Chapter IV inform the purpose of this study, and respond to the research questions that focused this study.

Research Question 1: How are Teachers Experiencing the Implementation of Michigan's High Stakes Performance Evaluation System as it is Being Carried Out in Their Schools?

The interviews with the 14 study participants yielded several subthemes that appear to show participants are adjusting to the new evaluation system. Of particular note are ways that participants noted how adjustment has been positively influenced through the efforts of their principals. Also of note are the references to receiving more frequent and specific feedback. That said, the participants of this study acknowledged that the new evaluation systems and processes are more time consuming for both teachers and principals. Additionally, participants expressed that while adjustment is happening, it is with some added stress.

Another facet of how teachers are experiencing the implementation of the new high stakes evaluation systems can be found in Theme 2: *The teachers are adapting their professional practice*. Three specific subthemes under this theme reveal that teachers believe the new evaluation systems have led to more focused instruction, more reflection on their teaching practice, and more adjustment of instruction based on student achievement data. In spite of these productive aspects of how teachers are adjusting to the new evaluation systems, Theme 4 shows that along with an increased sense of accountability for student performance, teachers are also experiencing stress, confusion, and overall concern about the fairness of the student growth ratings that make up 25% of their overall performance rating (this will increase to 40% in 2018-2019).

Research Question 2: How are Teachers Experiencing the Professional Culture in Their Schools Since the Implementation of Michigan's New High Stakes Performance Evaluation Systems in Their Schools?

Theme 3 indicates that teachers are experiencing changes in collaborative practices or the collaborative environment in their schools in response to the new high stakes performance evaluation processes. Some of those changes are deepening commitment to greater camaraderie (i.e., we are in this together) and collaboration. The participants specifically referenced greater efforts to help each other out (i.e., mentoring) and to do more focused collaboration around issues and challenges of common concern, especially as those concerns and challenges relate to the level of performance ratings the teachers receive. On the other hand, some of the participants noted just the opposite change—teachers are more guarded about sharing their best work and ideas and more focused on how their performance will be rated compared to the ratings of others. These findings will be further explored in the next section as I review how my study informs the scholarship related to this study.

Relationship of Results to Existing Studies

The diagram depicted in Chapter I regarding the impact of high stakes performance evaluation on teacher professional and collaborative practices was based on the dynamic between Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) and McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y (1960) theories of needs versus basic management ideas. The findings of this research suggest a number of areas that indicate how participants went far beyond basic needs and how the impact of high stakes evaluation failed to halt them in realizing Maslow's upper hierarchy status even though individual accountability could result in

eroded position security. Tables 7 through 10 present a comparison of the findings of the current study and previous research for each theme identified in this study.

Theme 1: Findings Related to Educators Adjusting to a Performance Rubric Evaluation System

Table 7 presents a comparison of findings from the current study to those of previous research. Research participant data indicates that all 14 educators adjusted to the shift from a binary feedback system to a rubric evaluation system that labeled educators as Highly Effective, Effective, Minimally Effective, and Ineffective, and also included a percent weight of student growth and achievement on the summative performance evaluation. With 11 of the participants citing increased stress associated with the rubric based/student growth performance evaluation system, 10 of the 14 indicated appreciation toward the specific feedback they are receiving under the umbrella of the new evaluation system. Although seven indicated a concern with the amount of time it takes to prepare evidence pieces to add to their portfolios, six commented positively on the change in frequency of feedback from their principals including additional observations and having principals dropping in to visit their classrooms more often.

Table 7

Comparison of Research for Theme 1

Theme 1: Teachers adjusted to a rubric performance system	
Current Study	Previous Research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While rubrics offer more relevance to teachers' day to day work, the detail and rigor expressed in the rubric lead to greater stress • Participants expressed concerns that evaluations were time intensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time intensive concerns (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013; Spote, Stevens, Healey, Jiang, & Hart, 2013)

Table 7—Continued

Theme 1: Teachers adjusted to a rubric performance system	
Current Study	Previous Research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants experienced increased frequency of observations and increases in specific feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback is a major variable in a reliable evaluation system (Alderman & Chung, 2014; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010, 2013, 2014; Myung & Martinez, 2013)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal actions that reduced fear and mistrust supported the acceptance of a rubric system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering trust is necessary for a positive process, lessening the threat perspective (Myung & Martinez, 2014)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns expressed with consistent application and use of the rubric 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate training (Sporte, Stevens, Healey, Jiang, & Hart, 2013) • Relationships may influence ratings (Sartain, Stoelinga, & Brown, 2011)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By emphasizing PLC work related to rubric implementation, principals helped foster acceptance of the new evaluation requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • — *The current study represents a new finding adding to the existing literature

Receiving constructive feedback related to the additional observations affirmed the research related to this subtheme (Alderman & Chung, 2014; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010, 2013, 2014; Myung & Martinez, 2013). Specifically, the participants' appreciation of more feedback based on more frequent observations suggests teachers understand that feedback is a major variable in a reliable evaluation system (Alderman & Chung, 2014; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation 2010, 2013, 2014; Myung & Martinez, 2013). Myung and Martinez (2014) indicate that trust is essential to the performance evaluation process. This coincides with my finding that participants experiencing positive and supportive engagement with their principals during the evaluation process had an increased a sense of trust, and that, in turn, decreased fear, with both influencing teachers' ability to accept the new evaluation system and processes.

That several participants in my study noted an increased effort to engage with one another about professional challenges and ways to meet those challenges supports findings by Sigudardottir (2010) linking school effectiveness with teachers engaging in professional learning community work. Moreover, new findings from this study suggest that in addition to the influence professional learning communities have on student achievement and the implementation of high impact instructional strategies, teachers in environments where PLCs are working to establish teacher collaboration express more acceptance of the new high stakes performance evaluation system and are more inclined to use their collaborative culture to support one another in achieving effective or better evaluation ratings.

Additional findings from my study regarding Theme 1 indicate that participants feel pressure as a result of the time dedicated to fulfilling the evaluation requirements. Time intensive concerns related to constructing robust evidence portfolios were expressed and support research findings from other studies that also identified concerns about adequate time for both teachers and principals to conduct due diligence under the more rigorous performance and growth based evaluation systems (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013; Spote, Stevens, Healey, Jiang, & Hart, 2013). Learning and understanding the detail included in the comprehensive rubric system created pressure on the participants' schedules as well.

In my study, I also found that school leaders play a key role in implementing the rubric and providing the final rating for educators. The new rubric systems implemented by districts include increased complexity and length. Participants expressed worries that principals might not consistently apply the rubrics from one classroom to another. This

finding supports the work of Sparte, Stevens, Healy, Jiang, and Hart (2013), which calls for adequate training in the use of the new evaluation system. Along with adequate training and consistent use, several participants expressed concern that relationships may influence final ratings, a finding that echoes other studies (Sartain, Stolina, & Brown, 2011).

Finally, my study findings emphasize the key role principals play in the manner in which a rubric evaluation system is implemented and used during the first few years following initial implementation. Specifically, the participants in this study noted the principal's role in both establishing a climate of trust and mutual support, and in encouraging teachers to engage in strong collaborative work in PLCs and other more informal ways of mentoring and supporting one another. Teachers expressed appreciation toward school leaders who walked them through the evaluation process whether it is was in small incremental steps or all in one swoop. Having an understanding principal who admitted they were all learning together to implement the new system together provided support and encouraged camaraderie for the staff.

Theme 2: Findings Related to Educators Adapting Their Professional Practices

Table 8 presents a comparison of current and previous research for Theme 2. As shown, participants in this study indicated that since the implementation of the high stakes performance evaluation system they are adapting their professional classroom practices in more intentional or specific ways. Participants in the study shared that they are more engaged in reflecting on their instructional habits, which reinforces other findings that engaging in reflective practices together helps teachers better assess the quality of their instruction (Harris & Jones, 2010; Carmichael & Martens, 2012; Nelson,

2010). Teachers indicated that they are also adjusting their practices based on student achievement, which supports some of the research related to Value Added Models (Anderman, Anderman, Yough, & Gimbert, 2010; Winters & Cowen, 2013). While a number of studies find that value added models are complex and expensive to construct and subject to significant critique, receiving student growth ratings encourages teachers to increase their use of student achievement data (Anderman, Anderman, Yough, & Gimbert, 2010; Winters & Cowen, 2013).

Table 8

Comparison of Research for Theme 2

Theme 2: Teachers adapted their professional practices	
Current Study	Previous Research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants are more engaged in reflecting on instructional practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators engage in reflective practices to assess quality of instruction (Harris & Jones, 2010; Carmichael & Martens, 2012; Nelson, 2010)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjusted instruction based on student achievement data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value added models will improve instruction and learning (Anderman, Anderman, Yough, & Gimbert, 2010; Winters & Cowen, 2013)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased focus on instructional practices related to state adopted standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • — *The current study represents a new finding adding to the existing literature

Of great interest is the finding that practitioners are focusing their instruction more on state identified grade level and content standards. This increase in instructional focus on specific learning standards is related to the implementation of both the rubric performance system and the student growth component of the summative performance evaluation system. These findings suggest teachers are foregoing veering away from state identified standards in order to pursue special interest projects, thus increasing the

fidelity with which they are addressing the curriculum expectations. Participants in this study indicated that the inclusion of student growth ratings as a significant part of their overall performance evaluation made them more concerned about ensuring they are teaching and their students are learning the adopted state standards, and are prepared for the state assessment on those standards.

Theme 3: Findings Related to Changes in Collaborative Practices

Table 9 presents a comparison of current and previous research for Theme 3. As shown, some of the findings from the current study support the existing literature as they did with the themes discussed above, while other findings dispute or add to the literature. The area of educator collaboration was of special interest. Having experienced positive collaborative relationships across a three-decade career, I came into the study questioning if such relationships could survive the stress and pressure placed on educators under the auspices of the legislated high stakes performance evaluation requirements. I was surprised and assured by participant responses that collaboration actually improved over the years since the new performance standards were implemented. This is discussed in the following paragraph.

Camaraderie and a focus on collaboration were viewed as important to improving the culture in the buildings of the participants in this study. This reinforces findings from studies that show a strong relationship between professional camaraderie and school culture (Owens, 2015; Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan, 2008; Many & King, 2008; Nadelson, Harm, Croft, McClay, Ennis, & Winslow, 2012). Mutual trust and knowing that the group is facing the same requirements with the new system contributed to the sense of change in collaborative practices, leading to strengthened professional

relationships. This aligns well with studies showing mutual trust is essential to a strong professional culture (Natriello, 1984; Harris & Jones, 2010; Sigurdardottir, 2010).

Table 9

Comparison of Research for Theme 3

Theme 3: Teachers reflected on changes in collaborative practices	
Current Study	Previous Research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased sense of camaraderie knowing that their peers are facing the same requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sense of camaraderie viewed as important to the culture of the building (Owens, 2015; Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan, 2008; Many & King, 2008; Nadelson, Harm, Croft, McClay, Ennis, & Winslow, 2012)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sensed a change in collaborative practices leading to strengthened professional relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration and sharing collective knowledge improves the culture (Owens, 2015; Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan, 2008; Many & King, 2008; Harris & Jones, 2010; Nadelson, Harm, Croft, McClay, Ennis, & Winslow, 2012)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased sense of responsibility and obligation to mentor others; especially the least experienced teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educators have the responsibility to support the newest teachers (Levine, 2011; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008) Peer coaching supports professional growth (Kohler, Crilley, Shilley, & Good, 1997; Swafford, 1998; Donegan, Ostrosky, and Fowler, 2000; Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen, & Bolhuis, 2007, 2009; Murray, Ma, Mazur, 2008) Perception of mutual trust must be evident (Harris, 2009; Harris & Jones, 2010; Sigurdardottir, 2010). *The current study adds to this finding.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance ratings influenced sense of competition, but a culture of mutuality and trust mitigated the influence of competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proponents fear pitting teachers against one another impacting collaboration and collegiality (Harris, 2009). *The current study disputes this finding.

Although only four of the participants shared their views on the importance of mentoring their colleagues, especially those with limited to no teaching experience, it was four participants with a combined 51 years of experience in the classroom that expressed this responsibility. This supports research that suggests educators have a responsibility to support the newest teachers (Levine, 2011; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). In addition, participants expressed the need to collaborate with one another and share best practices with their colleagues, which supports research related to peer coaching supporting professional growth (Kohler, Crilley, Shilley, & Good, 1997; Swafford, 1998; Donegan, Ostrosky, & Fowler, 2000; Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen, & Bolhuis, 2007, 2009; Murray, Ma, & Mazur, 2008).

Participant responses in this theme disputed the idea that fear of competitive evaluation ratings results in pitting teachers against one another and creating a negative impact on collaboration and collegiality (Harris, 2009). Although six of the participants discussed competition with their peers, it was not the common type of pitting against one another. Part of the concern expressed was the subtle fear that sharing lessons that worked in their individual classrooms may result in their colleagues' students performing better if using a shared lesson or strategy; however, for the most part, participants in this study were able to move beyond competitive concerns and act more out of sense of value from mutual support.

Theme 4: Findings Related to Teachers Views on the Use of Student Growth Data

Table 10 presents a comparison of current and previous research for Theme 4. The legislative requirement to include growth data as a weight in final summative performance evaluation ratings evoked some of the most passionate responses from the

participants. Study participants expressed their confusion with Michigan's requirement to include student achievement growth data, as the legislation has changed a number of times since 2011 when the laws regarding teacher evaluation were first enacted.

Although four of the 14 expressed this confusion directly related to legislative actions, 10 of the participants indicated that despite the confusion and uncertainty regarding how student growth ratings are developed, they are acting out of an increased sense of accountability due to the requirement to include student growth data on the summative performance assessment.

Increased stress related to the inclusion of student data supports research citing the difficulties associated with implementing a value added model and the possibility of making decisions based on inaccurate data (Anderman et al., 2010; Berliner, 2014; Collings & Beardsley-Amrein, 2014; Harris, 2009). Participant responses in this study related to stress with using student data to make value-added inferences about teacher impact suggest the process of assigning student growth ratings to individual teachers could affect staff morale. Participants in this study indicated that much of the anxiety about student growth ratings stems from the belief that educators can be falsely identified as Minimally Effective or even Ineffective if the data is not valid or used with great care (Lavigne, 2014). This fear is substantiated by recent studies that raise questions about the efficacy of the assessments and data analytics that assign student growth ratings to teachers (Anderman et al., 2010; Berliner, 2014; Collings & Beardsley-Amrein, 2014; Harris, 2009).

Table 10

Comparison of Research for Theme 4

Theme 4: Teachers expressed their views on the use of student growth data	
Current Study	Previous Research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experienced a sense of confusion based on legislative changes and state assessment changes experienced across the years Questioned fairness of the use of student growth data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulties associated with implementation and decisions made on inaccurate data (Anderman, Anderman, Yough, & Gimbert, 2010; Berliner, 2014; Collins & Beardsley-Amrein, 2014; Harris, 2009) Recommendation that teachers select and control the data points (Peterson, 2004) Lack of random student assignments to classroom (Anderman et al., 2010; Collins & Beardsley-Amrein, 2014; Harris, 2009; Konstantopoulus, 2014; Lavigne, 2014; Marder, 2012)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased stress and anxiety relating to the use of data and the lack of confidence in the data or how the data is being used to rate teacher performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact on morale if removing falsely identified ineffective educators (Lavigne, 2014) Educators are suspicious of data (Wayman, Midgley, & Stringfield, 2006; Harris, 2009, LaVigne, 2014, Konstantopolous, 2014; MCEE Report, 2013) Value added models are complex and expensive to construct (Anderman et al., 2010; Collins & Beardsley-Amrein, 2014; Harris, 2009; Lavigne, 2014; Marder, 2012). *The current study adds to this finding.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Despite fear and confusion, acting out of a sense of increased accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — *The current study represents a new finding adding to the existing literature

Additional responses from participants expressed specific concerns regarding the fair use of student growth ratings. This concern supports prior research finding that value added models are complex and expensive to construct, and at the same time, not highly trusted (Anderman et al., 2010; Collins & Beardsley-Amrein, 2014; Harris, 2009;

Lavigne, 2014; Marder, 2012). Although not cited by participants directly, the lack of random assignment of students to classrooms could also contribute to the feeling that using student data as part of the evaluation is not fair (Anderman et al., 2010; Collins & Beardsley-Amrein, 2014; Harris, 2009; Konstantopoulus, 2014; Lavigne, 2014; Marder, 2012).

Participant responses relating to the use of a student growth model, also known as a value added model, questioned the types of data their districts were using to determine student achievement changes. Peterson (2004) suggested that teachers should have the responsibility to select and control the data points being used to determine their final summative rating. This concept could mitigate the sense of unfairness and the stress associated with including student growth data as required statutory state evaluation system requirements (Harris, 2009; Konstantopolous, 2014; LaVigne, 2014; MCEE Report, 2013; Wayman, Midgley, & Stringfield, 2006).

Limitations

Although this research identified a number of areas relating to the impact of new standards regarding educator evaluations, some limitations exist. Because of time and communication restraints, the following represent limitations of transferability of the research findings.

The findings of this study have limited transferability. Michigan is in a unique position with shifting statewide summative student assessments across the years since its evaluation legislation was enacted. Also, Michigan did not implement one statewide evaluation system as some other states did. In addition, the state hesitated in funding the needed training for the evaluation models until five years after the law was enacted.

Of the 14 participants involved in the study, 13 of educators received Highly Effective status on their most recent summative evaluation. With participants being highly rated teachers, their perspectives on changing practices, specific feedback, collaborative practices, etc. may not transfer to teachers rated Minimally Effective or Ineffective. Seeking out the input of educators that received Minimally Effective or even more educators that received effective labels is warranted.

Middle school participant interview lengths were not as long as the elementary and high school participant interviews. It is difficult to determine if the online format of the interview or other factors contributed to the shortness of the middle school participant interviews, but the difference in the depth of information acquired in the elementary and high school participant interviews compared to the middle school participants interviews is of concern.

The ethnicity of the subject group was Caucasian serving in buildings with little demographic diversity. Including educators from more urban areas and with diverse student demographic subgroups is needed to create a broader and more inclusive understanding of the questions that focused this study.

The number of students each participant was responsible for varied depending on teaching level and subject areas. This resulted in wide variability in how student growth is assessed, analyzed, and factored into teacher evaluation. This variance was most obvious in the experience of teachers who teach in a typical elementary setting consisting of one group of students, compared to the experience of teachers who work in the middle school/high school setting where a teacher has the potential for five or six groups of students and varying student growth assessments across the different courses that they

teach. Narrowing the scope of participants may produce specific results related to the level and subject areas in which a teacher practices.

Recommendations

This study adds to existing research related to educator evaluation. In particular, this study goes deep into exploration of high stakes performance evaluation at the level of the individual practitioner. In addition, this research extends to examining the lived experiences of teachers related to professional collaboration influences on teaching practice, interactions with the principal, and their sense of safety, security, and comfort with the provisions and processes of evaluation practices that result in high stakes ratings of teacher performance. Michigan educators are under extreme pressure to improve student achievement. With the weight of student performance data included in statutory requirements for all Michigan educators at significant levels (25% from 2015-2016 through 2017-2018 and increasing to 40% in 2018-2019), teachers' personal accountability for each student achievement is raised to a new level of importance and potential impact on a teacher's professional standing, compensation, and ability to remain employed in the profession. Despite the fact that there is still much research to be accomplished in both examining the efficacy of creating student growth ratings at the individual teacher level and the means by which this can be done with increasing levels of validity, Michigan teachers (like teachers in many states that have adopted high stakes educator evaluation systems) are living under mandated changes in the systems and processes that are used to evaluate their performance and make high stakes decisions about their professional standing.

In Michigan, the uncertain state of efficacy and validity in assigning teacher evaluation ratings is exacerbated by the fact that Michigan statutes allow for wide variability in the evaluation systems, tools, student growth measures, and analytics used to develop teacher performance ratings. This compounds the challenge of ensuring a fair and equitable professional evaluation system for all teachers and school leaders. Michigan lags behind in identifying a quality growth model to use as part of the evaluation system. As the state continues to deliberate over and thus delay the stabilization of a state core curriculum assessment system, school districts are additionally challenged to stabilize how they will incorporate state assessment data into their full teacher growth rating system. Moreover, in Michigan, growth data from state assessments is only part of the framework that districts must create to develop teacher growth ratings and the rest of that framework must be determined by each individual school district. This means teachers will likely continue questioning the fairness of using state data as part of their performance assessment system and feel some confusion about the entire process of creating student growth ratings as districts keep evolving their measures and analytics in search of a better, more defensible process. Continued study in this area is needed in Michigan, as the weight of student growth in achievement increases in two years from the date of this study (2018-2019), and there is little evidence of a coordinated state-wide effort to stabilize the systems and processes for developing student growth ratings across all subjects and grade levels.

Recommendations for State Policymakers

Research exists describing the complexity of using a valid, reliable student growth system. These systems are expensive and cumbersome. I urge state legislators

and policymakers to freeze the student growth rating component of educator evaluation ratings at the current 25% weight level. Moving to the 40% student achievement weight as legislated to begin with the 2018-2019 school year without a valid system for measuring student achievement growth may result in false results and add further stress to the system.

I also urge policymakers to commit to stabilizing the state summative assessment system for mandated state curriculum assessments. The ongoing deliberations and delays in committing to a stable state assessment system has wreaked havoc on the ability of local school districts to stabilize their student growth models and created deep distrust of the entire concept of student growth ratings. The constant changes in assessment systems in the years since the initial legislation of high stakes educator evaluation requirements in Michigan have caused confusion and distrust. With discussions from the state superintendent recommending further changes in the state assessment system, educators question how they should spend their time best preparing students for the state summative assessments. Teachers see the state assessments as moving targets that put them at significant disadvantage and interfere with both understanding student progress and addressing student needs.

Research participants expressed their concern with the amount of time dedicated to the evaluation process. Studies support the need for more evidence based assessments of teacher practices, but the accrual of relevant and reliable evidence requires greater investment of time from both principals and teachers to create and interpret a broader and more authentic body of evidence. That said, the ratio of supervisor/evaluator (the principal) to employee (the teachers) in school environments (ranging from 1/30 to 1/50-

60, depending on school level) precludes the ability for teachers and principals to engage sufficiently in practices of observation, conferencing, evidence development, and evidence interpretation needed for reliable and verifiable performance ratings. I recommend state legislators relax the policy of evaluating educators every year. Considering requiring full evaluations every other year would allow teachers and principals to focus on meaningful practices and achieve reasonable levels of engagement from which they create the evidence-based evaluation ratings that are needed to guide and support continuous improvement in practice and make high stakes decisions about an educator's employment status.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Participants indicated that principals made a difference in accepting the rubric evaluation and the inclusion of student achievement data for summative performance evaluation. I recommend that principals work closely with their teachers to create understanding of the evaluation rubric and the procedures for implementing the new evaluation system in ways that result in greater confidence in performance ratings. I also recommend that principals continue to work with their teachers to access best practices in assessing student learning and using analytics to interpret student growth. Working together has the potential to mitigate the stress associated with incorporating student growth rating into the final evaluation ratings for teachers and administrators. It is important for districts to free up time for principals to work with teachers in collaboration to improve the performance of all practitioners. It is also critical that district leaders seek out collaborations with other districts, universities, research labs, and analytics providers

to explore more efficacious options for assessing student growth and interpreting the yield from student growth assessments.

I urge district level leaders not to stack rank teachers by points to determine lay off. There is too much error associated with both the inter-rater reliability of the rubric and the identified student achievement data being used in districts to make stacked rankings defensible. Ranking teachers even to the tenth of a point to determine staff reductions not only can result in false identification of teachers being reduced, but has the potential to pit teachers against one another. In lieu of stacked rankings, I recommend districts utilize less subjective means of breaking lay-off/recall ties (e.g., teacher qualifications, evaluation rating history, ratings on specified highest priority evaluation criteria, etc.) if the overall evaluation rating label as required by the state, alone, does not resolve the question.

Finally, I encourage all teachers to remain open to collaboration. Participants in the study expressed their appreciation for the focused collegial discussion relating to student achievement. They enjoyed sharing strategies and problem solving achievement challenges. While principals can significantly influence the professional culture of a school, teachers have the greatest influence and can use that influence to foster a collaborative culture and support one another in this most noble profession. Ultimately, the success of each teacher individually supports the success of teachers collectively. Moreover, working together to increase teaching effectiveness ensures that teachers will leverage their individual knowledge, competence, and expertise into greater collective knowledge, competence, and expertise in service to students.

Conclusion

Effective leaders are guided by moral purpose (Fullan, 2001). As use of the value added approach to educator evaluation is expensive and complex, legislative, educational, and policy leaders must recognize the importance of ensuring a fair model is used for evaluating educators. With possible teacher shortages looming on the horizon, how are we to fill classrooms with passionate, caring educators if the current performance and accountability requirements are pushing potential educators away from the field of education? An article published in an online newsfeed by Jonathan Oosting (2013) indicates that the Students First group has set their sights on continuing to strengthen the link between student achievement and educator effectiveness determinations. This is an example of the continuing pressure on schools to ensure they are systemically attending to and addressing the quality of teaching and learning in U.S. schools.

Media continues to be at the center of the debate of teacher effectiveness, shaping the public perception of educators and their effectiveness. Media discourse continues to polarize and oversimplify the use of VAMs in determining educator effectiveness (Gabriel & Lester, 2013). In Michigan, work needs to be completed to ensure a fair, equitable professional evaluation system is available resulting in fair application of such a system. Michigan lags behind in identifying a quality growth model to use as part of the evaluation system and committing, long-term, to using the same assessment model.

Practicing educators committed to the profession demonstrated through this study that they are able to quiet the noise from outside their classrooms and buildings and focus on the students they are serving. Although faced with legislative demands to increase student achievement, the teachers in this study responded to the demand in a professional,

collaborative manner. It is through this collaboration and trust with one another that they will work together to overcome the challenges imposed on them from the outside. Whether legislated or not, the participants in this study want what is best for their students. It is through their training and expertise that they are best suited to determine what, in fact, denotes student growth. However, even if Michigan stabilizes the systems and processes for conducting educator evaluations, it is important to remember that teaching and learning are complex, multi-faceted endeavors that cannot be relegated to linear, one-size-fits-all processes and strategies. Teaching and learning are dynamic processes, and thus call for dynamic processes for shaping and interpreting what happens in classrooms and how students are growing in their educational attainment. Educator evaluation needs to be treated as dynamic process that should be: (a) research informed, (b) evidentially interpreted, and (c) contextually understood and interpreted. The variability among students, student backgrounds, community and school contexts, and means of assessing student learning must be taken into account in assessing educator performance. The best way to account for all of this variability is to create strong communities of professional engagement in schools and use those communities to collaborate around effective practice for the students the community serves.

Despite the pressures and stresses associated with increased accountability, practicing educators in this study demonstrated their focus on collaborating and sharing best practices. They also demonstrated that trusting relationships are key to a positive teaching and learning environment. It is through strong collaborative practices that student achievement will increase. Teachers in this study show that leadership matters in supporting their inclination to respond to the new high stakes evaluation systems with

professionalism and a sense of collaboration. As school leaders, it is then perhaps our foremost responsibility to foster trust and collaboration as we lead our schools and districts through the adaptation to high stakes performance evaluation systems.

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Appendix A

Participant Informed Consent Form

Western Michigan University

Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

Principal Investigator: Dr. Patricia Reeves
Student Investigator: Kathy L. Stewart
Title of Study: *A Phenomenological study of practicing educators' collaborative experiences within a climate of high stakes individual accountability*

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled " *A Phenomenological study of practicing educators' collaborative experiences within a climate of high stakes individual accountability* ." This project will serve as Kathy Stewart's research project for the requirements of obtaining a Doctor of Philosophy. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?

The purpose of the study is to understand how teachers make sense of their profession in a post-Michigan PA 100-103 of 2011 era. Specifically, this study will examine: (a) how teachers experience the implementation of individual accountability for student results, and (b) how those experiences influence their dispositions toward collaborative professional practices, such as PLCs, data teams, peer coaching, and other processes where teachers work together to examine student results, identify strategies to improve results, and collect data on the impact of those strategies. This study seeks to go inside the experiences of teachers and examine how they are internalizing the nexus between high stakes performance evaluation as it is being carried out in their schools and the culture of collaborative professionalism in their schools.

Who can participate in this study?

You can participate in this study if you are a teacher meeting the following criteria:

1. A minimum of ten years serving as a teacher in the field
2. Serving in one of the four content areas (i.e. science, mathematics, language arts, social studies)
3. A minimum of three years serving as a member of a collaborative team (i.e. professional learning community, data team, peer mentor)
4. Student achievement growth is part of the evaluation system for at least two years
5. Received a rating of ineffective, minimally effective, effective, or highly effective for at least two years including the current year

Additionally the following will disqualify you from participating in this study:

1. Less than ten years in the teaching profession
2. A personal or professional condition that significantly interferes with the potential participant's ability to conduct and participate in the teacher performance appraisal process defined by current law.

Where will this study take place?

The interviews for this study will take place using an online format at a time and place that is convenient for each participant. You must feel private, safe, and comfortable with the self-selected setting.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?

Your total time commitment to this study is approximately 60 to 90 minutes during which time the researcher will engage you in dialogue regarding your personal experience with the changes in teacher evaluation as related to high stakes accountability. The interview should take about 30-45 minutes. Following the interview you will have the opportunity to examine the written transcript of your interview and clarify or add to the transcript as you deem. This review of the transcript should take about another 30 to 45 minutes.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?

After agreeing to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in a one-to-one 30 to 45 in-depth electronic interview with the student researcher (Kathy Stewart). During the interview you will be asked questions related to your experiences with the teacher evaluation process and experiences in the area of collaborative practices. The interview will be audiotaped and later transcribed. You will receive a copy of the written transcript with an invitation to review and provide additions/amendments to add further information. This review may take anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes depending upon your desire to add and/or amend the transcript.

What information is being measured during the study?

The interview will contain a few demographic questions to assist the researcher in profiling the participants of the study. This information will not include your name or other identifying information that could be attributed directly to you. The focus of the interview will be a conversation regarding your experiences with performance evaluations both prior to the legislative teacher evaluation legislated changes and since the legislated changes enacted July, 2011 and how this changes relate to collaborative experiences with your colleagues. You will be asked to describe your experience and the meaning these experiences hold for you. The description of your experiences will be compared with the other study participants to identify common themes and/or ways in which your experiences are alike or different from other participants' descriptions.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?

There are no identified or known risks for your participation in this study. However, the topic may result in emotional responses from you. If this occurs, the researcher may stop or pause the interview if you appear to be in a state of emotional distress. At any time

you may also choose to stop the interview if you feel overwhelmed by the questions and topic.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

There are no identified immediate benefits to participate in this study. You may experience some benefit from being afforded the opportunity to lend your voice and personal experience with the current performance evaluation requirements. In addition, you may feel a sense of benefit from contributing to a student that adds the teacher voice in how they are experiencing this complex, high stakes education evaluation legislated requirements regarding performance evaluations. Finally, you may contribute to the work of educational leaders and policy makers through the experiences and understandings collected from this study.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?

There are no financial costs to the participant in this study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?

There is no compensation for participants in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?

The principal investigator (Dr. Patricia Reeves), the student investigator (Kathy Stewart), and the contracted transcriptionist will be the only person with access to the information collected during this study. Once transcribed, the digital recordings of the interviews will be deleted and the transcribed documents will have all identifying information redacted or replaced by an individual participant code. Data from the study will be maintained on an encrypted and password protected electronic storage device and stored in a locked safe at the researcher's office until the conclusion of the study when the data will then be transferred to and maintained by in the Western Michigan University archives for a minimum of three years, then destroyed. All information will be treated with confidentiality. You will be assigned a participant number and code to protect your identity and ensure confidentiality of your responses. De-identified research findings will be published as part of the student researcher's dissertation with the potential utilization by the researchers in future publications or presentations.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?

You can choose to stop participating in this research study at any time without needing to provide a reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop or withdraw from the study. You will experience NO consequence, penalty, or judgment if you choose to withdraw from this study.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact me, the student researcher, at 989-277-7245 (cell) or via email at kstewart1@sisd.cc. You may also contact the primary investigator, Dr. Patricia Reeves at 269-387-3527 or patricia.reeves@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects

Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

Participant's signature

Date

Appendix B

Interested Teacher Participant Profile Information Collection

Interested Teacher Participant Profile Information Collection

1. Name
2. District
3. Building
4. Email address
5. Level (Elementary, Middle, High School)
6. Number of years of experience as a teacher
7. Content area (if applicable): science, social studies, mathematics, language arts
8. Number of years student growth used as part of the summative evaluation
9. Number of years effectiveness ratings used: ineffective, minimally effective, effective, highly effective

Appendix C
Recruitment Email

Dear Superintendent Colleagues,

In addition to currently serving as superintendent of Saginaw Intermediate School District, I am completing my Ph.D studies in Educational Leadership at Western Michigan University and am respectfully requesting that you send this research project invitation to your teaching staff members. It is my opinion that this project will benefit teachers as well as the educational field in general. The purpose of this study is to give voice to teachers about their personal experiences in the field with educator evaluation practices and results since the legislative action related to this field July, 2011. This research project is part of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Western Michigan University.

Specifically, teachers are invited to share their personal experiences related to collaborative initiatives within a climate of high stakes accountability. Whether teachers are participating in a professional learning community, data teams, and/or peer coaching model, collaboration is related to improving student achievement. Thus, teachers involved in such activities are invited to consider participating in this research study.

The criteria to participate in the study includes the following:

1. A minimum of ten years serving as a teacher in the field
2. Serving in one of the four content areas (i.e. science, mathematics, language arts, social studies)
3. A minimum of three years serving as a member of a collaborative team (i.e. professional learning community, data team, peer mentor)
4. Student achievement growth is part of the evaluation system for at least two years
5. Received a rating of ineffective, minimally effective, effective, or highly effective for at least two years including the current year

Participants in the study will engage in a one-on-one confidential 30-45 minute interview with the researcher using an electronic connection. The participant is given the opportunity to elect where they would like to be interviewed. Upon the completion of the interview, the participant will be asked to review the transcript of the interview to add or extend upon information shared during the interview. Both the audio recording and the transcript of the interview will use a participant number and code. Any information identifying the participant, the school, and the district will be redacted. Only the researcher will know the names and schools of actual participants. Teachers interested in participating in this research study should use this link to access a form for collecting interested participant information.

If you and your teachers need further information please contact me at this email address (kstewart1@sisd.cc) or this telephone number (989) 277-7245 (cell). I welcome questions and inquiries to ensure information needed to participate in this study is provided. Contacting me does not commit an individual to this research. Commitment is provided later through completing an informed consent document.

Thank you for your consideration in forwarding this request to your teaching staff to be part of an important study.

Sincerely,

Kathy Stewart

Appendix D
Interview Protocol Template

Research Study: Teacher Experiences of Profession Post P.A. 100-103

Project Description: The purpose of the phenomenological study is to understand how teachers make sense of their profession relating to collaboration with colleagues in a post-Michigan PA 100-103 era.

Date of Interview:

Start Time of Interview:

End Time of Interview:

Site of Interview:

Interviewer Name:

Participant Number and Code:

Thank you for consenting to participate in this research interview. I would like to record the interview so the study is as accurate as possible. I will inform you when the recorder is activated and and shut off. You may request that the recorder be turned off at any point of the interview. This interview will probably take between 30-45 minutes to complete.

Specifically, this study is interested in how you are experiencing your district's implementation of the new requirements for teacher evaluation including the shift to a new evaluation tool, any changes in the manner in which your work is observed and evaluated, the creation of student growth ratings, and the creation of overall performance ratings. This study is also interested in how your experiences with the new teacher evaluation process influences how you think about and go about your professional responsibilities, your professional interactions with colleagues, and your sense of yourself as a professional educator. In essence, I am interested in your story as an experienced teacher who has been in the field long enough to experience a major shift in how teacher evaluations are done and what they mean to you as a professional educator.

Research Questions

1. Please start out by describing what teacher evaluation was like for you before the changes in Michigan law.
2. Now, describe what teacher evaluation is like for you under the new Michigan requirements. Please include a description of how your district is implementing the new requirements and how you are experiencing those new requirements.

Probes:

- a. What evaluation model is your district using? How is it being used?

- b. How are observations being done?
 - c. What other evidence goes into your evaluation ratings?
 - d. How is student growth determined?
 - e. What other aspects of the evaluation process are you experiencing?
 - f. How would you describe the some of the high lights and low lights of how the new process is influencing the climate and culture of your school?
3. How would you describe the status of teacher collegiality and collaboration since the shift to the new evaluation system and processes? What, if anything, has changed and how?

Probes:

- a. Describe the types of collegiality and collaboration experienced.
 - b. What if any changes have occurred to the collaborative process?
 - c. Is there any notice of colleagues pulling back from sharing best practices.
4. How would you describe the influence of the change to the new evaluation system and processes on you as a professional teacher?

Probes:

- a. Describe any additional stressors felt as result of accountability for student achievement changes.
 - b. Share how you talk about the profession to others including colleagues, family members, and friends.
 - c. Indicate other relationship changes with colleagues, administrators, etc.
5. What else is important for me to understand about your personal experience with the new evaluation process and requirements?

Thank you for taking time to participate in this research study. Your willingness to participate in the study is appreciated. Information shared is valuable is will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. The recording of this interview will be sent to a professional transcriber. This contracted transcriptionist has signed a statement of confidentiality. Note that your participation has been given a code title and the transcriptionist will not know who provided the information. The recording will be transcribe word for word. Once the transcription is completed, I will contact you so that you may review the transcription to ensure its accuracy and reflect what you shared. Once you receive the transcript, note that the name and number will not identify you, your school, or your district.

Your review of the transcript is voluntary. Such review validates the accuracy of the research building reliability. Note that a few weeks will pass between the actual interview and receiving the transcribed narrative. It should take less than an hour to read and respond to the transcript. It is anticipated that you will do the following:

1. Read for accuracy. The narrative will be transcribed word for word. You

- might wish to elaborate, correct, and add to your response.
2. Reflect on well the transcribed narrative reflects your experience.
 3. Make certain the transcript reflects accurately your experience and how make sense of this experience. You are welcome to fill in any gaps.

The transcript will be sent in the format of a Word document. You will receive this document attached to an email. Please provide a private email account if you wish it send there instead of to a school account. I suggest you download the word file and use track changes (if comfortable) to make edits and revisions. If you need assistance with this, please contact me. You are also welcome to use a different process to highlight any additions/amendments to the transcript. Do you have any further questions?

Again, thank you for participating in this research study. Your story adds a teacher voice to educator evaluation.

Creswell (2006, p. 136).

Appendix E

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

Confidentiality Agreement-Data Collection Transcriptionist

Western Michigan University
Department of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership
College of Education

Principal Investigator: Dr. Patricia Reeves

Student Investigator: Kathy Stewart

I understand that I have been asked to transcribe interviews as part of a doctoral research study for the doctoral student listed above. This research has been approved by the Human Subject Institution Review Board (HSRIB) of Western Michigan University and is approved doctoral research project. I have been thoroughly trained in the transcription protocol and I will not deviate from the protocol as presented.

I, _____, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Kathy Stewart related to her doctoral study. Furthermore, I agree:

- To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio taped interviews, or in any associated documents;
- To not make copies of any recordings or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts;
- To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
- To return all audiotapes and study-related documents to Kathy Stewart in a complete and timely manner.
- To transcribe the information collected verbatim to express the complete intent of the participant without adding any additional information, context, meaning or judgment.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the recordings and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber:

Signature

Date

Student Investigator:

Signature

Date

Appendix F
HSIRB Approval

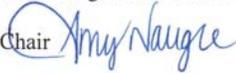
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: November 24, 2015

To: Patricia Reeves, Principal Investigator
Kathy Stewart, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair 

Re: HSIRB Project Number 15-11-24

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "A Phenomenological Study of Practicing Educators' Collaborative Experiences within a Climate of High Stakes Individual Accountability" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., *you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study."*) Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: November 23, 2016

1903 W. Michigan Ave., Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5456
PHONE: (269) 387-8293 FAX: (269) 387-8276
CAMPUS SITE: 251 W. Walwood Hall