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### Educational Leadership in Middle Schools: Informal Teacher Leaders

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## ABSTRACT

### **Educational Leadership in Middle Schools: Informal Teacher Leaders**

Quality educational leadership has been shown to have a strong positive relationship with student achievement (Louis et al., 2010). Successful schools do not depend upon a single charismatic leader but on many individuals collaborating and using their collective leadership skills (Grissam et al., 2021; Jackson & Marriott, 2012; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Pounder et al., 1995). To attain excellent student success, a school must engage its full leadership capacity (Fullan, 2001; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Klar & Brewer, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2004). This includes teachers.

Teacher leadership, an elusive concept with various definitions, has received growing attention from scholars and educators in their quest for change that results in increased student learning. There have been over 200 published, empirical, theoretical related, and non-theoretical studies of teacher leadership (Nguyen et al., 2019; Schott et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2016; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Recently more attention is given to those teacher leaders who are not formally designated and recognized for their leadership. This study aims to examine those informal teacher leaders and give voice to their literacy leadership efforts in middle schools that were beginning to be engaged in changing the English language arts and literacy curriculum required by state standards.

Three case studies of informal teacher leadership within different stand-alone (rural, suburban, and small urban) New York State middle schools were explored, described, and compared to answer three research questions 1) what roles these informal teacher leaders played, 2) how these role related to the roles played by principals and other formally appointed teacher leaders, and 3) how the informal teacher leadership varied across the three schools and what accounted for the differences.

York-Barr and Duke's (2004) teacher leadership definition that emphasizes influencing others for student learning was applied to 56 semi-structured three-part teacher and administrator interviews. Analysis of interviews was supplemented by an online descriptive questionnaire, the Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning (CALL®), administered to all teachers, as well as documentary data and field notes used for data triangulation and qualitative narrative analysis.

Informal teacher leadership related to literacy in the three schools was similar in part because of their middle school context, which emphasized interdisciplinary teams and cadres of students assigned to particular teacher teams, especially in the suburban and urban middle schools. All three schools had school principals who enabled teacher leadership for curriculum, formative assessment, and instructional decision-making. The informal teacher leaders were motivated to initiate various collaborative curriculum and instructional changes primarily by what they perceived to be their students' learning needs. The roles they played were consistent with various models of teacher leadership: Crowther et al., (2002); Fairman & Mackenzie (2012); Gordon et al., (2020); Harrison & Killion, (2007); York-Barr & Duke, (2004).

Teacher leadership conceptions demonstrated a new typology of semi-formal teacher leadership roles, recognizing school librarians as teacher leaders, and informal teacher leaders distributing leadership among themselves rather than at the direction of school-wide changes. These efforts were supported by the school and district administrators even with crises that arose during the study in both the rural and urban middle schools.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS:  
INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERS

by

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DISSERTATION

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Adelia Lucarelli Luciano, and my father, Nicholas A. Luciano for whom education was so important. Their educational dreams were unfulfilled so my dream of achieving this degree belongs to them too.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Research has accepted that educational leadership quality strongly influences student achievement (Louis et al., 2010). Throughout the twentieth century, studies of educational leadership and its impact on student learning concentrated on the leadership provided by certified school administrators. More recently, scholars have turned their attention to the leadership provided by teachers and other professional staff members (Barth, 2001; Berg, 2018; Eckert, 2018; Spillane & Shirrell, 2018). Successful schools, according to this line of research, depend upon a collection of individuals collaborating and using their leadership skills to influence others, rather than depending upon a single, sometimes charismatic leader (Grissom et al., 2021; Jackson & Marriott, 2012; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Pounder et al., 1995).

Most teacher leadership research attention focuses on the leadership provided by those who are formally recruited and assigned to play particular roles, such as curriculum coordinators, mentors, instructional coaches, professional learning coordinators, and department chairpersons, whether they play such roles on a full-time basis or teach in a classroom part-time and have a leadership position part-time.

A handful of scholars have begun to focus on the leadership provided by teachers who are not formally appointed to perform leadership functions. These **informal teacher leaders** are teachers who may “emerge spontaneously or organically from the teacher ranks” (Danielson, 2006, p. 2). Their peers, administrators, and others know informal teacher leaders by their influence inside and outside their classrooms in a variety of ways: their teaching excellence inside their classrooms that others model, their advocacy for students, their willingness to share their craft and help guide others, their passion for teaching, and their service helping others (Gordon et al., 2017).

## **Definition of Teacher Leadership**

For this study, I applied York-Barr and Duke's (2004) suggested definition of teacher leadership, "teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually and collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement" (pp. 287-288).

This definition is broad enough to include both formal and informal teacher leadership. A school organization's leadership capacity, according to this broader definition, includes all teachers who are key to supporting instruction and affecting positive school change because of their professional knowledge and expertise, professional relationships with colleagues and other professionals, and their direct influence on students (Berg, 2018; Crowder et al., 2002; Eckert, 2018; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2012; Frost, 2014; Fullan, 2001; Sun et al., 2013).

It is essential to recognize, support, nurture, and champion positive teacher leadership of all types to improve schools providing for exemplary student learning and achievement (Barth, 2001; Danielson, 2006; Eckert, 2018; Little, 1982; Marzano et al., 2005; Smylie et al., 2002; Sun et al., 2013). Especially in turbulent times with the complexity of school issues and demands that include external federal and state change requirements, educators need more research knowledge about informal teacher leadership and how it relates to other kinds of leadership.

## **Informal Teacher Leaders and Leadership**

This study's purpose is to develop an understanding of informal teacher leaders' roles and the ways schools may recognize, encourage, and support them during the process of school change. Developing such an understanding is vital because schools cannot afford to lose or not benefit from this important human professional asset (Berg, 2018; Eckert, 2018; Gordan et al.,

2017; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Whitaker, 1995). Also needed is knowledge of how informal teacher leaders develop regarding formal leaders, administrators, and formal teacher leaders, and how informal teacher leadership occurs when implementing required curriculum change (Eckert, 2018; Glenda & Hackman, 2014; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

This study seeks to better understand informal teacher leadership collaboration in different school contexts. Savard and Mizoguchi (2019) define an applicable definition of context as “the set of circumstances in a particular school’s environment with their participants” (p. 4). The case studies focus on informal teacher leadership within three New York State middle schools where educators were seeking to change English language arts and literacy instruction.

### **Research Questions**

The study explores three primary research questions:

**R-1 What roles do middle school informal teacher leaders play in implementing the Next Generation New York State English Language Arts (ELA) and Literacy Learning Standards in three types of middle schools: rural, suburban, and urban?**

**R-2 How do the roles of these informal teacher leaders relate to the roles played by principals and formal teacher leaders in implementing the Next Generation New York State English Language Arts and Literacy Standards?**

**R-3 In what ways does the leadership of informal teacher leaders in these three middle schools vary, and what might account for the differences?**

A broader set of questions underlies these primary questions which I have addressed, where feasible. How does the school leadership context in different schools affect or reflect the instructional change? Why do schools adopt different arrangements of teacher leadership? How do similarities and differences support or thwart informal teacher leadership? Are there different leadership functions, and how do teachers and principals construct them differently? What is the distribution of leadership functions and does it follow a consistent pattern or does it depend on issues that the school and parties are addressing? Does the configuration of middle school

structures support or thwart teacher leadership? How does literacy change provide opportunities for informal teacher leadership?

### **Research Design, Methods, and Analysis Overview**

I chose case study research methods using individual interviews, a survey for descriptive purposes, documentation, and field notes on three distinct middle schools in rural, suburban, and urban school districts located within central and south-central New York State. The schools' communities were different in size, wealth, diversity of student population, federal and state classifications, location, and Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) regions.

The 20 participants included teachers, school librarians, principals, assistant principals, a superintendent, and a BOCES curriculum coordinator. The teachers taught either English language arts or literacy as part of their content area in grades five to eight within their middle school and were teacher leaders identified by an administrator and confirmed by a teacher, were identified by another teacher, or volunteered themselves.

Each volunteer teacher or administrator participated in interviews one to four times, an average of forty-five minutes per interview or forty-eight and one-half hours total interview time. I audio-recorded and transcribed the confidential interviews. The teacher participants' narratives give voice to how they collaborated with other teachers and the principal. They illustrated how their roles interacted and worked together as professionals. After the interviews, emails to participants after the interviews provided additional factual information.

With a School of Education research grant, I arranged an administration of the Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning® (CALL®) survey for teachers, teaching assistants, and administrators in the three schools. This survey was created by the Wisconsin Center for Educational Products and Services at the University of Wisconsin.

Developed and validated at the University of Wisconsin, researchers and schools use the survey reports for guided feedback and suggestions to improve distributed leadership within a school according to five domains related to high student achievement (Halverson & Kelley, 2017).

Halverson and Kelley, major developers of the CALL® system, referencing Hutchins's (1995) distributed cognition theory, defined distributed leadership as having two dimensions: leadership that is "socially distributed across the organization" (p. 16) and "situationally" (p. 17) distributed through an organization's "artifacts" (p. 17) or structures such as schedules, contracts, or use of space.

Through a secure online portal, the Wisconsin Center for Educational Products and Services director at the University of Wisconsin administered the CALL® survey to each school individually. The survey return rates were, rural school 42% (n=10); suburban school 49% (n=22); and urban school 24% (n=18). Each survey took approximately forty minutes to complete. The Wisconsin Center provided online descriptive results based on the domains to me and each school principal.

To triangulate the results of the interviews and the survey results, I collected documentation data from the websites of teachers, schools, districts, and New York State. Field notes provided my reflections to capture an understanding of the schools and serve as additional data for clarification. In one of the schools, the rural school, the participants invited me to observe a one-hour district curriculum meeting and a half-hour teacher collaboration session between two teachers. I observed full faculty meetings in the other middle schools; forty-five minutes each in the suburban and urban schools.

I analyzed all data according to broad categories of teacher leadership roles, various distributed leadership conceptions, and teacher leadership frames cross-checking for congruence.

My analysis used a variety of frames and/or models to examine teacher leadership from various perspectives and I wrote each case in a narrative story mode.

### **Researcher's Position and Interest**

Fifty-plus years as an educational professional in various roles prepared me to conduct this study. I am a White woman of Italian American heritage living in a rural area and traveling primarily within upstate New York and have viewed leadership in schools from different vantage points. See the Vita section after the appendices.

My interest in the work of informal teacher leaders and their impact on schools began during my 23 years as director of a New York State regional teacher center with thirty-five small school districts, two BOCES, four higher education institutions, and other educational organizations collaborating on teachers' professional learning.

New York State Teacher Centers have existed for over 35 years through a special grant from the state legislature. State regulations require these centers to provide professional learning experiences for teachers and other educational professionals to increase their knowledge and skills that directly affect teaching and learning. Guided by a policy board of primarily classroom teachers, each teacher center develops its work with the motto "for teachers, by teachers."

Given the teacher center's large geographic mostly rural region (it was as large as the combined states of Rhode Island and Delaware), its location on a college campus with an education department, and my experience in project evaluation, the teacher center focused primarily on supporting teachers' classroom and school action research projects. During my tenure as director, I collaborated with teachers on an estimated 500 center-funded action research projects in addition to other funded projects. These projects focused on a range of topics, including early childhood education, gender equity, arts education, literacy, school-to-career



from s, and many more topics for grades pre-kindergarten to high school. Currently, as a teacher center volunteer associate for teacher leadership, my work continues.

In addition to this teacher center's work, I was the co-ordinator and primary developer of the statewide teacher centers' competitively funded leadership academy for 10 years. Selected directors and policy board members participated in teacher leadership seminars and projects during one to three years of their participation. Most of the participants were not certified as school administrators but as classroom teachers.

Another role I held was administrator of a regional teacher centers' network for providing professional development during the state's Race to the Top federal grant. I also achieved certification as a school and district administrator, was a Vermont State Education Department administrator for various federal programs, and in my beginning career an informal and semi-formal elementary classroom teacher leader. This wide-ranging experience provided me with the background for my interest and subsequently this research.

Through working with teachers, their action research projects, and hearing their stories about working together for change in their classrooms and schools, I recognized that these individuals and teams constituted a powerful force for positive change that is unrecognized by most school professionals. Serving at the behest of and working with the policy board (teachers designated or approved by their peers as teacher leaders) I would query why their schools did not recognize and utilize teachers' expertise and professional acumen more widely to provide leadership benefits for their students and schools.

More recently, my work as a School of Education Research Assistant engaged me in Syracuse University Teacher Leadership Conferences. I also assisted with research on important policy issues with local school and district superintendents through the Study Council. Because

of my interest in teachers, a developing interest in middle schools with their professed student developmental focus that related to my work in early childhood education with its early age developmental focus, multiple readings and study on leadership generally and teacher leadership, in particular, I saw a need for attention and research on informal teacher leaders within middle schools.

It is part of my belief system that leadership power resides in every teacher and they can use this power positively when nurtured with the goal of student learning. In my long career as an educator, I have sought to be a part of this nurturance. Also, I believe capable, quality school administrators, who in New York State have once been classroom teachers, can work together in concert with teacher leaders for the good of all their students.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### The Changed Paradigm of Educational Leadership

A leadership paradigm that began to be developed about seventy-five years ago recognized that leadership in organizations was not confined to a single leader but was part of an organization so that the organization itself had leadership attributes along with the groups and individuals embedded within the organization (Benne & Sheats, 1948; Gibb, 1954; Jackson & Marriott, 2012; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Pounder et al., 1995; Spillane, 2006; Thorpe et al., 2011). There has also been a growing awareness that defining leadership through a classic approach that focused on a leader's traits, styles, and characteristics no longer defined what a leader should be (Haslem & Reicher, 2016).

A concise definition of leadership has been elusive (Shieve & Schoenheit, 1987; Wiens & Beck, 2022) and no teacher leadership definition was universal. A clear definition of teacher leadership that was broad enough to encompass many teacher leadership iterations was essential. The teacher leadership definition proposed by York-Barr and Duke (2004) was meaningful and clear; therefore, I have chosen to use it for this study “teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually and collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student-learning and achievement (p. 287-288).”

Their definition includes teachers who respond to needs that advance the school's core goals of teaching and learning. This happens through teachers' influence on others. Influence occurs when something had relevance to teachers and principals so that those individuals became invested, similar to what Dewey (1938) proposed as learning. A sole formal leader, such as a

school principal, was not the only one responsible for this leadership but everyone in the school community had responsibility for achieving the school's primary goals.

Why was the evolved paradigm important to teacher leadership? This leadership paradigm recognized teachers for their actions as leaders. It also allowed for teachers, traditionally not seen as leaders within their districts and schools, to be part of the leadership capacity.

For reforming schools positively leadership functions were critical. A system's leadership provided flexibility and adaption mechanisms when responding to challenging reform situations. All school organizations required leadership that was distributed throughout (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Fullan, 2006). Eckert (2018), in his study of different high schools, asserted that a school's leadership capacity must increase because of the increasing complexity of schools. For practicality, more than just administrators were involved in school leadership in those schools and others.

This view of leadership, a combined leadership conception that went beyond a formally assigned individual as the only leader, positively impacted student learning (Grissam et al., 2021). Additionally, Boyd-Dimock & McGree (1995) found that teachers' influential leadership capacity beyond singular classrooms was essential for school improvement.

The review for this study covers several dimensions of this changed leadership paradigm:

- Distributed Leadership in Schools
- Teacher Leadership
- Informal Leadership
- Informal Teacher Leadership
- Teacher Leadership in Particular Contexts:

- Collaboration
- Middle Schools
- Literacy

### **Distributed Leadership in Schools**

Distributed leadership is important to informal teacher leadership in that it allows for others in addition to formal leaders to take leadership actions. The distribution of leadership can also occur formally or informally by formal and/or informal leaders determined by the task(s) to be accomplished. The job or the work determines when leadership was distributed within the team (Spillane & Diamond, 2007).

#### ***Various frameworks of distributed leadership.***

Several educational organizational researchers have provided varying distributed leadership frameworks. Bolden's (2011) review of distributed leadership highlighted these frameworks and in Table 1 I have provided examples indicating who distributed leadership and when this generally occurred.

**Table 1***Distributed Leadership Frameworks*

<b>Author and Process/Typology Framework</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Who Distributes Leadership</b>	<b>When</b>
<b>Gronn (2003)</b> 3-stage process: Spontaneous Collaboration	Groups of individuals with different skills or knowledge and/or capabilities came together to complete a task/project—impromptu interactions produced by the leader(s) (Diamond & Spillane, p. 149.).	Formally designated to or by the group itself.	At the start of the work process when a group came together on a task.
Intuitive understanding	A close working relationship developed over time with trust.	Within the group.	During the work actions.
Institutionalized practice	The organization created opportunities for DL by designing or adapting existing structures.	Formal or informal group recognition.	Grew out of the completed work.
<b>Leithwood et al. (2007)</b> Planful alignment	A formal authority leader or formal group assigned leadership responsibilities to individuals and/or groups to lead a function or task.	A formally designated leader or formal leadership group.	Start of the work process.
Spontaneous alignment	Unplanned and instinctual within the group who should be a leader.	The group	Within the work process.
Spontaneous misalignment	Unplanned but chosen leader(s) resulted in a mistake because the chosen leader(s) did not align their actions with the goals.	The group	Within the work process.
Anarchic misalignment	Leader(s) pursued their own goals resulting in rejection by the group.	Individuals within the group went their own way to the detriment of the organization	At the beginning and/or within the work process.
<b>MacBeath et al. (2004)</b> Formal	Leadership roles are designated and official.	Formal authority	At the beginning or when formal leaders see the need
Pragmatic	Leadership roles were negotiated.	Formal authority negotiated or the negotiation happened informally by the group.	At the beginning and during the work.
Strategic	New people, with skills, knowledge, and/or access to resources were brought in.	Formal authority.	At the beginning or when there is a need.

Table 1 continued

<b>Author and Process/Typology Framework</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Who Distributes Leadership</b>	<b>When</b>
<b>MacBeath et al. (2004)</b> <i>Incremental</i>	Individuals acquire leadership responsibilities progressively through experience.	The formal authority assigned the initial leadership authority or it was acquired through informal authority within a group.	When readiness benchmarks were met.
<i>Opportunistic</i>	Additional responsibilities were taken ad hoc by the individual(s) with consent from formal authority or the group.	Individual (s) volunteer.	When an individual saw a need.
<i>Cultural</i>	The organization or group members assumed leadership functions and shared them.	Individuals within the group take turns or assume leadership when needed.	When the group determines or as needed per the custom.
<b>Spillane (2006)</b> <i>Collaborated</i>	Two or more individuals worked together in time and place.	Within the group or dyad.	Beginning or elsewhere in the work process.
<i>Collective</i>	Where two or more individuals worked separately but interdependently.	Formal authority or the group.	Beginning or elsewhere in the work process.
<i>Coordinated</i>	Where two or more individuals worked in sequence.	Formal authority or group.	At the beginning of a work process or when needed.

Note: DL = distributed leadership

Adapted from “Distributed leadership in organizations: A review of theory and research” by R. Bolden, 2011, *International Journal of Management Review*, 13, p. 258. Copyright 2011 by R. Bolden. Adapted with permission.

The various authors emphasized different facets of distributed leadership. Gronn (2000) examined the process of distributed leadership emerging from a group to the whole organization. Leithwood et al. (2007) provided two views of distributed leadership either planned or

unplanned. McBeath et al. (2004) offered several ways that distributed leadership could emerge and Spillane (2006) viewed how distributed leadership was practiced.

***Gronn's contextual interdependence and conjoint agency conceptions.***

Gibb (1954, as cited in Thorpe et al., 2011), was crucial to Gronn's distributed leadership conception. Gibb argued that "leadership is probably best conceived as a group quality" (p. 242). Gronn (2000) believed that there was interdependence between the system's structures where the leadership actions took place. This interdependency was produced through a school's cultural context including how things were done, actions over time, and individual responses within the school's culture. "Conjoint agency" (p. 325) was another distributed leadership feature that occurred when situations changed and the leadership tasks were passed from one person to another.

People exchanged leadership actions and roles without planning but intuitively determined when a need for leadership arose (Gronn, 2000). In this study, teachers who worked together on curriculum and instruction shared leadership tasks back and forth as the work progressed.

Gronn additionally asserted (2000) that researchers needed to examine distributed leadership by analyzing the actions of the participants; when, where, wherein, and within what particular context. highlighting the organization's structure including individual perspectives. When schools were first adopting state learning standards there was leadership distribution within the schools' organizational structures among and between teachers and administrators. The school or district's normative operating procedures determined the routines that would be used by and for the learning standards teams. These routines included the allocations for time and other resources.



***Leithwood et al.'s concept of planned distributed leadership.***

Leithwood et al. (2007) applied the distributed leadership concept through either formally anticipating leadership by agreement or its unplanned emergence. Unplanned leadership may also develop into uncoordinated leadership that conflicts with the organization's tasks or goals--*spontaneously misaligned*. Outright rejection of either planned or unplanned leadership that resulted in negative independent leadership action was anarchy and framed as *anarchic misalignment*.

***MacBeath et al.'s taxonomy of distributed leadership.***

MacBeath et al. (2004) produced a taxonomy of how leadership distribution occurred during a time when hierarchical decisions for leadership were pre-eminent. According to the authors, leadership was distributed formally *pragmatically* through necessary actions, *strategically* through planned distribution, and *incrementally* as individuals gained more experience. Teachers themselves assumed leadership *opportunistically* or *culturally* as part of a school's normative operations.

***Spillane frames distributed leadership as interactions.***

Spillane's (2006) research focused on how distributed leadership was practiced when there were many interactions during the organization's work process. These distributed interactions were framed as collaborated, collective, and/or coordinated. *Collaborated* interactions happened at a certain time and place. *Collective* actions were interdependent but happened separately. *Coordinated* actions happened in sequence. For all of these processes, multiple leaders were engaged.

The many conceptions of distributed leadership led educational leadership researcher Harris (2008) to state that distributive leadership was used as a "catch-all" (p. 33) She succinctly

viewed distributed leadership as “the interactions between” (p. 12) the many leaders in any organization. Thorpe et al. (2011) attempted to make distributed leadership’s understanding clearer by describing it as a process that was dynamic with a focus on leadership actions and interactions through varying arrangements rather than focusing on the leaders.

### **Distributed Leadership School Models**

All of the various conceptions are potentially helpful in analyzing informal teacher leadership within schools. Smylie et al. (2002) presented three distributed leadership school models utilizing those conceptions. Heller and Firestone (1995) conceived the first model by examining leadership functions performed by individuals. Many functions were performed most successfully by teams where the individuals had different assigned roles as teachers, administrators, central office staff, and external consultants. The authors made the case that leadership, for routine work, could be distributed to different people. Sometimes the leadership functions were cooperatively coordinated even when the school’s administrators had no conversation with others or provided no direction. Notably, teachers provided this coordination function for routines.

Ogawa and Bossert (1995) developed the second school model that portrayed leadership as an organizational attribute. The social interactions of individuals, sometimes without specific leadership titles or roles, provided leadership. These interactions were created through a network of individuals, which resulted in organizational leadership.

Smylie et al. (2002) contended that the third model, advanced by Spillane et al.(2004), combined the first two models. This third model stressed that leadership was distributed through actions within the work across the organization; it was stretched across the organization. With

social interaction, various actors assumed similar or different leadership actions in various situations. These activities afforded leadership distribution across the school.

Distributed leadership came from group action. Leadership was distributed by formal authority, e.g., school principals (Spillane, 2006) and/or informally by teachers (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015; Min et al., 2016) and others dependent upon the work. In this current study, leadership was developed within a particular school context with influence from that context (Leithwood, 1994).

***Distributed leadership's important to informal teacher leadership.***

Leithwood et al. (2004) and Harris (2005) suggested that teacher leadership fits within distributed leadership's fundamental tenets of flexibility, lateral not hierarchical, and interactive. Both formal and informal teacher leadership were distributed but unlike informal teacher leadership, formal teacher leadership was part of the administrative hierarchy distributed by formal authority (Danielson, 2006).

Another understanding of distributing leadership was that it could occur within groups, teams, or partnerships when teacher leaders emerged informally as the work evolved. The situation of the work and the context of the school precipitated the type of teacher leadership, whether it was formal or informal.

***Capital and its relationship to distributed leadership.***

Spillane et al. (2003) found that teachers recognized and authorized teachers' leadership depending upon different forms of "capital" (p. 1-2).

- Human capital included an individual's skills, knowledge, and expertise.
- Cultural capital developed from a personality of caring.

- Social capital came from connected networks and groups that supported trusting relationships.
- Economic capital provided material resources.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) explained that capital adds to one's worth; therefore, it is part of one's influence as a leader. Elementary teachers in a Spillane et al. (2003) study emphasized human, cultural, and social capital, which provided leadership authority to teachers' peers.

Capital's importance also depended upon a teacher's content area; different teachers were leaders in different subject areas. Other studies affirmed this teacher leadership expertise content area connection (Baecher, 2012; Manno & Firestone, 2008) while others did not (Friedman, 2011). The expertise connections played a part in this study with the librarians who had expertise integrating technology into the curriculum and the content area English language arts (ELA) teachers' trusting relationship dependent upon instructional expertise.

***Distributed leadership depends on many factors.***

Either formally or informally, some distributed leadership actions overlapped, happened in sequence, or developed simultaneously (Bolden, 2011). Spillane (2006) contended that leadership was distributed by intent, when there was a dilemma, or by happenstance, without thought. His conceptions assigned administrators to effect distributed leadership, which involved the school's hierarchical structure. However, in later research Spillane et al. (2008) recognized teachers assuming leadership.

Fasso et al. (2016) provided another view of distributed leadership that focused on curriculum change. Their approach also combined interactions within the work, how it was socially distributed, and the leadership that originated from the task itself. Fasso et al. (2006)

contended that while Spillane et al.'s (2004) distributed leadership design presented a descriptive framework that contained important features, it left out critical elements.

Their first contention was that while distributed leadership research has primarily focused on individual(s) and/or the leadership situation for analysis, they argued that the structural context should be the unit of analysis. The structural context presented a complex supporting connection between the people and the frame in which they acted. One should not ignore the context when teacher leadership was analyzed from a distributed leadership perspective. This was similar to Gronn's (2000) concern about context.

While Fasso et al. (2016) charged that Spillane's distributed leadership conception focused primarily on formal leaders having only followers, Spillane and Diamond's (2007) proposition was that leadership shifts between leaders and followers with some of the leaders being teachers, who were not assigned as formal leaders and in later research Spillane et al. (2008, p. 202) discussed informal leaders.

Spillane et al.'s (2004) research primarily used observations from the formal leaders who distributed leadership rather than the individuals who had experienced distributed leadership. Not enough attention was given to curriculum change as a routine for distributed leadership, which was especially important to teachers because leadership distribution happens among teachers when the focus was the curriculum.

Spillane et al. (2004) left out the micropolitical part of social interactions for leadership distribution. The actions that were portrayed did not consider the political or power considerations within interactions, e. g. hierarchical power.

Fasso et al. (2016) proposed a distributed leadership framework that built on Spillane's framework but considered the elements that he had overlooked. The adjusted framework was

intricate, with intersecting ideas that promoted contextual identification, socially distributed leadership within specific situations, and how other influences intervened. They also urged researchers to emphasize the curriculum itself, its supportive structures, individuals' roles, and actions related to their values, how their behavior correlated with their dispositions, and how the curriculum development attended to a situation's micropolitics. In this current study, all of Fasso et al.'s elements are addressed.

***Distributed leadership challenges schools' power differential.***

Distributed leadership research explored the dynamics of the interactions between those who engaged in leadership tasks and hold formal positions and those who did not. There were implications for the formal leaders with "shifts in power, authority, and control" (Harris, 2013, p. 551) that considered micropolitics. Informal leaders relied on their authority from others whom they influence through relationships that may not be formally sanctioned; therefore, their leadership was not distributed formally. However, Whitaker (1995) urged that principals (the formal leaders) recognize the informal leaders (the teachers) and distribute managerial leadership tasks to benefit the schools.

de Jong et al. examined (2021) distributed leadership in 14 Dutch school teams. School principals were named the formal leaders and teachers, were the informal leaders.

The distributed leadership team interactions used were collective, dynamic, and dyadic or relational. *Collective* meant how often the team members were interacting, more team interactions meant higher team cohesiveness. *Dynamic* meant how and on whom team activities centered. If these interactions were centered around only one or two individuals, leadership was not distributed widely within the team. *Dyadic* measured reciprocal interactions and many reciprocal interactions indicated more distributed leadership (de Jong et al., 2021, p. 3).

The research developed ways of identifying the real team leaders be they formal or informal, which indicated how leadership was shaped within the teams. The findings indicated that teachers within the teams, both the coach-teachers and the other teachers, were more often the central team leaders rather than the formal leader—the principal. The researchers encouraged more research using social networks for identifying informal teacher leaders. For this current study, I attempted to ascertain teacher leaders by social networks asking teachers whom they would go to for instructional help. It produced no nominations.

***Distributed leadership and student learning.***

Halverson and Kelley (2017) asserted that distributed leadership was essential for certain leadership practices that produced higher levels of student learning. To that end, they developed the Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning® (CALL) survey to map a school's leadership along certain dimensions or domains that affected student learning so that actions could be taken to enhance distributed leadership. This assessment recognized that school leadership was held by many; therefore, the results of a school's assessment affirmed this concept rather than the assessment concentrating on one individual. They drew on school leadership research that focused on student learning. Table 2 highlights this CALL® research base.

**Table 2***Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning (CALL®) Elements and Sources for Distributed Leadership*

<b>Base of Research</b>	<b>Elements</b>	<b>Research</b>
<b>Base 1</b> <i>Elements with formal and informal authority across the school</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Shape a vision of academic success</li> <li>* Create a hospitable climate</li> <li>* Cultivate leadership in others</li> <li>* Improve instruction</li> <li>* Manage people, data, and processes</li> </ul>	Hallinger & Heck (1998) highlighted school leadership's influence on student learning. Wallace Foundation's (2011) meta-analysis on school principals' leadership, had a positive relationship with student learning
<b>Base 2</b> <i>School's core components and key processes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Exacting standards for student learning</li> <li>* Rigorous curriculum</li> <li>* Quality instruction</li> <li>* Culture of learning and professional behavior</li> <li>* Connection to external communities</li> <li>* Performance accountability</li> </ul>	Porter, et al. (2008) Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED)
<b>Base 3</b> <i>School principals' practices that are correlated with positive student outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Challenge the status quo as change agents</li> <li>* Establish and promote cultures of achievement</li> <li>* Implement student and school-building discipline to decrease distractions</li> <li>* Use teachers' professional influence</li> <li>* Participate in curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices</li> <li>* Participate directly in professional learning to share strategies and resources</li> <li>* Provide feedback for monitoring and evaluation of teaching and instructional practice</li> <li>* Create school practice routines</li> <li>* Provide time, money, supplies, and people resources.</li> </ul>	Marzano et al.(2005) meta-analysis of school principals' practices connected school leaders' actions to student learning.
<b>Base 4</b> <i>Essential support for improvements, distributed throughout the school</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Inclusive and strategic school leadership focused on instruction</li> <li>* Strong parent-community ties</li> <li>* Faculty and staff beliefs and values to change professional learning quality</li> <li>* Faculty and staff beliefs and values to change collaborative quality capacity</li> <li>* Safe student-centered learning climate</li> <li>* Curriculum and learning tools aligned to student outcomes.</li> </ul>	Byrk et al. (2010) organizational structures and practices that are connected to student outcomes



*Note.* From Mapping school leadership: Research base and domains, by R. Halverson & C. Kelley, 2017, *Mapping leadership: The tasks that matter for improving teaching and learning in schools*, Chapter 2, pp. 25-33. Jossey-Bass.

The CALL® survey authors translated this supporting research into major domains and sub-domains of leadership within their distributed leadership framework. (Halverson & Kelley, 2017). Their survey was validated by subsequent research on over two hundred U.S. schools (Blitz et al., 2014). Teacher leadership existed within these domains dependent upon the school's contextual culture. The subdomains typified specific actions related to the domain. A school was then assessed on their attainment level for that action compared to like schools: rural, town, suburban, and urban and poverty levels: low, medium, high, or extreme based on student school lunch eligibility. Table 3 lists the CALL® domains and subdomains.

**Table 3***Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning (CALL®) Domains and Subdomains*

<b>Domains</b>	<b>Subdomains</b>
1. <i>Focus on Learning</i>	1.1 Maintains a school-wide focus on learning 1.2 Recognizes formal leaders as instructional leaders 1.3 Designs an integrated learning plan through collaboration 1.4 Provides appropriate services for students who traditionally struggle
2. <i>Monitoring Teaching and Learning</i>	2.1 Formative evaluation of student learning 2.2 Summative evaluation of student learning 2.3 Formative evaluation of teaching 2.4 Summative evaluation of teaching
3. <i>Building Professional Community</i>	3.1 Collaborative focus on teaching and learning problems 3.2 Professional learning supports 3.3 Socially distributed leadership 3.4 Coaching and mentoring
4. <i>Acquiring and Allocating Resources</i>	4.1 Supportive personnel practices 4.2 Structures, maintains time 4.3 School resources focus on student learning 4.4 Integrates external expertise into the instructional program 4.5 Coordinates, and supervises relations with families and external communities
5. <i>Establishing a Safe and Effective Learning Environment</i>	5.1 Clear, consistent, enforced expectations for student behaviors 5.2 Clean, safe learning environment 5.3 Support services for students who traditionally struggle

*Note.* From Mapping school leadership: Research base and domains, by R. Halverson & C.

Kelley, 2017, *Mapping leadership: The tasks that matter for improving teaching and learning in schools*, Chapter 2, pp. 29-36. Jossey-Bass.

The CALL® data analysis used a computer algorithm and provided an assessment comparing respondents' schools to similar schools. The current study applied the CALL® survey as one data source to provide a general description of a school's leadership. I chose the CALL® survey for its descriptive potential in this study.

### **Teacher Leadership**

*A new view of school leadership with teacher leadership.*

In 1997, Crowther et al. (2002) developed their teacher leadership research toward a new theoretical conception of school leadership that embraced teacher leadership. One of their premises was that thus far educational leadership was based on “prescribed authority” (p. 23) with its power to control. They argued that the processes of control that worked for administrative leadership have not worked for teacher leadership and therefore, new thinking was needed where teachers were central to educational leadership.

Crowther et al (2002) asserted that teachers and administrative leaders distributed authority and responsibility by “participation, partnership, and service” (p. 27). Management issues that administrators deal with should be shared with teachers including changing the school’s culture to a learning organization (Senge, 2000) as a living organism (Nirenberg, 1993; Wheatley, 2006).

To support their contention, Crowther et al.(2002) examined teacher leadership in high-poverty Australian schools and concluded that these teachers became identified as leaders who took action for the whole school, students, and school staff. Because of their influence on others for change, they were recognized as having authority that enhanced the schools’ community and climate to advance learning. The researchers provided a summary of observations on teacher leaders:

- Leadership actions were visible.
- Gained their authority through their influence.
- Essential for school reform
- Found in different school contexts.
- Known for their actions.

- Effective for students and schools.
- Must be developed and cultivated

These observations were formative in recognizing teacher leaders and created a conceptual base for later research.

***Influencing and changing the larger educational leadership structure.***

In their search for a new paradigm of teachers and teaching, Crowther et al. (2002) provided additional clues for observing teacher leaders. These clues were developed from Crowther's (1996) earlier research using four criteria:

1. Evidence of social justice contributions to the school or school community.
2. High community esteem especially from economically poor community members.
3. Influence in school decision-making.
4. A high level of school-based responsibility.

From the research findings, the authors developed a teacher leadership definition -“ Teacher leadership facilitates principled action to achieve whole-school success. It applies the distinctive power of teaching to shape meaning for children, youth, and adults. And it contributes to long-term, enhanced quality of community life.” (p. 10).

Additionally, the researchers developed a teacher leaders' convictions framework.

Teacher leaders:

- Convey beliefs about a better world.
- Strive for authenticity in their teaching, learning, and assessment practices.
- Facilitate communities of learning through organization-wide processes.
- Confront barriers produced by the school's culture and structures.
- Translate ideas into sustainable systems of action.

- Nurture a culture of success. (Crowther et al., 2002, p. 4-5)

Teacher leaders gained a great deal of authority from their peers and the community members who realized that the teacher leaders' change actions would benefit the whole community.

Although Wenner and Campbell (2016) in their review reported that they found no teacher leadership studies focused on social justice, these researchers Crowther et al. (2002) understood social justice to be the key motivating factor for teacher leadership.

***Additional findings on principals' and teacher leaders' patterns.***

Crowther et al.'s (2002) continued research validated the teacher leaders' framework. The teacher and administrator participants informed the analysis that resulted in behavioral patterns employed to produce a list of challenges for principals who chose to nurture teacher leadership.

The principals' teacher leadership development challenges were that principals must:

- Communicate and demonstrate a sense of purpose and supporting actions.
- Encourage and include others' views and desires in actions taken.
- Ask "difficult to answer" questions (p. 55) of themselves and the teachers.
- Provide individuals' originality with a variety of opportunities.
- Discern when to let others lead.
- Allow for positive possibilities from challenging circumstances.
- Build a "culture of success" (p. 62) by recognizing accomplishments.

The researchers utilized the four component factors of Goleman's Emotional Intelligence to portray an additional framework of teacher leaders' actions (Crowther et al., 2002) presented in Table 4.

**Table 4***Teacher Leaders' Action Framework*

<b>Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Factors</b>			
<b><i>Self-Awareness</i></b>	<b><i>Social Awareness</i></b>	<b><i>Social Skills</i></b>	<b><i>Self-Management</i></b>
*Contribute to an image of teachers as professionals who make a difference. *Seek a deeper understanding of tacit teaching and learning processes. *Value teaching as a key profession in shaping meaningful systems. *Synthesize innovative ideas from colleagues' dialogue and activities.	*Approach professional learning as consciousness-raising about complex issues. *Stand up for children, especially marginalized or disadvantaged individuals or groups. *Create a sense of community identity and pride.	*Encourage a shared schoolwide approach to teaching, learning, and assessment. *Test the boundaries rather than accepting the status quo. *Act on opportunities for others to gain success and recognition.	*Demonstrate tolerance and fairness in demanding situations. *Manage time and pressure issues through priority setting. *Adopt a "no blame" attitude when things go wrong.

*Note.* Adapted from *Developing teacher leaders: How teacher leadership enhances school success*, by F. Crowther et al., Corwin Press, Inc., 2002, p. 30. Copyright by Corwin Press, Inc. Authorized for adaption with book purchase.

The teacher leaders' actions, portrayed through Goleman's (1995) typology of emotional intelligence, were without concern for the school administrators' direction; however, the teacher leaders understood that they had to have a relationship with their school principal for support (Crowther, 1996). These influential studies by Crowther and Crowther et al. (2002) did not define informal teacher leadership directly but they studied teachers without formal authority who advocated for change to improve their schools and communities.

***Parallel leadership for teacher leadership***

In the next research phase, nine schools were recognized for increased literacy and mathematics student achievement, which resulted from school-based innovations. The

researchers studied the leadership dynamics of the participants' roles in school improvement. These dynamics assumed a parallel leadership process of teacher leaders with school administrators; a process of "collective action to build capacity" (Crowther et al., 2002, p. 38). In parallel leadership, school principals had primary responsibility for strategic leadership such as creating a school's vision, aligning the resources for that vision, and networking for that vision to become real. Teachers' leadership was directed primarily to instruction.

Parallel leadership was assumed to provide a view of teacher leadership that was non-confrontational with principals' roles separating the leadership functions. However, this viewpoint appeared to conflict with the researchers' stated disposition for a new conception of educational leadership with teachers at the heart.

The Australian outcomes research tested in Michigan affirmed this. Teacher leadership was authentic but distinctive from other forms of leadership grounded in shared leadership with teachers as central leaders. It was found in all types of teachers within different school contexts and must be supported under four conditions:

1. Public and professional acceptance of teacher leadership work recognized, celebrated, "studied, and documented" (p. 33).
2. Active encouragement and support by principals and other school administrators.
3. More teachers' development related to school change and leadership skills.
4. Nurtured teacher leadership to produce positive school outcomes through "professional learning, schoolwide pedagogy, and culture building" (p. 35)

### ***Promise and perils of teacher leadership.***

From the Crowther et al. (2002) summary, I compiled "promise and perils" of teacher leadership as it was expected to evolve in the years ahead.

#### Teacher Leadership Promise:

- Teacher leadership frameworks capture the essence of teacher leadership—teachers trying out new ideas to benefit student learning by sharing and collaborating with others for positive change.
- Teacher leaders' dispositions are embedded in Goleman's (1995) typology which has the potential as a "model for excellence" (p. 142).
- Teacher leadership may bring together the school and community for a "shared vision" of student learning (p. 140).
- Teacher leadership takes place in different situations such as mentoring novice teachers.
- Additional situations need exploration for teacher leadership opportunities.
- A student leadership conception could evolve from teacher leadership.
- Parallel leadership could be less threatening to school administrators but needs to be more fully explained.

#### Teacher Leadership Perils:

- Teacher leadership was just one of the roles that teachers could play.
- The second framework was based on liberal democratic ideals that could be the antithesis of values for certain communities.
- The current push for standardization could thwart nurturing teacher leadership that has innovation as its underpinning.
- Without clarity on teacher leadership roles, principals and teacher leaders could come into conflict.
- Trying something new takes time and is difficult.
- Principals may feel threatened by teacher leaders.



- Parent demands could restrict teacher leadership.
- There was a lack of forums or networks to exchange teacher leadership ideas.
- Pre-service training in teaching and leadership presented barriers and lacked new, relevant approaches to shared leadership.
- Negative teachers, high-stakes student assessments, and poor-performing schools were barriers to overcome.
- Schools that are doing well may not want to change (Crowther et al., 2002).

These promises and perils that Crowther et al. elicited were not isolated from other research. Others were also developing ideas about leadership and its distribution across an organization for individuals with formal leadership assignments. Two years later, York-Barr and Duke (2004) in their teacher leadership research review noted that distributed leadership provided teacher leadership opportunities.

Harris (2013) was a proponent of carefully defined distributed leadership and teacher leadership; with the understanding that there are several “sources of influence” (p. 545) for distributed leadership within a school that included teacher leadership both formal and informal. She, like Crowther et al. (2002), understood the need for a different conceptualization of educational leadership; one that was based on trusting mutual interrelationships to create more positive outcomes. Within the Crowther et al. research was a call for distributed leadership without naming it as such.

### ***Different conceptions of teacher leadership***

Like leadership itself, the teacher leadership phenomenon has had different conceptions depending upon contexts that have various histories, agreements, understandings, and relationships. Teacher leadership always existed in schools (Crowther et al. 2002; Weise &

Murphy, 1995). History demonstrated that formally recognizing teachers leading has changed throughout time (Silva et al., 2000). There have been waves of teacher leadership recognition (Crowther et al., 2002; Fullan, 1994; Wasley, 1991; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

1. This first wave focused on school efficiency when teacher leaders were formally assigned and named, e.g., department heads.
2. The second wave concentrated on employing teacher knowledge with formal assignments, e.g., curriculum leaders, professional learning providers, and mentors for novice teachers.
3. The third wave focused on processes supporting collaboration outside the classroom to change schools' cultures for reform. Formal, semi-formal, and informal teacher leadership with teams and groups e.g., professional learning communities, and lesson study.

These three teacher leadership waves were acknowledged in York-Barr and Duke's (2004) review of teacher leadership literature, which Wenner and Campbell (2017) referred to as the "seminal" (p. 4) teacher leadership review. York-Barr and Duke's (2004) review is compared with three additional contemporary reviews, Wenner and Campbell (2017), Nguyen et al. (2019), and Schott et al. (2020) in Appendix 1.

These reviews together provided salient points about teacher leadership, some of which were highlighted in the Crowther et al. (2002) research. In each review, the authors argued that teacher leadership was essential for educational reform and change because teachers are close to the real action of what schools do, teaching and learning. There was agreement that a standard teacher leadership definition was problematic because there were different configurations depending upon a school's context, but there was agreement that teacher leaders had influential

roles. Schott et al. proposed (2020) that researchers should just adopt York-Barr and Duke's (2004) teacher leadership definition because it was elegant and broad enough to advance the research knowledge base without becoming entangled in complicated process definitions.

Even with these agreements within the reviews, the issue remained about teacher leadership definitions that denigrated the comparability between the reviews. Additionally, the items selected for review, e.g., peer-reviewed or not, how peer-review was defined (dissertations were included in one review), and what databases were employed for the selection of items were not comparable.

These reviews of the teacher leadership phenomena still exposed gaps in teacher leadership studies, primarily in informal teacher leadership within various contexts and content areas. Hence, this current study focuses on informal teacher leadership within stand-alone middle schools experiencing literacy curriculum change.

### ***Definitions of teacher leadership***

In New York State with its 731 school districts, and 4,411 public schools including 360 public charter schools (New York State Education Department, 2020a), the State Board of Regents have been encouraged to define teacher leadership and to provide support for its formal establishment. However, advocates for teacher leadership report that the State Education Department resisted this option when provided opportunities to build teacher leadership into the state's system for certifying teachers (NYSUT, Sullivan, Personal communication, 2017).

New York State's Education Professional Standards and Practices Board for Teaching, a key advocate for teacher leadership, defined formal teacher leaders as "those teachers selected or appointed or intentionally designated and named by the organization's formal authority or by others to a named role with functions outside the classroom" (2014, p. 1).

This definition encouraged not just a specific role but a named role. It allowed for formal teacher leaders with different roles: instructional coach, master teacher, lead teacher, content area department chairpersons, and teacher leader within specific locally negotiated contracts. The rationale for these designations was first that the teacher leaders were teachers, not administrators, and that school leadership was not confined to administrators. Also, assumed was a pay differential, for those who were primarily classroom teachers, but because of added responsibilities and connected accountability should receive increased compensation. This responded to concerns that teacher leaders were not overwhelmed with responsibilities beyond the classroom, which discouraged teachers from participating in leadership.

***Expanding teacher leadership to semi-formal teacher leaders.***

Within the research, formal teacher leadership had additional nuances such as a “hybrid” teacher leader, a formal teacher leader who maintained a classroom assignment in addition to teacher leadership responsibilities (Margolis & Huggins, 2012). Less discussed in the research were those professionals such as school librarians, school counselors, particular special educators, and other educational specialists whose numbers in these roles have increased with the implementation of state instructional standards (Domina et al., 2015). These professionals may be assigned to teach with expertise in content or instructional pedagogies, e.g., Academic Intervention Specialists (AIS) teachers. Integrated within their teaching assignment, in their job structure, were leadership responsibilities such as professional development planning and co-instruction. For the current study, these teachers have been identified as semi-formal teacher leaders.

Also, identified in this current study was the second category of semi-formal teacher leaders, those who worked within structures that were created and developed by the school or

district administrators but whose first role was as a classroom teacher and who then had a semi-formal teacher leadership role. For example, teacher members of curriculum committees, comprehensive district educational planning committees, site-based planning committees, and professional development committees were semi-formal teacher leaders. There were other assignments such as those who were technology and content area liaisons to the central office or to the Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCE). The third category of semi-formal teacher leaders were those teachers who were recognized by their peers for leadership positions in professional organizations and teachers' unions or teachers who form informal groups to discuss instruction. This third category of semi-formal teacher leaders was not examined.

The recognition of semi-formal teacher leadership in the research has been meager or not named as such. Other researchers who have addressed this topic included hybrid-teacher leaders within this semi-formal designation, but they were actually formal teacher leaders (Levenson, 2014, Margolis, 2020).

Levenson (2014) studied teacher leaders in different types of secondary schools: a small-town rural school, a large, suburban school, a small urban charter school, and a small alternative middle school in three states. The researcher classified teacher leadership into three categories: instructional, institutional, and policy/networks and produced a continuum of instructional teacher leadership suggesting that teachers proceed from informal teacher leader to semi-formal teacher leader to formal teacher leader. However, this continuum does not necessarily apply in various school contexts nor was there clarity about the role definitions.

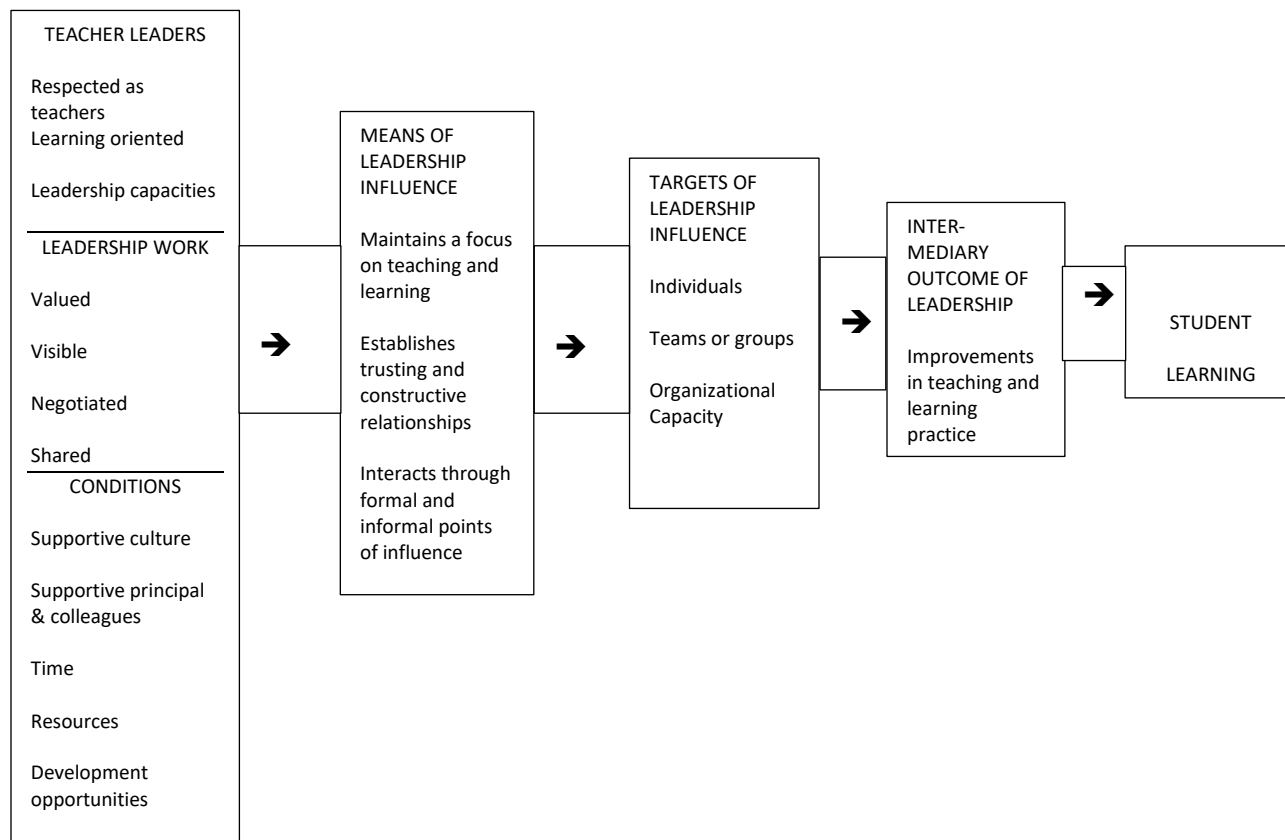
Margolis (2020) made another case for semi-formal teacher leadership positioned between informal teacher leadership that relied on relational influence and formal teacher leadership that relied on a hierarchical designation. He understood teacher leadership within the

third wave that is aimed at changing school cultures. Margolis asserted that semi-formal teacher leadership was a new phenomenon explained by complexity theory. His assumption was that informal teacher leader supporters chose to work against hierarchical systems whereas other research indicates that all types of teacher leadership, informal, semi-formal, and formal, have worked to benefit schools with democratic processes.

He argued that informal teacher leadership was unsustainable because teacher leadership should have a place within the hierarchical systems for power because schools are organizations that have power over teachers and informal teacher leadership gets “swallowed up by the existing power structures” (Margolis, 2020, p. 402). However, informal leadership has existed in organizations as long as they were populated by people and this type of leadership has been necessary for maintaining the organizations. He claimed that teacher leadership was better assigned to formal and semi-formal positions but his teacher leader research examples were primarily those with formal hybrid positions.

***Impact of teacher leadership.***

York-Barr and Duke (2004) argued that teacher leadership studies should focus on the impact of teacher leadership at the classroom level because doing so would show student effects faster. They proposed a conceptual framework for teacher leadership outlined in Figure 1.

**Figure 1***Teacher Leadership for Student Learning: A Conceptual Framework*

*Note.* Reproduced from What do we know about teacher leadership: Findings from two decades of scholarship, by J. York-Barr & K. Duke, 2004, *Review of Educational Research*, 74(3), p. 289. Copyright 2004 by the American Educational Research Association; reproduced with general permission from the publisher.

Teacher leadership's research on student learning impact has shown that benefits to students from teacher leadership were primarily indirect similar to research on other educational leaders. The teacher leadership impact has been through teachers expanding their own thinking, learning in their classrooms, and influencing others' instruction by modeling new instructional methods that then benefit a wider group of students. Student learning has been defined narrowly as achievement on once-a-year tests. Some have called for an expanded definition of student

learning (Donohoo et al., 2013; Marzano, 2003; Margolis, 2020), while others have called for more research concerning direct impact (Nguyen et al., 2019; Wenner & Campbell, 2017)

Schott et al.'s (2020) review included promising research on direct student effects from teacher leadership. The identified studies that demonstrated a direct effect on student achievement were Avsec (2016), Sebastian et al. (2017), Liu et al. (2018), and Cheung et al. (2019). All of these studies examined the impact of teacher leadership on students differently.

The Avsec (2016) study resulted in Slovenian middle school students' engagement in inquiry-based learning (IBL) and their development of technological literacy was impacted significantly by teachers' "laissez-faire" leadership style (p. 7). Additional factors for students' success included teachers who were actively engaged in IBL and who creatively implemented the structured IBL module.

Sebastian et al.'s (2017) study connected school principals' leadership with teachers' leadership and high school students learning in a large urban school. This study focused principal's influence on student learning and found that only the principal's "direct relationship with learning climate" (p. 477) led to increased student learning. This complex quantitative study connected teacher leadership to principal leadership with an indirect connection to student learning. Teacher leadership was a mediating factor and was significant for the professional learning community, professional development, learning climate, and parent-community ties. The researchers' teacher leadership measures demonstrated that teacher leadership was needed to address administrative issues that impacted student growth beyond the school climate.

Liu, P. et al. (2018) examined Chinese primary schools to determine in what ways teachers exhibited leadership that improved student learning. While the Sebastian et al. (2017) study was situated in a United States context, this study was in the Chinese educational context



of class teachers. Class teachers are like homeroom teachers but remain with their student cadres throughout each of the varying levels of a student's education: pre-primary, primary, jr. middle school, and sr. middle or high school (InterNations, 2022). Students had a different class teacher at each level. These teachers were identified as formal teacher leaders who were considered part of the management hierarchy in Chinese schools along with the principals and their influence within the primary schools had a direct impact on students' primary school success.

Cheung et al. (2018) studied leadership practices affecting pre-primary student learning in Hong Kong where educational organizations were different from mainland China. Teacher leadership was examined with leadership dimensions attributed to Leithwood (1994): curriculum design and development, developing people, building a collaborative and reflective culture, and improving teaching effectiveness. Teachers who exhibited these leadership practices demonstrated that their young students were successful rather than those who did not.

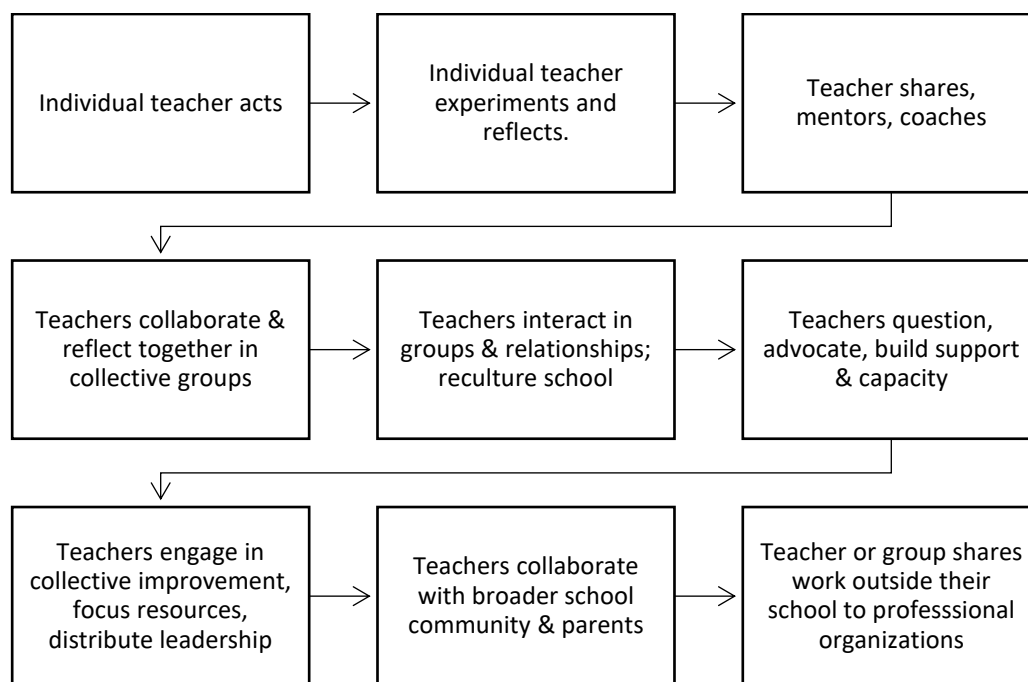
In the four studies that Schott et al. (2020) reported teacher leadership having direct student effects, context played a role. The Sebastian et al. (2017) study was the only cited study in the United States. The authors utilized the Bryk et al. (2010) Essential Supports Framework, to connect the organizational processes to student learning: professional capacity of staff (including professional development and collaboration quality), school learning climate, parent-community ties, and effective classroom instruction (Sebastian et al., 2017, p. 467)

### ***Structures and opportunities for teacher leadership***

According to York-Barr and Duke (2004), up to the time of their review, there were few deliberate efforts to create opportunities for formal teacher leadership. Informal teacher leadership had always existed. The researchers also found that although specific structures had increased teacher leadership opportunities they did not guarantee success. For these structures to

support teacher leadership, there were preconditions: the principal held definite dispositions to share or distribute leadership or was at least supportive of teacher leadership and the school culture (actions, and norms) accepted teacher leadership with expectations that teachers provided leadership outside their classrooms.

Fairman and Mackenzie (2012) made use of York-Barr and Duke's framework in their model of teacher leadership development. They argued that teacher leadership developed on teachers' strengths alone without administrators' initiation or distribution. Their research focused on groups of teachers who initiated changes in teaching for student learning when they collectively were committed to change and then demonstrated leadership. Fairman and Mackenzie's model in Figure 2 provided this developmental path for teachers' influence.

**Figure 2***Teacher Leadership Action for Learning*

*Note.* Adapted from “Spheres of teacher leadership” by J. C. Fairman & S. V. Mackenzie, 2012, *Professional Development in Education*, 38(2), p. 251. Copyright 2012 by Taylor & Francis Ltd. on behalf of the International Professional Development Association (IPDA). Adapted with permission.

From their teacher leader case studies, Fairman and Mackenzie (2015) found that teachers did not see their efforts as leadership but simply as teachers’ work: work that is supposed to improve student learning. The researchers suggested that the teachers were reluctant to call themselves leaders because teachers in traditional hierarchical systems supposed that leadership meant being or becoming an administrator. These teachers stayed in their classrooms and focused on teaching but they collaborated with their peers outside their classrooms to make instructional changes and saw this as essential for increasing student success. Even when larger external reform efforts provided for formal teacher career ladders rather than administrative school ladders, many

teachers rejected the teacher ladder approach because to them it meant leaving the classroom where professionally they build their identity and expertise (Harris, 2013; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Brosky (2011) took another view of teacher leadership influence through micropolitics and teacher leaders' political influence. Since York-Barr and Duke's (2004) review, formal teacher leadership programs, certifications, and endorsements have been developed nationwide. In Brosky's research of teachers in a development program who were working toward teacher leadership certification endorsements, the teachers indicated that they often used two methods for influencing others: "rationality" (p. 101) using reasonable claims with facts, and "ingratiation" (p.101) complimenting or taking action to get someone in a good mood before presenting a proposal. Brosky used Bacharach and Mundell's (1993) definition of influence as getting someone to do what you wanted them to. Brosky determined that these novice teacher leaders used alliance-building toward "coalitions" (Brosky, 2011, p. 102) as their primary method of influence appealing to more people beyond the group who had developed an instructional innovation.

### **Teacher Leadership and Collaboration**

For individuals to work toward a common goal such as effective student learning requires them to work with others. Collaboration has been cited in many teacher leadership studies for teacher leadership initiation, support, and success (Nguyen et al., 2019; Schott et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Montiel-Overall (2005) deemed collaboration as a fuzzy construct and Kelchtermans (2006), in his research on teachers' workplace conditions, found the term "far from being unequivocal" (p. 220) and often confused with collegiality. To distinguish between the two terms, he defined collaboration as a description

of action—teachers doing things together (p. 220), and collegiality as a quality of the teachers' relationships (p. 221).

In an extensive review of teachers' collaboration, Vangrieken et al. (2015) found that collaboration's meaning ranged on a continuum from a collection of individuals getting together informally to a team of people who worked together on a joint problem or project. This current study frames collaboration as a partnership or group of individuals who have worked together for a common goal that advantaged each person's strengths and produced something stronger (Hord, 1986; Kanter, 1996).

The more an organization developed collaborative leadership, the more the individuals in groups saw this as the norm; those who had more experience with leadership under hierarchical conditions were less likely to develop such a norm (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). ~~In addition,~~ DeRue and Ashford's research found that groups who engaged in shared leadership collaboratively were more apt to focus on tasks and the changes needed to achieve those tasks with higher quality and creative responses. The hierarchical groups did not regard these tasks and change dimensions as highly and instead focused on the process to preserve the status quo and resisted change.

Vangrieken et al. (2015) found that teachers' collaboration produced benefits for students, schools, and teachers. Teachers gained experience learning to be leaders through collaboration. Also noted were the structural and organizational preconditions for positive, successful collaborations: time, especially common meeting time, space to meet, and team support over an extended period. These attributes were also cited in the research reviews of what was needed for teacher leadership support in Appendix 1 (Nguyen et al., 2019; Schott et al., 2020; Wenner & Campbell, 2019; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Vital to reforming schools for increased student success was creative change. Not holding to the status quo required collaboration and leadership that was non-hierarchical. Lumpkin et al. (2014) found that teacher empowerment for teacher leadership along with positive peer relationships to support that leadership was developed through collaboration. Collegiality, while not the same as collaborating, was an important quality for collaborations helping to build relationships and trust for the work collaborations that were purposeful and produced positive results (Kelchtermans, 2006; Mora-Ruano, 2019).

In Fairman and Mackenzie's (2015) study, teacher leaders used accountability pressures for test scores to influence others to work with them. The resulting teachers' collaboration supported teacher learning, teacher growth, and teacher motivation to produce higher student achievement as measured by their state's accountability tests. In other research, accountability was noted to have stimulated teachers' collaboration (Pfeil & Hirsch, 2013). When teachers collaborated on curriculum, instruction, or assessment, distributed leadership also played a role.

Either teacher leaders were assigned formally to direct and/or support actions of individuals or groups, or the teachers themselves distributed leadership informally within the work of the collaborations. An individual's experience with leadership other than formal leadership influenced them to acknowledge leadership within a group rather than relying on hierarchical assignments. When the group norm was shared leadership, informal leaders emerged consistent with the expectations of the group.

Teacher collaboration to develop school achievement goals and actions for students was vital for student success. Teacher collaboration has been identified as one of the "essentialities" (Lumpkin et al., 2014, p. 60) of teacher leadership that are related to student achievement. The

other essential factors for teacher leadership they identified were a focus on student learning, teacher empowerment, and relationships with other teachers.

Teacher collaboration quality has often been cited as a factor resulting in teacher growth and student achievement (Min et al. 2016; Pfeil & Hirsch, 2013; Ronfeldt et al. 2015).

Researchers Ronfeldt et al. examined factors that contributed to the quality of collaboration. The researchers found that the collaboration factors with direct relationships to student achievement were:

- Analyzing student data that developed an instructional response.
- Focus on curriculum and instructional decision-making.
- Extensive time for collaboration, not just one experience.
- Direct support for teachers' classroom work, not just support to achieve school goals.

Teacher collaborations were categorized into three types: general collaboration, instructional strategies collaboration, and assessment collaboration. The researchers found differences of significance in teachers' various groupings.

From teacher surveys, they found that instructional strategies' collaboration was more significant to elementary teachers and assessment collaboration was more significant to middle school and high school teachers. All three types of collaboration were significantly related positively to student achievement as measured by state test scores in mathematics (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Teacher leadership was not examined within these collaborative groups qualitatively but given that collaboration was important to teacher leadership, this research raised important considerations.

Similar to the Ronfeldt, et al. (2014) study, Min et al. (2016) found that the quality of collaboration was important and was affected by the school context and factors within the school. These researchers tested the extent that school characteristics were connected to instructional collaboration, a dimension that supports teacher leadership. They found that in schools where administrators and teachers have “similar perceptions” (Min et al., 2016, p. 146) about instructional collaboration, they were more apt to have a professional collaborative culture. Min and her colleagues also found that secondary schools—middle schools and high schools--have more frequent and higher quality collaborations than elementary schools and that schools with higher poverty had more collaboration. The researchers hypothesized that because high-poverty schools performed lower on state accountability measures, there was increased pressure to solve instructional issues and other complex problems, which resulted in more administrative and teacher collaboration.

Mura-Ruano (2019) examined three forms of teacher collaboration to ascertain their impact on student achievement measured by the Program for International Student Achievement (PISA). The three forms of collaboration were:

1. Instruction related, where teachers exchange materials, and assessments and work together to prepare instructional strategies.
2. Project-related, where teachers planned lessons, prepared assessments, and planned joint lessons for peer review and peer evaluation.
3. Organization, performance, and problems related, where teachers focused on the evidence of student learning across content areas and strategies for students’ homework. (p. 3)

In this German secondary school, teacher collaboration was considered a basic requirement to address educational reform. Results from the study indicated that only the organization,



performance, and problems collaboration type had a significant impact on the PISA. This was not a study of teacher leadership; however, because collaboration presented opportunities for teacher leadership it was important to include this research given the informal teacher leadership collaborations in my current study.

### ***Relationships are part of successful collaboration***

Teacher leadership does not occur in isolation from social connections (Harris, 2013). Collaborative experiences within different levels of a district or school's organization have been found to present opportunities for informal teacher leadership. For collaboration to be successful, essential structures of the designated time, space, and administrative support were required. But as Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) cautioned, structures did not guarantee successful collaboration. Relationships with supportive interactions by team members are critically important.

### **Teacher Leadership in Middle Schools**

The middle school philosophy supports collaboration within the curriculum, instruction, and assessment and encourages interdisciplinary development and classroom implementation. True collaboration develops through the trust of others within the collaborative task, which takes time and communication. Working with students' data may advance collaboration and hence, leadership throughout the teaching core. However, collaboration opportunities between teachers and principals may not be part of a school's culture and opportunities for teacher leadership strengths are diminished.

In 1989, the Carnegie Corporation of New York established a Task Force on the Education of Young Adolescents. After studying young adolescents' educational conditions, this Council made recommendations based on eight foundational principles that middle schools should exhibit:

1. Small learning communities.
2. A common core of knowledge.
3. An organizational structure for success.
4. Teacher and principal responsibilities for decision-making.
5. Expert teachers specifically for this age group. Adolescent health promotion.
6. An alliance with families.
7. Partnerships between school and community (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1985).

These principles were then interpreted to mean establishing structures and processes to support young adolescents:

- interdisciplinary teaming
- advisory groups for students
- common planning time for teachers
- instruction and assessment aligned with a core curriculum
- teachers' relationships created for learning
- school shared decision-making
- professional development focused on young adolescents' learning needs
- teachers' as partners in school governance (Grenda, 2011; Jackson & Davis, 2000; National Middle School Association, 2003, 2010).

While the task force did not explicitly say that teacher leadership was essential to middle schools, most of its basic principles and nearly all its suggested structures and processes, especially school-shared decision-making and teachers as partners in school governance and even its advisory grouping of students, assumed or depended upon teachers working closely with

each other and taking responsibility for decisions that administrators would make in more traditional schools.

A school's context, climate, and culture include processes that are interrelated. According to Kraft et al. (2016), a school's context embodies a description of distinctive characteristics such as elementary, middle, or high school level, a principal's leadership actions, staff expectations, rural, suburban, and urban classifications, student population characteristics, formal teacher leadership positions, collaboration opportunities, geographic location, etc.

The Education Glossary of Education Reform (2013) reported that a school's culture was the result of individual, group, and society's perspectives that reflect values and beliefs which, in turn, influence practice and relationships. There are many influences within the school and outside within the community that affect a school's culture within its unique context.

School climate connected both context and culture with how individuals experience the culture within a specific context (National School Climate Center, 2022). These experiences involve a school's customs, objectives, ideals, interpersonal relationships, routines, and organizational structures that relate to a school's student population within a particular level. These three frameworks, context, culture, and climate, embody the internal and external environment where teacher leadership is exercised.

### ***Essential Elements for middle schools.***

The culture and structures that have been found to support both distributed leadership and teacher leadership have also undergirded middle schools: a collaborative culture; clear direct administrative support; time, space, and schedules that allowed for collaborative work; trust between teachers and administrators; and a focus on learning that takes into consideration how students learn at their developmental stage and the learning standards that established the

learning goals. The New York State Department identified seven Essential Elements of a Standards Focused Middle-Level program, which support these overlapping goals:

1. A philosophy and mission that reflect the intellectual and developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents (youth 10-14 years of age).
2. An educational program that is comprehensive, challenging, purposeful, integrated, relevant, and standards-based.
3. An organization and structure that support both academic excellence and personal development.
4. Classroom instruction appropriate to the needs and characteristics of young adolescents provided by skilled and knowledgeable teachers.
5. Strong educational leadership and a building administration that encourages, facilitates, and sustains involvement, participation, and partnerships.
6. A network of academic and personal support available for all students.
7. Professional development and learning for all staff that is ongoing, planned, purposeful, and collaboratively developed. (New York State Education Department, 2007, sic)

For recognition as a “School to Watch” a middle school in New York State must conduct an Essential Elements self-study. In the application for recognition, the New York State Education Department explained the rating and the evidence a school must provide. Especially noteworthy for this study was Essential Element 5:

The school has teacher teams sharing responsibility for the education and personal development of common time for those teachers and teacher teams sharing responsibility for a common group of students. **They collaborate** in analyzing student achievement data and **making decisions about rigorous curriculum, standards-based assessment practice, effective instructional methods, and evaluation of student work**. The professional learning community employs coaching, mentoring, and peer observation as a means for continuous improvement. (New York State Education Department, 2017a, p. 5, emphasis mine).

Through New York State policy, leadership practice in middle schools was to support teacher collaboration for decision-making regarding curriculum, assessment, and instruction.

New York State middle schools that provided evidence on all seven essential elements received a “School-to-Watch” recognition along with national recognition (New York State Education Department, 2017a). While none of the middle schools in this study had this designation, they adopted Essential Element five providing for teachers’ common team times and the teachers had common groups of students.

Yoon et al. (2015) reviewed middle school studies from 2000 to 2013 and found that while 40% of the studies focused on curriculum and instruction, only 4% of the studies addressed school leaders, which included teacher leaders and content-level coaches, who may be formal teacher leaders. The researchers recommended more research on the collaboration theme and providing middle school teachers with a “voice” in research (p. 14). Their study was part of another published study, which provided a history of the middle school movement from 1963 to 2015 (Schaefer et al., 2016).

Researchers Horejs (1996), Lomas (1997), and Stone (1996) coordinated parallel studies of teacher leadership at the elementary, middle, and high school levels to determine if there were similarities and differences between teacher leaders at different school levels. Separate case studies of teachers in different school levels were combined for this collective study: a suburban elementary school, an urban middle school, and a suburban high school (Stone et al. 1997). In the suburban elementary and high school cases, principals nominated formal teacher leader participants and in the middle school case, informal teacher leaders were identified by their peers and the principal.

Across the school levels, varying supports and constraints for the teacher leaders were reported. Table 5 illustrates these comparisons.

**Table 5**

*Support and Constraints for Teacher Leadership at Different School Levels*

<b>Support &amp; Constraints</b>	<b>Elementary School Formal Teacher Leaders</b>	<b>Middle School Informal Teacher Leaders</b>	<b>High School Formal Teacher Leaders</b>
<i>Personal teacher leader Characteristics</i>		S	S
<i>Positive school climate</i>		S	S
<i>Opportunities for professional learning</i>	S	S	
<i>Opportunities for leadership experience</i>	S		
<i>Alignment of administrators' and teachers' views on leaders by communicating with clarity to teachers</i>			S
<i>Teachers' union's egalitarian viewpoint on teachers</i>	C		
<i>Additional compensation</i>		S	S

*Note.* C= Constraint S= Support

From “Commonalities and differences in teacher leadership at the elementary, middle, and high school levels” by M. A. Stone, J. M. Horejs, & A. M. Lomas, 1997, *Action in Teacher Education*, 19 (34), 49-64.

The teacher leaders at the different school levels reported support and constraints. At all levels, the teachers agreed that shared decision-making was supportive but only elementary teacher leaders recognized shared decision-making as supportive when release time was made available. Teacher leaders at all levels had to balance their leadership roles with classroom teaching along with a lack of collegial and/or administrative support. The negative teacher leadership factors were also addressed in other teacher leadership research (Gonzales & Behar-Horenstein, 2004; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Other findings from these case studies:

- All the teacher leaders had more experience than their peers.
- The middle and high school teacher leaders had more formal education than the elementary teacher leaders.
- The teacher leaders assumed their leadership roles for both professional and personal reasons:
  - Gratified professionally for the greater good.
  - Increased their personal and professional knowledge, skills, and understanding of the school and district organization.
  - Nurtured and expanded the teaching profession.
  - Increased their personal and professional influence with a voice in decision-making.
  - Interested in working collaboratively.
  - Expanded their professional roles beyond the classroom.
  - Provided compensation for their additional responsibilities.
- Each teacher leader was motivated to support their own and their peers' improvement.
- Teacher learning was increased by teacher collaboration and decision-making empowerment.
- Teacher leaders used an assortment of skills.
- Role differences evolved because of differences in school contexts and opportunities.
- Positive outcomes defined as “shared decision-making, collegiality, and school improvement” were pursued (p. 56).

Lomas (1997) conducted a teacher leadership survey in the middle school that identified informal teacher leader roles: collaborators, sharers, staff development providers, mentors, union leaders, student sports coaches, and extra-curricular advisers. Unlike the elementary and high school level teacher leaders, the middle school teacher leaders' stated purpose was to make all the parts of the school environment supportive for all their students (Stone et al. 1997). Because

the other schools were suburban schools rather than urban schools, at a time when suburban schools faced fewer socio-economic challenges, the suburban teachers may have seen their school environments already as student supportive. Student support was not seen as a needy area. Or perhaps, because this was a middle school, the assumed emphasis was on meeting their students' middle adolescent developmental needs (Schaefer et al., 2016). This example illustrated the necessity of understanding teacher leadership within school contexts, which are different from one school to another.

Lomas claimed that middle school teacher leaders viewed school climate accomplishments as important benchmarks for students in addition to traditional testing goals for student achievement. Additionally, she suggested increasing teachers' understanding of a principal's critical role in teacher leadership. This second recommendation was noteworthy because the researcher was herself the middle school's principal, who did not think she received teachers' recognition for her teacher leadership support. Other principals may share this concern as well, but this issue was not voiced in the teacher leadership literature that I examined; however, principals' important support role was recognized in the teacher leadership research reviews in Appendix 1.

Stone et al.(1997) made general teacher leadership recommendations at all school levels:

- Authentic involvement for teachers as professionals in decision-making should be provided, not just their stamp of approval or buy-in. Hierarchical differences should be diminished in the decision-making process.
- Providing time and opportunities for collegial, collaborative work should be arranged for by funding release time.
- Teacher leadership is not a quick fix; time is required for its cultivation; sometimes years.



- Structure and support teacher leadership roles specifically as teachers' work, so that other teachers do not think that teacher leader roles are outside what could be a regular teacher's role.
- Acknowledge, respect, recognize, and value teachers' work and expertise.
- Acknowledge that teachers take on leadership roles for personal reasons and professional reasons, just like administrators.

These recommendations were also made throughout the teacher leadership literature.

Researchers who have studied middle school leadership have cited a lack of research specifically on distributed teacher leadership, although they are a natural site given the middle-school bedrock principle of interdisciplinary collaborative teams where leadership was distributed among teachers (Angelle, 2010; Grenda & Hackman, 2014). However, the common perception was that only administrators distribute leadership and not teachers.

Angelle (2010) asserted that since there has been little research on distributed leadership in middle schools, a distributed leadership middle school model was needed. From research, Angelle reported distributed leadership features and supportive teacher leadership hallmarks within this model: a level of trust that supported a school culture, which had shared purpose; mutual goals; power-sharing; and reciprocal support from the principal to the teachers and from the teachers to the principal.

Angelle (2010) reasoned that this base of trust helped create teacher relationships that were collegial and empowering, which provided teachers confidence. The major outcome of Angelle's model were teacher efficacy and trusting relationships with other staff that led to job satisfaction and teachers staying in their school. Long-term teacher and principal tenure with an

intent to stay have had a strong positive relationship with student growth (Kraft et al., 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

***Middle school principals' vital characteristics that support teacher leadership***

Petzko (2004) compared a national middle school sample and a nominated select group of successful middle schools. Schools were defined as successful using measures of less school violence, less harsh student discipline practices, and higher student attendance. While various factors accounted for the schools' successes, a significant research finding was that successful middle schools developed more leadership teams involving more teachers. Principals included the entire faculty in school decision-making and created more leadership opportunities.

In the previously cited Gonzales and Behar-Horenstein (2004) study that examined informal teacher leaders who moved from one middle school that had dedicated support for teacher leadership to another that did not, the researchers found similar school cultural dispositions for active teacher leadership.

- (a) Teachers are learners in a community of learners using democratic governance methods for support.
- (b) A culture of collaboration exists with a commitment to professional growth.
- (c) There is schoolwide concern about equity and success for all students.
- (d) A strong, supportive principal focuses on teacher leadership, they are not passive with regard to teacher leadership.

In this study, the supportive school principal discussed teacher leadership from which I created a theory of action illustration in Figure 3. The action moves from the teachers themselves to the principals. Coaching may be done teacher to teacher or by the school principal.

### Figure 3

#### *Theory of Action for Developing a School's Teacher Leadership*



Informal teachers leaders from one middle school volunteered to go to a new middle school along with teachers from another middle school. The supportive principal went to this new school and encouraged relationship-building among all the teachers. This principal left after that first year in the new building, and another principal was assigned. The school climate began to change related to administrative actions and teacher reactions. This climate did not sustain the teacher leadership support experienced in the first school.

Administrative leadership became a traditional hierarchical model. Without the experience of distributed leadership, that existed in the previous supportive school, the teachers from the second school adhered to the principal's top-down mode and did not support their colleagues' informal teacher leadership collaborative efforts (Gonzales & Behar-Horenstein, 2004).

As a result of their research, Gonzales and Behar-Horenstein (2004) developed a Learning and Leading Model focused on school culture, utilizing the cultural dispositions of teacher leadership support. This model depended upon "democratic governance, a culture of collaboration, commitment to, and capacity for personal growth, strong supportive leadership, and concern about equity and the success, and well-being of individual students" (p. 137).

Williams (2013) studied eight middle school content-level department chairs assigned as formal teacher leaders by the administrators. Their two large urban schools reported exemplary student achievement on test scores even though their student population was classified as having

high poverty. The study gave voice to these teacher leaders about their principals' supportive relationships. They perceived the following school principals' characteristics:

- Transparent, and open, communication skills.
- Actions for equity and social justice with commitment and passion for their beliefs that all children are important and that schools can make a difference.
- Empathy, and flexibility with a strong commitment to their middle school students.
- Shared decision-making that motivated and empowered others.

Williams (2013) was not explicit about the extent of the formal teacher leaders' decision-making or information about the middle school context.

Grenda and Hackman (2014) conducted three case studies comparing successful middle school principals who distributed leadership in public middle schools, one small urban, one suburban, and one semi-rural where the state's student test scores were higher than in other middle schools. The schools varied in racial diversity, but all were classified as economically disadvantaged.

All the schools adhered to the middle school philosophy of serving young adolescents. A major finding was that when a school abides by the middle school philosophy, distributed leadership is stronger. Grenda and Hackman (2014) claimed that distributed leadership's strength was reflected in the schools' structures that provided multiple faculty and staff leadership opportunities, supported democratic governance, and created a common vision for student learning. Principals regarded the teachers as experts and supported them as curriculum leaders, employed them for professional development, and involved them in managing the building specifically, decision-making about student discipline.

These middle school principals emphasized that a key success factor was hiring the “right” teachers (Grenda & Hackman, 2014, p. 182) and they also attributed success to supporting teachers’ collaboration and teacher leadership. The principals counseled teachers, whom they ascertained should not teach, to other careers. There were two primary challenges to distributed leadership: extra time was needed for teachers in their leadership roles who needed encouragement and support, and it was difficult to keep communication messages consistent among and between the many teacher leaders. How this leadership distribution operated was not clear in the research report.

Grenda and Hackman (2014) called for more research on principals’ practice with distributed leadership in middle schools. They asserted that there was a sizable gap in this research and recognized major benefits to middle schools with distributive leadership as it applied to the middle school philosophy of collaborative leadership. But again, the notion was that administrators distributed the leadership roles.

Gale and Bishop (2014) contended that middle school principal leadership was different from elementary and high school principal leadership in three respects. First, the nature of students’ development in middle schools was demanding because of the students’ developmental transition from childhood to adolescence. The school principal must be willing to be supportive and to be engaged with students who are in this developmental transition.

Next, because of the variety of building configurations, according to varying grade levels, fifth to seventh grades, sixth to eighth grades, seventh to eighth grades, and other configurations, a principal must also be knowledgeable about effective instruction and curriculum, how to frame teaching and learning in the various grade levels and subject areas, and how to engage students within a particular range of grade levels.

Finally, the middle grades were where many students disengaged from school and behavioral issues increased. All of these elements created multiple pressures on school leaders. These pressures challenged principals to pay attention to and accept multiple possibilities for student engagement rather than holding teachers to rigid expectations (Gale & Bishop, 2014). Subsequently, instructional innovations were crucial for engaging young adolescent students, which challenged a system's teaching conventions and school structures. There were roles here for teacher leaders' collaboration and innovation.

Bickmore et al. (2017) used the National Association of Secondary School Principals' various studies, which included middle schools, and identified three key attributes of effective middle school principals:

1. They were knowledgeable about effective middle school programs and research.
2. They emphasized students' developmental needs when managing the school.
3. They engaged in collaborative decision-making with others, especially teachers.

***Essential Elements and structures that encourage teacher leaders.***

Brown and Anfara (2003), while proponents of middle schools, cautioned that school leaders needed knowledge and skill to change middle-level organizational structures positively for early adolescent students. Just changing structures did not produce meaningful change that benefited students. Regarding this caution, a New York State middle school study by Wilcox and Angelis (2012) demonstrated that structural elements correlated to positive middle school change and student growth, but school personnel actively worked to implement other changes by creating a high student achievement vision, developing a climate of trust and respect, and creating structures that supported collaborative and coherent instruction. To implement the changes they encouraged teachers to lead. The researchers reported that implementing these

measures resulted in higher student achievement measured by the middle school's student state test scores because they increased the school's capacity for high-quality teacher collaboration.

For pre-service educators and students,, Angelle (2016) encouraged professional learning communities where teachers were collaborative leaders. She emphasized the middle school essential elements that she wove in from an instructional perspective. Angelle emphasized collaborative leadership connected to five essential cultural characteristics:

1. Belief in the value of working with young adolescents and the needed preparation for this work.
2. Leadership that was collaborative and willing to take risks.
3. A shared vision that guided decision-making.
4. High expectations for everyone in the learning community.
5. Organizational structures supporting educator and student learning with meaningful relationships.

The author asserted that middle schools incorporated teacher leadership because they were schools with administrative school leaders who empowered others to lead with high expectations for everyone. However, the expressed idea was that only principals distributed leadership roles to formal teacher leaders alongside the school principals.

While Angelle (2010) found no direct link between the middle school essential elements and student achievement, Craig (2012) and Root III (2015) reported such links in their research on New York State middle schools. Craig's (2014) study of 185 middle school principals evidenced a relationship existed between the degree to which schools implemented the New York State Middle School Essential Elements and student achievement, as measured by state tests in English language arts and mathematics. Higher student achievement depended on middle schools

that implemented all the elements with their important interplay. Adopting one element and excluding the other elements did not produce this growth. In Craig's research, some elements produced a stronger effect, but a significant impact required putting into practice the whole set of elements rather than any particular element individually.

In four New York State middle schools that implemented the essential elements to at least a moderate degree, Root III (2015) found they realized student growth. The school with the greatest implementation of the elements, which also had the highest percentage of student poverty, received the top scores. The second-highest poverty-ranked school matched the test scores of a school with a lower poverty level indicating that the middle school essential elements do have a positive student effect.

The middle school research of Angelle (2010, 2016), Craig (2012), and Root III (2015) all emphasized:

- The Essential Elements of Middle-Level Education; middle school structures were created to support teachers and their work for young adolescents' development and provide collaboration.
- Middle school principals, to be successful, needed to be more flexible because of young adolescents' development and their learning needs.
- Studies of distributed leadership in middle schools have been sparse but research has supported the essential elements for school success.

An important part of the Essential Elements of Middle-Level Education has been teacher collaboration, and from teacher leadership research we know that teacher collaboration spawned and supported teacher leadership. However, research documenting the relationship between middle school structures and teacher leadership has been limited.



### *A confluence between middle school research and teacher leadership research.*

Middle school researchers, like teacher leadership researchers, have sought the holy grail of documenting whether and how the phenomenon they are studying relates to student achievement. Both sets of researchers have accepted the distributed leadership concept that leadership may be distributed across the school. Both have an emphasis on collaborative leadership. The understandings and structures that supported distributed leadership and teacher leadership also undergird middle schools with a collaborative culture; clear and direct administrators' support; time, space, and schedules that allow for collaborative work; and trust between teachers and administrators to develop working relationships that focus on learning. Additional evidence was offered by Petzko (2004), that collaborative leadership and middle schools' success are correlated because successful middle schools had more interdisciplinary instruction which required teacher collaboration.

Various researchers have cited the need for further attention to how different middle school components affect informal teacher leaders and their relationships with formal administrative leaders and have called for the voices of teachers to be heard in conducting such research. All these are gaps that this current study has been designed to address.

### **Teacher Leadership and Literacy**

Initially, literacy leadership research was confined to studying reading specialists and administrators. Over the last twenty years, this thinking changed and classroom teachers began to be studied in this leadership role. More research was needed on classroom teachers' roles beyond the elementary school and within content areas supported by the change in the New York English language arts and literacy standards. These literacy standards were interwoven through all the content areas, increasing opportunities and the need for teachers to work together. However, for

the most part, leadership for literacy was still considered the purview of formal or semi-formal teacher leaders who had special training and expertise in this area. The next phase of literacy leadership research was expected to integrate literacy within the content areas, such as science and social studies. “In an era of accountability and heightened responsibilities, it is clear that all classroom teachers must be literacy leaders” (Sharp et al., 2020).

The New York State Education Department has defined Next Generation English Language Arts and Literacy Standards as standards designed to promote advanced literacy skills beyond the basics:

READING, WRITING, LISTENING, AND SPEAKING—all language-based competencies included in English Language Arts—have become prerequisites for participation in nearly every aspect of day-to-day, 21<sup>st</sup>-century life. While there was a time when basic literacy skills provided a clear path forward, today's students need to develop an increasingly complex set of advanced literacy skills and competencies in order to access social and economic opportunities, find and use information, and meet personal goals. All students in New York State classrooms must develop advanced literacies to enable communication, spoken and written, in increasingly diverse ways and with increasingly diverse audiences. New York State's English Language Arts and Literacy Standards, as well as the Lifelong Practices of Readers and Writers, include the skills and competencies needed for students to be effective communicators. (New York State Education Department, 2019, emphasis mine).

The state’s goal was for all students to successfully speak and write (Lesaux & Galloway, 2017).

- Advanced literacy skills for teachers’ instruction have the following features:
- to develop students’ reading comprehension in all subjects areas
  - to use texts that have “big ideas and rich content”
  - to have classroom discussions that create and increase conversation and to use “academic language”
  - to write “building language and knowledge” within the content
  - to use “small sets of high-utility vocabulary words to build breadth and depth of knowledge (New York State Education Department, 2017, n/p).

Not all researchers have defined literacy as broadly as New York State or defined literacy leadership as being the responsibility of all classroom teachers. Researchers in “A Framework for Defining Literacy Leadership” defined literacy as reading. They and others assigned literacy

leadership primarily to formal administrative leaders (Fletcher et al., 2011; Houck & Novak, 2017) and reading specialist professionals: “instructional/literacy coaches, reading/literacy specialists, reading teacher/interventionists, and reading supervisors” (Bean et al., 2015, p. 4). Also, most studies of literacy leadership have focused on leadership in elementary schools, where the priority is typically on teaching students to read (Camburn et al., 2003).

Dowell, et al.’s (2012) research on literacy leadership presented a historical narration about literacy leadership through national and international literacy organizations. One recommendation of this compendium was for the International Reading Association (IRA) to update its 2010 standards for classroom teachers’ literacy instruction skills. This was done in 2017 and included standards for middle and high school teachers in addition to previous standards for middle and high school content.

In 2018, Sharp et al. asked questions about teacher preparation for literacy leadership. They found that many programs were inadequate as they failed to address classroom teacher literacy leadership skills or even consider teacher leadership. The researchers identified classroom teacher literacy leadership skills, which paralleled the skills needed for teacher leadership:

- Strong literacy knowledge and pedagogy.
- Ability to handle a school’s micro-politics.
- How to develop and maintain professional networks for support.
- How to create a classroom culture that supports literacy.
- Staying informed about literacy issues.
- Collaborating with colleagues.

- Advocating for curriculums that recognize and are inclusive of students' backgrounds and socio-emotional needs.

Sharp et al. (2018) urged that teacher preparation programs address teacher literacy leadership both strongly and explicitly.

A few research reports addressed teacher literacy leaders' actions, which I reviewed if they applied to secondary schools and literacy in the content areas. One report described a model that involved high school teachers in a tenth grade within the Washington D. C. City Schools (Chilla et al., 2007). Important characteristics of this model and its development included:

- Teacher action research and collaborative reflection.
- Literacy for all subjects.
- Focused professional development turn-keyed from an outside consulting group.
- Principal's support and federal grant start-up funds.
- Two-year professional learning plan for administrators and teachers.
- An apprenticeship model that developed teacher leaders.
- Establishment of a literacy council that included teachers and administrators.
- Use of test data to determine instructional effectiveness.

Results of this project indicated that 60% of tenth-grade students improved their reading scores with an overall increase in reading proficiency of two grade levels (p. 17).

A more recent study by Francois (2014) was a case of a New York State urban secondary school in grades six to nine that changed from a school where students "weren't really reading" to a school having a "culture of literacy" (p. 587). The researcher focused on the principal's leadership, school structures such as common planning time, and professional development from the Teachers' College Reading and Writing Project. The author concluded that it was the

inter-relationships of these various factors that brought about the change and not one factor. Teacher agency was discussed as necessary to take change requirements but few teachers' voices were portrayed in relation to the principal's leadership actions and teachers' leadership was not explicitly discussed.

Greenleaf et al. (2018) in their inauguration of a Leading Literacy Change Department in the ILA recognized that literacy leadership was specific to local district and school environments and that collaboration was key. This recognition was in concert with informal teacher leadership that is dependent upon context and created through collaboration.

Scornavacco et al. (2016) studied the adoption of Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) an instructional strategy that relied heavily on hybrid teacher leaders in 18 middle schools in one school district. CSR created small group instruction where students worked together in collaborative groups on the readings and with specific strategies in pairs to deconstruct their reading comprehension.

Teacher leadership structures were developed to adopt the CSR: a pair of teacher leaders selected to be CSR teacher leaders in each school, a district teacher leader coach, a principals' CSR liaison, and a CSR consultant were to support the CSR teacher leaders. The CSR implementation and the teacher leaders' development were uneven. Given these results, the researchers ultimately focused on one school with the most successful teacher leaders to determine the factors that accounted for the teachers' success and their school's success in CSR implementation. These factors all revolved around the school's principal:

- Support and enactment of distributed leadership.
- Principal's tenure that was longer than average.
- Interest and knowledge in the CSR model.

- Meeting regularly with the CSR principals' liaison.
- Involvement in shared classroom visits with the CSR teacher leaders.
- Sharing data on student test scores, classroom observations, and teachers' advice and criticisms with the CSR team leaders.
- Choosing CSR teacher leaders with expertise and positive working relationships with other teachers.
- Guaranteed time to meet with the CSR teacher leaders for mutual feedback and inclusion in the school's leadership team meetings.

The researchers concluded with an in-depth report on the several middle schools that started CSR implementation with hybrid teacher leaders. Their findings pointed out the need for careful consideration of distributed leadership demands and the various supports that teacher leadership required depending upon a middle school and district's context (Scornavacco et al., 2016)

In 2020, Fountas and Pinnell urged the growth of teacher leadership for the purpose of literacy leadership. "The effectiveness of literacy education throughout the school is increased when a teacher becomes a leader, sharing expertise with colleagues to strengthen the entire literacy system" (p. 223). Their commentary was directed to three groups in support of teacher literacy leadership: principals or other administrative leaders, literacy coaches, and classroom teachers who wanted to develop leadership skills beyond their current status to influence others for students' success.

These researchers and authors encouraged incremental teacher leadership growth at the school level. This proposal was a bottom-up approach because teachers at the school level are close to the problems and issues. Therefore, teachers were in a better position to develop solutions, adapt changes, and then influence a larger venue, rather than a top-down approach

with large-scale change initiated by a formal leader at the top of the school's organizational hierarchy. Their model emphasized developing a culture of shared leadership between teachers and specialized personnel such as a curriculum coordinator or literacy coaches (formal or semi-formal teacher leaders) in addition to other teacher leaders, the school principal, and families and community members. The school principal and the literacy coach formed literacy teams with classroom teachers and other teachers who were not on this special team. Team leadership was assigned to a hybrid teacher leader who was formally appointed and compensated and who also worked part-time in their own classroom (Fountas & Pinnell, 2020).

The authors presented anecdotal evidence from research on a group of elementary schools in one school district as an example of applying this teacher literacy leadership model to improve practice and student outcomes as measured by standardized tests. To begin, the school principals with a team of central office instructional specialists engaged in professional learning and developed their common goals and vision about literacy learning through a process of exploring their "core values and beliefs" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2020, p. 228) about literacy learning. Teachers were not involved during this phase of the research.

Utilizing the authors' Literacy Continuum® (Fountas & Pinnell, 2016) as a guidepost, these administrators built personal and group knowledge and understandings. They also developed an action plan to support school cultures that emphasized: "teamwork and collaborative professionalism" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2020, p. 228). After the principals and central office administrators received instruction, the principals invited the instructional coaches and elementary-level teacher leaders from each school to engage in the same developmental instruction they had received to create a common understanding.

Each of these teacher leaders on the literacy teams had shown an interest in joining the larger group and was endorsed by the principal for showing leadership potential. After all teacher literacy leaders received instruction, these new, hybrid formal teacher leaders chose to have their classrooms become learning places where other teachers observed their work in trying out the new instructional practices. In addition, this teacher literacy leadership team developed future professional learning experiences for their colleagues.

The district's central office team worked on plans for the middle-school and high-school teachers and provided the same instruction as the elementary teachers and also developed some as hybrid teacher leaders. These teacher leaders provided their subject area teacher colleagues with instruction as they themselves applied this learning to their own classes.

Fountas and Pinnell (2020) argued that by developing and supporting teacher leadership in each school context, this initiative improved “teacher expertise and student outcomes” (p. 229). They worked from the premise that differences or contexts existed and needed to be addressed and that applying the same curriculum worked differently depending on the various school contexts.

Other teacher literacy leadership examples were extant in the teacher leadership literature. Margolis and Deuel (2009) discussed five teacher leaders engaged in a middle and high-school-level grant that focused on teaching literacy through the content areas. Their research explored these hybrid teacher leaders' “motivations, meanings, and approaches” (p. 264) to teacher leadership. The researchers discussed formalizing teacher leadership roles recognizing that teachers already played many informal roles (Chilla et al., 2007; Spillane & Diamond, 2007).



Margolis and Deuel (2009) asserted that formalizing teacher leaders' informal roles encouraged teachers to assume these roles given those teacher leaders influenced instructional reform implementation. Similar to many teacher leadership studies, they found that teacher leadership actions were motivated to create a better environment for teacher and student learning and that the teacher leaders' own professional growth included personal validation and recognition (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

### ***Doctoral dissertations explored literacy teacher leadership***

Several doctoral dissertation studies have focused on teacher literacy leaders, primarily but not exclusively focusing on formal teacher leaders. Ruller (2013) examined the role of five teacher literacy leaders in a suburban district who were selected by their principal to share and work with teachers implementing a reform initiative. Common attributes were examined to determine a profile of a teacher literacy leader, how they worked with other teachers and administrators, and their influence on others.

Regarding their profile, Ruller (2013) found that teacher literacy leaders were reflective and continuing learners, they liked working with their colleagues, and teacher leadership provided validation and recognition for their work. A summary of the findings emphasizes that the principal's support was essential but to be successful, the principals had to have clarity and transparency about the formal teacher leaders' role. This factor was identified in other teacher leadership studies. Distributed leadership should be a partnership between the principal and teacher leaders, not just a principal handing off responsibility to teachers. A successful school culture included the school's being prepared for formal teachers' sharing and observing each other's classrooms. How this was to be done was not defined. Other conclusions confirmed the results of other teacher leadership research such as time, class schedules, and covering classes for

teachers to observe in other classes, if not planned for, constrained a teacher literacy leader's role and teacher literacy research was influenced by the context of each school.

Ruller (2013) argued for leadership to be distributed by teachers rather than administrators. Evidence for this position included teachers who after the training by the first set of teachers opened up their classrooms for modeling and gradually assumed leadership roles themselves within the professional learning workshops. The teacher leaders began to turnkey their leadership to other teachers who then began to influence instructional change as informal teacher leaders not designated by the formal administrators.

Instructional reform created opportunities for teacher literacy leadership. Espania's (2012) dissertation study about two classroom teachers during a district's adoption of a collaborative literacy project illustrated that teachers were identified and supported to be the school's professional learning community (PLC) facilitators or co-facilitators. Espania defined these teachers as informal teacher leaders because they did not have formal roles or titles; however, they were assigned as Professional Learning Facilitators (PLC facilitators) by their school principals and were given PLC meeting expectations.

The semi-formal teacher leaders maintained their classroom teaching but were expected to influence other teachers to change their literacy instruction through the formally structured PLC meetings and coaching cycles working with a formally assigned literacy coach. This reform project gave the semi-formal teacher leaders opportunities to display their instructional expertise and facilitation skills. Espania (2012) found that the context that included time and space structures, the school's culture of collaboration, strong personal relationships, and a history of success influenced the semi-formal teacher leaders' achievements.

Delaney's (2004) dissertation focused on a New York State urban high school engaged in literacy reform through their writing instruction. Teachers worked on their instructional changes through informal collaboration. One teacher endorsed the specific reform initiative on literacy commenting, "Now there's just more conversations with other faculty members. What are you using? What is working for you?" Another stated, "If I have a good idea, guess what? I'm gonna share it." (p. 138).

Finally, other researchers have connected teacher leadership to school literacy reform and positive change (Berg, 2018; Danielson, 2009; Eckert, 2018; Ingersoll, et al., 2017; Schott et al., 2020). Interest in teacher leadership invigorated the third wave of teacher leadership because of resource support from federal initiatives and the subsequent state reform efforts. The third wave of teacher leadership was intended to change school cultures with influence to accept educational reform.

These studies on teacher leadership while answering questions on who and what, especially in regard to formal teacher leaders, have left many questions unanswered. The next part of this review will focus more specifically on informal teacher leadership but first a broader review of informal leadership.

### **Informal Leadership in Organizations**

Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) posited that "adaptive leadership" (p. 306) was informal, evolving from interactions that operated in an organization's processes in agreement by DeRue (2013) defining informal leadership as that which was not officially designated by the organization but leadership that exists primarily through influence. DeRue argued that "Informal leadership is vital to the success of contemporary organizations" (p. 3) because today's organizations are complex having moved from the industrial era to the knowledge era. Their understandings were

related to the more recent leadership paradigm, which includes others in addition to those who have been named formally at the top of the organizational charts.

Almost 80 years ago, Barnard (1938) explored the leadership authority of corporate executives. He argued that these formal leaders, who had a great deal of authority derived from their positions in the organization, still found that they needed the authority given by others beneath them in the hierarchy to be able to function as leaders. Authority, by this conception, was delegated upward by those who usually defer to someone assigned as a formal leader. But one cannot deny that within hierarchical organizations there were individuals who were called the leaders.

Those who were not formally designated leaders received leadership authority from their colleagues because of personal or expert influence to lead as informal leaders. This authority was acknowledged by others in a group, a team, an organization, and even by themselves. Morse and Seaman (1950) in their paradigm for the study of leadership focused on individuals as leaders and recognized formal and informal organizational structures, such as work teams, as “group factors” (p. 151) that provided informal leadership.

Formal leaders were those who had been appointed, usually with job descriptions and accompanying compensation for their work. While these named administrative leaders have “high influence potential” (Morse & Seaman, p.151), they are not given the authority of leadership until those with whom they work recognized them as leaders. These earlier scholars of organizational leadership provided the field with the informal leadership concepts applicable today.

Pielstick’s (2000) survey study compared formal to informal leaders. He determined six leadership dimensions and developed a leadership profile from his earlier meta-ethnographic

study of leadership: shared vision, communication, relationships, community, guidance, and character (Pielstick, 1998). He posited that these areas were important for both informal and formal types of leaders as “authentic leadership” (Pielstick, 2000, p. 100). Table 6 lists the six dimensions with their related variables in which informal leaders were rated higher than formal leaders.

**Table 6**

*Leadership Dimensions on Which Informal Leaders Were Rated Higher Than Formal Leaders*

<b>Leadership Dimensions</b>	<b>Related Variables</b>
<i>Shared Vision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Moral purpose and inspiring</li> <li>*Provides for the common good</li> <li>*Provides meaning and focus based on shared needs, values, beliefs</li> </ul>
<i>Character</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Ethical, humble, fair, centered, intuitive, credible</li> <li>*Motivated by a higher purpose</li> <li>*Disenchanted with the status quo</li> <li>*Servant leader, moral leader, transforming leader</li> <li>*Well-rounded, open, flexible, altruistic, personable, caring, and responsive</li> <li>*Treats everyone with dignity and respect</li> <li>*Exhibits honesty and integrity</li> <li>*Emphasizes service above self</li> <li>*Pulls rather than pushes people along</li> <li>*Uses good judgment and distinguishes unique situations</li> </ul>
<i>Communication</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Communicates common values</li> <li>*Listens to others and seeks to understand before being understood</li> <li>*Inspires, encourages, motivates</li> <li>*Uses stories and weaves in a higher purpose</li> <li>*Engages in an interactive dialogue</li> <li>*Shares ideas and issues</li> </ul>
<i>Relationships</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Fully engages when relating to others</li> <li>*Collaborates with others</li> <li>*Recognizes the needs of others and emphasizes with others</li> <li>*Demonstrates equity and treats everyone with dignity and respect</li> <li>*Exhibits honesty and integrity</li> <li>*Demonstrates service above self</li> </ul>
<i>Community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Vision based on shared, needs, values, beliefs</li> <li>*Humble, fair, servant leader</li> </ul>
<i>Guidance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Builds trust and sets the example</li> <li>*Mentors, coaches, and teaches others</li> <li>*Engages in his or her own learning and personal renewal</li> <li>*Engages in moral reasoning and principled judgment</li> <li>*Uses creative and reflective thinking</li> <li>*Gives recognition to others</li> <li>*Builds teams and coalitions</li> <li>*Supports cultural diversity and unity and supports gender equity</li> </ul>

*Note.* From Formal vs. informal leading: A comparative analysis, by C. D. Pielstick, 2000, *The Journal of Leadership Studies*, 7(3), 99-114.

Formal leaders only rated higher than informal leaders on four variables: “engaging in politicking, having a need for power, using authority, and using fear or coercion.” (p. 111).

Although cited by many other informal leadership studies, there were limitations to Pielstick's (2000) study. The return rate for the questionnaire was 19% and the participants, chosen randomly, were skewed toward education graduate students (64% of the returns). Except for the four variables that could be viewed as negative, the other variables were positive. However, Pielstick raised important issues about formal and informal leadership that others continued to study.

Hunt and Dodge (2006), in support of the paradigm that incorporated informal leadership, explained that their relational leadership theory was based on leadership social processes. They argued that this theory "recognizes leadership wherever it occurs; it is not restricted to a single or even a small set of formal or informal leaders; and, in its strongest form, functions as a dynamic system embedding leadership, environmental, and organizational aspects" (p. 654).

Relational leadership was an active process, one that was socially constructed between people who were in a relationship with each other, and in which some people influenced others to do something (Ulh-Bien, 2006). A major question asked by Hunt and Dodge (2006) applying relational leadership theory was "What are the social processes by which leadership emerges and operates?" (p. 666). This question was essential for examining informal leadership because informal leaders' influence was generated through social connections.

Relational leadership theorists have focused not on the individual's perspective or understanding, but rather on what happens in the process of a relationship. This understanding of informal leadership moved beyond the bounds of identifying or focusing on individual informal leaders' roles but concentrated on the groups' actions. It was akin to distributed leadership, which focused on inherent leadership interactions produced from the tasks or the work by many.

DeRue and Ashford (2010) studied how informal leaders developed and became informal leaders within groups and teams. They highlighted the social-psychological foundations of that emergence using several theories: Social identity theory (Hogg, 2001), leadership categorization theory (Lord & Maher, 1991), and status characteristics (Bunderson, 2003). These theoretical constructs provided the basis for informal leaders' characteristics in that they represented an ideal to group members, conformed to other group members' ideas about what a leader looked like and what actions leaders took, and had knowledge, skill, or experience that helped the group be successful in its work. DeRue and Ashford (2010) hypothesized that informal leadership emerged because of these personal characteristics.

People made judgments about leadership based on individuals who were trusted, caring, social, and competent. Groups without formally assigned leaders or an established leadership hierarchy generally turned to the most competent people in the group but also those who exhibited a warm personality. These characteristics were affirmed by Cuddy et al.'s (2011) research where group members associated a person's friendliness and kindness with skill and ability.

DeRue and Ashford (2010) also found that if individuals within the group had more experience with leaders in formal hierarchical positions, they saw a hierarchy as their mental model of leadership. Therefore, these individuals considered informal leaders as less competent and less qualified than formal leaders. This thinking made it more difficult for informal leaders to emerge and be recognized as leaders. This was observed in the Gonzales and Behar-Horenstein (2004) study in which middle school teachers who had not experienced support for teacher leadership followed the new principal's directive demands and disparaged the informal teacher leaders.



Miner (2013) contended that there was a need for more research on informal leadership in organizations because the research was limited and because informal leadership was shown to be a major influence on expanding the social capital of an organization, which provided many benefits. Table 7 illustrates the selected research that Miner noted in which informal leadership benefited organizations.

**Table 7**

*Research That Supports Informal Leadership and Benefits*

<b>Research</b>	<b>Benefits from Informal Leadership</b>
Butler J. K. Jr. (1991). Towards understanding and measuring conditions of trust: Evolution of a conditions of trust inventory. <i>Journal of Management</i> , 17(3), 643-663.	*Informal leaders affected the level of trust for formal leaders positively or negatively.
Morey, N. & Luthans, F. (1991). The use of dyadic alliances in informal organizations: An ethnographic study. <i>Human Relations</i> , 44(6), 597-618.	*Social capital and organizational operations benefited from informal leadership. *Informal structures differed prominently from the formal organizational structure. *Two-person alliances that take leadership informally produced efficiencies.
Pescosolido, A. T. (2001), Informal leaders and the development of group efficacy. <i>Small Group Research</i> , 32(1), pp. 74-93.	*Informal leaders have earned the respect and trust of others. *They influenced morale and opinions throughout the organization.
Peters, L. H. & O'Connor, E. J. (2001). Informal leadership support: An overlooked competitive advantage. <i>Physician Executive</i> , 27(3), p. 35-40.	*Informal leaders are "influence" leaders who provided innovative ways of addressing problems and tasks in an organization. *As influence leaders, they impacted many facets of the organization.
Hongseok et al. (2006). A multi-level model of group social capital. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> , 31(3), pp. 569-582.	*Informal groups existed within an organization and could provide benefits. *Informal leaders had the power to benefit or stop change.

*Note.* From "Informal leaders", by R. C. Miner, 2013, *Journal of Leadership, Accountability, and Ethics*, 10(4), pp. 57-61.

Two other studies shed light on the benefits of informal leadership in organizations, one was of a high-tech company (Larsson et al., 2010), and the other, was a policy study for medical professionals (Gabel, 2014). The researchers in both studies recognized that informal leadership

had not been examined in-depth within organizations and that the study of informal leadership could provide valuable insights for organizational success. Each study's authors cited Pielstick's comparative study but used a different theoretical base for their research. In the Larsson et al. (2010) study of a Swedish, high-tech firm, the researchers based their work on Mumford et al.'s (2002) leadership theory for those who work in the creative or professional sectors.

Larsson et al. (2010) definition of informal leaders included the organization's professional members who were not in managerial or supervisory roles. These workers were considered highly creative high-tech design and development professionals. The Mumford et al. (2002) leadership theory underscored the importance of formal leaders who work with creative professionals. Formal leaders needed to learn special managerial expertise that supported creativity.

These management understandings recognized how professionals doing creative work engaged in self-leadership and self-empowerment. Larsson et al. (2010) contended that transformational leadership constrained creativity and innovation because an official change in vision may conflict with the ways people work creatively. This concept aligns with middle school teaching where creativity and innovation are needed for meeting young adolescents' learning needs with the most engaging teaching.

The findings of the Larsson et al. (2010) study established that informal leaders were vital as a positive force and that they were given authority by others not only because of their technical knowledge but because they understood the organization and processes in which they operated. These informal leaders could help others by "information brokering" (p. 175) or making sense of information to others within their organizational context, like excellent mentor teachers. Their influence was spread by networking throughout the organization.

They also influenced the formal leaders because the informal leaders worked cooperatively with the formal leaders complementing their formal roles. The researchers stressed that their conclusions on informal leadership support might only apply in complex, problem-based, high-tech-focused workplaces (Larsson et al., 2010). Their commentary underscored the importance of studying leadership within the context of an organization and examining its purposes and culture.

Gabel's (2014) policy report on professional medical leadership provided insights from two other informal leadership studies: a study of nurses' informal leadership (Downey et al. 2011) and a study of doctors' informal leadership (Snell et al. 2011). Gabel classified the difference between formal and informal leaders based on power differentials. French & Raven (1959) and Raven (1965) defined power as "legitimate, expert, informational, rewarding, coercive, or referent" (as cited in Gabel, p. 250). Gabel applied these power conceptions and produced a typology of leaders in medicine and health care identifying qualities and characteristics for formal leaders, informal leaders, and general qualities and characteristics for both. Table 8 illustrates Gabel's typology of leadership in medicine and health care.

**Table 8***Gabel's Typology of Leaders in Medicine and Health Care*

<b>Formal Leaders</b>	<b>Informal Leaders</b>
*Competencies were important for the selected work and needed for: the technical, financial, regulatory, and personnel aspects of a formal position.	*Influence was based on expert, informational, or referent power, the individual's personal qualities, and the ability to become a reference point for others.
*Influence was based on positional power, reward, and coercive power, sometimes expert and informational power.	*Had no appointed position or title no authority based on a position involved with the issue at hand. Reward and coercive power were social, not material.
*Referential power was crucial for increased effectiveness.	*Recognized organizational lines of authority.
*Recognized formal organizational lines of authority.	*Worked collaboratively with formal leaders.
*Recognized the importance of working collaboratively with informal leaders.	*Had recognized clinical competence.
*Recognized clinical competence for expert and informational power.	*May not seek or accept a formal leadership role.
*Recognized social and material rewards are received when organizational goals were met.	*Received less recognition from others when organizational goals were met.
*Faced severe consequences such as loss of position when organizational goals were unmet.	*Faced fewer consequences related to positional security if organizational goals were unmet.
<b>Attributes Formal and Informal Leaders Both Demonstrated</b>	
<p>*Strong commitment to the values and principles of medicine and health care.</p> <p>*Strong commitment to the organization's mission.</p> <p>*Communicated their values and principles to others.</p> <p>*Communicated directly and clearly; listened and included others in problem-solving.</p> <p>*Inspired and motivated others to share their commitment to principle-driven goals and objectives.</p> <p>*Served as a model for others, regardless of position.</p> <p>*Strong personal qualities of honesty, integrity, focus, and perseverance.</p> <p>*Recognized differences in viewpoint, negotiated differences, and helped to resolve conflicts.</p> <p>*Took pride in their own accomplishments and valued the recognition of others but did not require personal recognition for their mission-driven efforts.</p>	

*Note.* From "Expanding the scope of leadership training in medicine" by S. Gabel, 2014,

*Academic Medicine*, 89(6), pp. 848-852.

Gabel (2014) argued that teaching all medical professionals leadership skills would be highly beneficial. In his recommendations, he adopted transformational leadership constructs or leadership that “alters, modifies, or changes reactions, attitudes, or behaviors of others” (p. 177).

Miner (2013) in conceptual commentary indicated that because informal leadership was elusive it was not widely studied and gave additional reasons for this. He asserted that most of the attention has been given to informal leadership within small groups or in situations where informal leadership only had detrimental effects on organizations (pp. 57-58) such as some informal leaders going off in their own direction and not coordinating with others or posing challenges to the organization’s formal authority as in Leithwood et al.’s (2007) anarchic misaligned distributed leadership. A negative aspect of informal leadership, depending on one’s perspective in a given situation, was that informal leadership has the power or influence to block change. However, informal leadership was also recognized and developed for positive ends.

Miner (2013) further argued that formal leaders are given authority through their designation as leaders and are accountable for that authority, whereas informal leaders are not given authority except by those they influence; therefore, they were not accountable for their authority. He summarized his commentary with these points on informal leadership:

- It exists, needs to be recognized, and is important. Formal leaders need to work with informal leaders.
- It is not designated but is present through relationships that are nurtured.
- Informal leaders have more autonomy and appeal to others through their consideration and empathy than formal leaders.
- An informal leader may support and advance or thwart an organization’s change.

- Their authority is secured through their influence, which could affect the mindsets of others.

This summary of informal leadership aligns with the findings and understandings of informal teacher leadership cited by many.

Stincelli and Baghurst (2014) in their attempt to explore a theory of informal leadership in organizations went back to the traditional model of leadership identification through leadership qualities. Their focus was on small Midwestern businesses in one city. Three themes emerged from this research related to informal leadership:

1. The informal leaders were highly competent.
2. There was cultural support in the organization from formal leaders to informal leadership.
3. The organization's situation allowed for less hierarchical leadership through teaming and other collaborative opportunities.

I found in the research reviewed that informal leaders were important to different types of organizations and that more research was warranted. The researchers' findings mirror what has been found in schools supporting informal teacher leadership. This discussion of informal leaders was also important to education leadership generally, where the search for new leadership conceptions to change education processes for student achievement continues.

### **Informal Teacher Leadership**

Even acknowledging teacher leadership with their influence, their dispositions, and their actions, informal and formal teacher leader definitions have continued to be fuzzy. Portner and Collins (2014) asserted the importance of distinguishing between formal and informal teacher leadership because teacher leadership constructs needed more definition to advance their

development. Table 9 illustrates several ways that selected teacher leadership researchers have conceptualized informal teacher leadership.

**Table 9**

*Teacher Leadership Conceptualizations: Distinctions Between Formal and Informal Teacher Leadership*

<b>Research</b>	<b>Distinctions between Definitions of Formal and Informal Teacher Leadership</b>
Whitaker, T. (1995). Accomplishing change in schools: The importance of informal teacher leaders. <i>The Clearing House</i> , 68(6), 356-357.	*FTLs have formal authority roles: department chairs, union leadership, and advisory committee members. ITLs are classroom teachers who work in an informal, unstructured manner (p. 78).
Leithwood et al. (1999). Fostering teacher leadership. <i>Fostering leadership for changing times</i> , Chapter 8, 115-133. Open University Press.	*Administrators expected FTLs to carry out many functions to positively influence other teachers. ITLs assisted other teachers to improve their classroom practice.
Beauchum, F. & Dentith, A. M. (2004). Teacher leaders creating cultures of school renewal and transformation. <i>The Educational Forum</i> , 68(3), 276-286.	*All teachers were ITLs, it was part of their job description to work beyond the classroom in many roles. Principals designated or assigned some formal TLs.
Patterson, [Janice]. & Patterson, [Jerry]. (2004). Sharing the lead. <i>Educational Leadership</i> , 61(7), 74-78.	*School administrators identified and assigned jobs to FTLs; teacher colleagues or other recognized ITLs.
York-Barr, J. & Duke, K. (2004). What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship. <i>Review of Educational Research</i> , 74(3), 255-316.	*School context determines FTLs and ITLs' meaning. FTLs are assigned; ITLs influence others formally or informally, alone, or with others.
Danielson, C. (2006). <i>Teacher leadership that strengthens professional practice</i> . Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development	*School administrators assigned FTLs are quasi-administrators; ITLs played voluntary roles and emerged "organically."
Muijs, D. & Harris, A. (2006). Teacher lead school improvement: Teacher leadership in the UK. <i>Teaching and Teacher Education</i> , 22, 961-972.	*Purposeful collaboration was both formal and informal.
Grant & Singh (2009). Passing the buck: This is not teacher leadership! <i>Perspectives in education</i> , 27(3). 289-301.	*ITL was exercised by teachers through "disbursed distributed leadership" (p. 291) in schools where FTL was not part of the administrative hierarchy. Administrators assigned semi-formal TL roles to experienced teachers.
Chew, J. O. A., & Andrews, D. (2010). Enabling teachers to become pedagogical leaders: Case studies in two IDEAS schools in Singapore and Australia. <i>Educational Research for Policy and Practice</i> , 9(1), 59-74.	*Two cases of specialized schools. FTLs were assigned deliberately by the school principal to facilitate school-based committees. ITLs volunteered and were supported by their peers.

Table 9 continued

Research	Distinctions between Definitions of Formal and Informal Teacher Leadership
Baecher, L. (2012). Pathways to teacher leadership among English-as-a-second language teachers: Professional development by and for emerging teacher leaders. <i>Professional Development in Education</i> , 38(2), 317-330.	*ITL to FTL was a continuum influenced by the expertise of English as a second language teachers.
Collinson, V. (2012). Leading by learning, learning by leading. <i>Professional Development in Education</i> , 38(2), 247-266.	*FTLs were a continuum from informal roles; ITLs were full-time classroom teachers who volunteered to influence colleagues' learning.
Hunzicker, J. (2012). Professional development and job embedded collaboration: How teachers learn to exercise leadership. <i>Professional Development in Education</i> , 38(2), 267-289.	*ITLs were full-time classroom teachers whose work extended beyond their classroom and their own students.
Margolis, J. & Huggins, J. S. (2012). Distributed but not defined: New teacher leader roles to change schools. <i>Journal of School Leadership</i> , 22(5), 953-981.	*Hybrid TLs were classroom teachers assigned FTLs part-time: lead teachers, peer coaches, and instructional specialists.
Portner, H. & Collins, W. E. (2014). <i>Leader of leaders: The handbook for principals on the cultivation, support, and impact of teacher-leaders</i> . Pearson.	*ITLs initiate their own leadership motivated by students' different purposes
Martin, J. M. (2018). <i>Unlocking the potential for every teacher to lead: A phenomenological study of informal teacher leadership</i> . [Doctoral thesis, Lesley University].	*Different motivations for ITLs were dependent upon personal concerns for improving student learning encouraged by collaborative, collegial relationships.
Gordon et al. (2020) Informal teacher leaders: Who they are, what they do, and how they impact teaching and learning. <i>Journal of School Leadership</i> , 31(6), 526-547.	*Many similarities between FTLs and ITLs but ITLs were not assigned as TLs; they fulfilled their roles with more passion than FTLs.
Liu, Y. (2021). Contextual influence on formal and informal teacher leadership. <i>International Journal of Educational Research Open</i> , 2(2), 1-10.	*FTLs held assigned leadership positions. ITLs did not have positions as leaders but led for "specific occasions."

Note. TL = teacher leadership TLs = teacher leaders FTLs = formal teacher leaders

ITLs = informal teacher leaders

Whitaker (1995) urged middle school principals to recognize informal teacher leaders and include them in school management decisions for suggestions and advice because teachers are critical for schools' change and improvement. The author argued that there was a significant difference in the effectiveness between schools, depending on whether or not their principals



identified and employed informal teacher leaders in managing the schools for change. The more effective school principals made use of informal teachers, whereas the less effective school principals did not. While this research was published 27 years ago, there have been calls for more informal teacher leadership research over the subsequent years (Schoot et al., 2020).

Leithwood et al. (1999) proposed that actions by formal leaders provided for organizational change and that supporting teacher leadership should be part of these actions through informal leaders. Recognition of teacher leadership was important for change because it supported teachers' agreement to the change and it motivated teachers to change. The researchers viewed the formal leaders' actions as transformational but in actuality, they were transactional in their approach to teacher leadership. Recognition was given to informal teacher leaders with the expectation that these teacher leaders could then be used to influence other teachers to accept an organizational re-design. The authors recommended cultivating teacher leadership that included teachers being involved in a problem-solving process and teachers being provided with specific, targeted professional development designed and used to enhance teachers' knowledge to achieve new organizational goals.

Gonzales and Behar-Horenstein (2004) studied five middle school informal teacher leaders who were nominated by their peers as leaders. Their research emphasized that the school's culture provided enabling conditions for teacher leadership. The authors recommended that a nested system (Bronfenbrenner, 1974) of teacher leadership, from the outside environment supporting teachers in the teachers' classrooms as individuals was necessary to inculcate teacher leadership within these schools. This research illuminated the importance of the varying levels of support for teacher leadership for it to become part of a system's fabric.

Beachum and Dentith's (2004) studied twenty-five teachers in five schools (one middle school) in an urban district, where site-based management was enacted. These teacher leaders were teachers who took on extra work outside of their classroom teaching to participate in this process. In all five schools, there were teacher grade level or subject matter teams and the formal teacher leaders were hybrid (part-time) teacher leaders who shared administrative duties part-time including teacher supervision, hiring new faculty, student discipline, and the new programs' implementation. These functions were unusual in their scope and applied to teacher leaders, many of whom were less experienced teachers. However, if a teacher had special expertise they were considered for a hybrid teacher leader role. The researchers did not provide school details, the teachers, how the teachers were chosen, and the relationships that existed between the different types of teacher leaders. Beachum and Dentith (2004) celebrated the fluidity of the two roles between teaching and leadership in these particular school communities which later research endorsed Margolis & Huggins, 2012).

Danielson (2006) coined a classic definition of an informal teacher leader; true teacher leadership, she argued, was developed spontaneously or "organically" by teachers "in response to a need or an opportunity to work with colleagues" (p. 19). Formal teacher leaders, she termed "quasi-administrators" (p. 19). They were teachers who assumed those roles distributed or developed by administrators, some of which were semi-formal. Danielson's annotations evolved from teachers' stories she collected in her work as an educational consultant, checking her observations with other educators throughout a period of one year. She developed a framework for teacher leadership in which student learning was the center point within school cultures that included the school context of teaching and learning and communications and community relations.

Teacher leadership was embedded within “settings” (Danielson, 2004, p. 59) such as a department or team, across the school, or beyond the school. Danielson provided examples of practice within these contextual components. An example was that within the contextual component of teaching and learning there were four sub-components: focusing on results, curriculum, student assessment, and teaching.

Applying the curriculum sub-component across the school setting, Danielson (2004) provided the example that teacher leaders take the initiative to “analyze the school’s curriculum against the state or district content standards” (p. 93). In each of these examples, it was teachers who took action on the task. Many of Danielson’s examples are now formally assigned to specialists whereas she noted that these roles were held informally by teachers.

Muijs and Harris (2006) researched ten English urban, suburban, and rural schools and agreed with Danielson’s (2006) conception of informal teacher leadership and suggested that “leadership is fluid and emergent rather than a fixed phenomenon.” (p. 962). They proposed that all teachers could be leaders depending upon teachers’ collaborative work. In the various schools, some teachers were formally assigned to roles that dealt with instruction and managerial roles, while others played informal leadership roles that had evolved from teachers working outside their classroom such as coaching peers, being a leader for a teacher work team, or coordinating an action research project. The genesis of these activities determined if this work was established by administrators as formal or semi-formal or if it was generated from teachers’ work as informal teacher leaders. What was important to all the teacher leadership roles was teachers’ collaboration and who distributed the leadership roles. The researchers agreed with the distributed leadership conception that leadership occurs within the workflow of the teachers’

activities working together. Teachers' voices and specific actions were not included in the research report which would have been more telling.

Grant and Singh (2009) explored distributed leadership in two high-poverty urban primary South African schools where formal teacher leadership positions were not allowed within the schools' strict formal hierarchical leadership structures. The researchers framed distributed leadership by formal leaders as "authorized or delegated" (p. 291) leadership cited in Woods (2004, p. 6) similar to semi-formal teacher leadership within work groups and committees. Informal teacher leadership was distributed by teachers within their work and referred to as "dispersed distributed" leadership (Grant & Singh, 2009, p. 292) based on Gronn's (2003) distributed leadership conceptions that recognized "spontaneity and intuitive working relations" (p. 394) (Gronn, 2003 cited in Grant & Singh, 2009, p. 292).

Another form of distributed leadership that could produce informal teacher leaders was "democratic distributed leadership" (Grant & Singh, 2009, p. 292) in which teachers worked for social justice by examining the organization's values and goals (cited in Woods, p. 7). Grant and Singh did not examine the organization but focused on the actual roles of the teacher leaders. Grant and Singh (2009) first used a level of analysis categorizing teacher leadership into zones that progressed from zone 1 (the classroom) to zone 2 (working outside the classroom with other teachers and with students for extra-curricular activities), to zone 3 (whole school) to zone 4 (between schools in the community) (p. 294 cited in Grant, 2008, p. 93). They found that informal teacher leadership did not progress beyond zone 2 and distributed leadership was limited to delegated leadership except when teachers collaborated and dispersed leadership among themselves. They then employed Grant's (2008) second level of analysis to determine six

teacher leadership roles that were all formally sanctioned and assigned to experienced teachers as semi-formal roles. The six roles were:

1. Continuing to teach and improve one's teaching
2. Providing curriculum development knowledge.
3. Leading in-service education and assisting other teachers.
4. Participating in performance evaluation of teaching.
5. Organizing and leading peer reviews of school practice.
6. Participating in school-level decision-making. (Grant & Singh, 2009)

These teacher leadership conceptions were directly connected to the schools' context underscoring the importance of detailing context when describing teacher leadership.

In two case studies of Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement (IDEA) schools in Australia and Singapore, Chew and Andrews (2010) viewed informal teacher leadership as pedagogical leadership. This frame of teacher leadership was exhibited by teachers who stepped forward and volunteered to share their teaching through video-tapping in a project created to advance teacher and student learning. The teacher leaders were called informal because they did not have titles but were semi-formal teacher leaders who volunteered to be on an administrative created committee during their schools' reform processes for curriculum and instruction.

Collinson (2012) studied secondary-level teachers identified by their peers as excellent teacher leaders throughout different regions in the United States. These teachers completed a survey and then a select group was interviewed to determine how they became informal teacher leaders. First, they became deep learners through a variety of methods to create innovative instructional strategies for their own classrooms. They then shared these strategies with others. The wide range of primarily informal learning methods included:

- collaboration with a mentor or team-teaching
- having supportive relationships outside the school such as with parents, partnerships with local organizations, and professional networks
- peer relationships
- their students
- active membership in professional organizations
- changed schools from those that were not supportive
- observed colleagues
- consulted with other teachers
- volunteered and served on committees
- participated in professional organizations
- provided professional development

All of these learning activities evidenced a deep commitment to their learning, their students' learning, and their colleagues' learning with a focus on learning, not leadership. The teacher leadership research reviewers in Appendix 1 also found that teacher leaders learned from a variety of methods.

Margolis and Huggins (2012) studied six hybrid teacher leaders, and five middle school teachers, in four school districts using Gordan's (2004) three models of teacher leadership to promote teachers' professional development:

1. Lead teachers, and expert teachers provided support for local school needs, such as a teacher assigned to work with others on deconstructing a subject area curriculum to incorporate new standards.
2. Multiple leaders distributing leadership roles out to teachers who had the interest and the capabilities, such as mentoring new teachers.

3. Every teacher is a leader with teachers assuming leadership functions for change, such as teachers serving in professional learning communities and making changes in their classrooms in collaboration with each other.

From these models, the researchers developed the hybrid teacher leadership model that increased formal teacher leadership. Teachers were assigned within a content area to work with teachers or to model exemplary teaching. Hybrid teacher leaders were positioned between a full-time formal role without assigned students to teach and an informal teacher leadership role in which teachers were full-time teachers. Many of these hybrid teacher leadership positions were coaches or instructional specialists who worked with teachers to increase their effectiveness. Their positions were seen as part of the administrative hierarchy with relationship connections to other classroom teachers.

A major detriment to this evolving teacher leadership model in these particular schools was the lack of role definition, which was to come from the multiple outside funding sources, the district, and the school. Frequent administrative changes also contributed to this lack of role clarity. No clear structures had been adopted for the hybrid teacher leadership implementation.

Therefore, in this study, the hybrid teacher leaders informally adopted their role definitions. All of these factors led to the “misuse, underuse, and inefficient use” of the teacher leaders’ skills and potential (Margolis & Huggins, 2011, p. 971). Because of the ill-defined implementation, the study’s authors reported a deterioration in peer-to-peer relationships, reform actions that were uncoordinated, professional development not focused on classroom needs, and no accountability for the hybrid teacher leaders who had first been identified because of their informal teacher leadership.

Gordon et al. (2021) conducted informal teacher leadership research that involved querying other professionals, principals, higher education faculty, and other teachers in four states. These other professionals reported that the actions of informal teacher leaders primarily provided informal mentoring to other teachers. Informal teacher leaders did this by one-on-one advisement, providing support through listening, and informally coaching their peers. Their actions took place from within a layered system of leadership with movement from the classroom to a whole grade level or content area to the whole school analogous to Fairman and Mackenzie' (2012) teacher leaders' sphere of influence and the recommendations from Gonzales and Behar-Horenstein (2004) based on Bronfenbrenner (1977) on creating a nested system of leadership support. Figure 4 illustrates this nested system.

**Figure 4**

*A Nested System for Informal Teacher Leadership*





At the school level beyond their own leadership in classrooms and perhaps overlapping with grade level and content areas, Gordan et al. (2021) found that informal teacher leaders involved themselves in four collaborative leadership functions:

1. Served as a member of school improvement teams.
2. Shared school improvement ideas.
3. Involved in shared decision-making initiatives.
4. Led school improvement planning and implementation.

By volunteering for these various functions, informal teacher leaders integrated or ingratiated themselves into where they served as leaders. Also, they assumed the lead to support students, beyond their own classrooms with sponsored student groups, and/or advocated for individual students or groups of students. However, many of these roles were actually semi-formal because they were developed by administrators such as school improvement teams.

Depending upon a school system's structural context, leadership at the inter-school level or at the district level presented opportunities for informal teacher leadership (Gordan, et al., 2021). In their study results, the researchers provided a comparison between formal and informal teacher leaders. They relied partially on classical leadership considerations, which focused on traits and functions (Haslam & Reicher, 2016). Table 10 illustrates these comparisons.

**Table 10***Formal & Informal Teacher Leaders' Comparisons*

<b>Formal Teacher Leaders</b>	<b>Informal Teacher Leaders</b>
<p>Assigned to be mentors or coaches for beginning teachers or teachers in trouble.</p> <p>Assigned leadership authority at the school level or grade level as specialists or coordinators. At the school level, served on teams sometimes assigned as the designated leader.</p> <p>Committed, confident, well-organized, empathetic, flexible, reflective</p> <p>Content and pedagogical knowledge, communication skills, collaborative skills, and problem-solving skills.</p> <p>Successful formal teacher leaders had the trust and respect of other teachers</p> <p>Relationships with administrators and other teachers were problematic when teacher leaders evaluated peers or assumed quasi-administrative duties. In some contexts, this was collaborative with other teachers.</p> <p>Positive impact on teachers' professional growth and student achievement as part of a leadership team.</p> <p>Recognized and assigned as leaders for specific tasks, roles, and functions.</p>	<p>Mentored and coached by checking in with other teachers and provided support when needed or requested and collaboratively.</p> <p>Shared ideas, materials, and other resources; took the lead in group discussions.</p> <p>At the school level, served on teams, and was affirmed as the leader by other teachers. Teacher leadership rotated when necessary.</p> <p>Same as formal teacher leaders but their level of caring was deeper, more passion-driven, compassionate, and courageous as advocates.</p> <p>Skillssets were the same as formal teacher leaders who emphasized their learning and modeled these skills.</p> <p>Stronger relationship bonds with other teachers beyond trust and respect.</p> <p>Relationships with administrators were generally agreeable and respectful. Administrators depended upon their largesse. Sometimes, other teachers observed administrators taking advantage of informal teacher leaders' volunteering.</p> <p>Same as formal teacher leaders but with more emphasis given to their advocacy for students beyond their classrooms. They had classrooms that modeled communities of learners.</p> <p>All teachers had the capacity to lead, with some having more capacity and commitment depending on many factors.</p>

*Notes.* TL = teacher leadership TLs = teacher leaders.

From "Informal teacher leaders: Who they are, what they do, and how they impact teaching and learning" by S. P. Gordon et al., *Journal of School Leadership*, 2021, 31(6), pp. 526-547.

Gordon, et al. (2021) claimed that the major difference between formal and informal teacher leaders was that informal teacher leaders had a special inclination for the informal role. Within a formal leadership hierarchy, administrators assigned formal teacher leaders to quasi-administrative roles and expectations for fulfilling those roles. Formal teacher leaders did not have the luxury to focus on their primary passion, unlike informal teacher leaders. Formal

teacher leaders were expected to do certain tasks and to be evaluated on these tasks. This aspect of the differences between formal and informal teacher leadership suggested possible disadvantages of being a formal teacher leader rather than an informal teacher leader. It also provided one possible answer to the question of why more teachers do not take formal leadership roles. Gordan, et al. (2021) focused on informal teacher leaders' work through observation and commentary by others and did not observe the informal teacher leaders.

In 2021, Y. Liu produced a study that compared formal and informal teacher leadership in different contexts. She defined the contexts as different countries and her research questions included leadership responsibilities, and school and teacher-level factors. For the comparisons, Y. Liu used data available through a larger data set, the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS). The findings presented broad interpretations with scoring based on responses from principals and teachers with yes or no answers to leadership responsibilities held by principals, formal teacher leaders, and informal teacher leaders. This was noteworthy because the Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning (CALL®) researchers (Blitz et al. 2014) indicated that they could not ask survey questions that specifically mentioned informal teacher leadership because it varied depending on the school context and survey respondents' understanding of the terms.

The United States had a below-average score for formal and informal teacher leadership with nine countries having an above-average score for informal teacher leadership: Italy, Belgium, Korea, Romania, Croatia, Poland, Serbia, Sweden, and Finland (Liu, Y., 2021). The findings indicated that informal teacher leaders had less responsibility for hiring and firing teachers, deciding teachers' salaries, and school budgeting but there was no uniformity between formal and informal teacher leadership functions overall across the various country contexts. The

researcher did not examine what or how school structures existed to determine how teacher leaders were involved in the aforementioned decision-making. Measures that were not examined included “setting the school direction and creating the school mission and vision and building a positive school culture” (p. 9).

Focusing on this group across countries, Y. Liu (2021) found that informal teacher leaders were more likely to be female, have more experience, and have higher educational degrees. Another finding was that schools with more non-white students had more informal teacher leaders and schools with higher student poverty had fewer. Y. Liu emphasized that there was no theoretical framework for what different types of teacher leaders do in various contexts and she called for more in-depth qualitative research within each country to determine the nuances of teacher leadership.

Informal teacher leaders were less likely to be recognized for their work and often their work was unseen. However, it has been shown that they are essential to a school’s operation and have positive power for collaboration and sustenance of a school’s goals when supported. There are still questions that remain about informal teacher leadership that this study will explore.

### **Summary**

Several points from this literature review are relevant to the current study. Leadership in organizations, including schools, has changed as a reflection of the complexity of our times and the realization that more leadership involvement by others close to the necessary change produces a better outcome or in the case of schools, more teacher and student learning. As it applies to this study, the nuances of informal teacher leadership and the identification of semi-formal teacher leadership expanding leadership were to be determined.

The definition of teacher leadership varied by context, which posed a conundrum for those who hoped to compare findings across different settings and situations. However, providing a flexible definition such as York-Barr and Dukes (2004) should allow for an exploration of teacher leadership across a typology of formal, semi-formal, and informal classifications.

Middle schools provided a natural context for informal teacher leadership within the structures of teams and interdisciplinary work along with a focus on the social-emotional development of young adolescents. Collaborative work centered on literacy within content areas allowed for teacher leadership opportunities. The current study's choices of middle schools and literacy that allowed for collaboration were endorsed by the literature.

The study of informal teacher leadership through the voices of those teacher leaders was a need throughout the literature. The definitional issue regarding teacher leadership remained but using multiple perspectives to examine the informal teacher leadership phenomena may address this issue.

Research on informal leadership in organizations has substantiated that informal leadership exists as an important phenomenon in all varied organizations and its importance has been underscored as an area of need to study. Connections between informal teacher leadership in schools and informal leadership in other types of organizations that require employees to exercise creativity and judgment, and work together provide important clues to what research on informal leadership in schools should look for.

Even with all the literature on teacher leadership, informal leadership, middle school leadership, and literacy leadership, we are still left with more questions than answers that the current study plans to address.

Under what circumstances are some leadership roles inherent in classroom teacher roles or that other specialists play in their “regular” expected work with students?

What is the relationship between teacher leadership and the collaboration that is increasingly expected of teachers?

In what ways do middle schools’ design and processes require and support teachers to work collaboratively with each other and where do they assume leadership through this collaboration?

In what ways does the need for all teachers to find ways of improving students’ literacy skills require them to work collaboratively and provide leadership to each other?

How do teachers decide what leadership roles different teachers will play and if choices of roles are not made explicitly, how do they come about?

What can motivate more teachers to assume leadership responsibility in groups beyond their classrooms and to learn the necessary skills for their success?

How can prospective and current administrators learn about the inherent benefits of teacher leadership?

What are successful ways of recognizing informal teacher leadership?

These questions and others are explored in this current study.

### Chapter 3: Research Design and Methods

Case studies are empirical research methods that can be used to explore, describe, and illustrate contemporary and ongoing phenomena (Yin, 1994, p. 15). I chose a case study approach because the study was a current situation with research questions that fit this approach. The questions explored how teacher leaders in three middle schools work when implementing new state learning standards. These case studies were each separate and then compared with each other rather than a multi-comparative case study that begins with a theory and evaluates each case with that theory (Yin, 1994). This resulted in my decision to provide a chapter for each case and a comparison chapter deviating from the traditional five-chapters dissertation. In each case, the phenomena of teachers working collaboratively were compared to provide teacher leadership illustrations within distributive leadership extant in the schools.

In case study research, phenomena are intertwined with context (Yin, 1994). Studying the perceptions and understandings of teachers, principals, and other school professionals about educational leadership within their schools provided an opportunity to examine the intersection of those understandings. This teacher leadership study focused on three New York State middle schools rural, suburban, and urban. Responses to questions depended upon each school's context and its approach to adopting the Next Generation New York State English Language Arts (ELA) and Literacy Learning Standards.

Context has been found to have a crucial influence on how individuals behave in schools (Min et al., 2016). Context is defined as "the set of circumstances" in a particular school's environment with its participants (Savard & Mizoguchi, 2019, p. 4). Context is also important when studying the same phenomenon from different vantage points with different actors who are likely to have various perspectives. The context of a district and its school system, where that system's environment is situated, the characteristics of that environment, the demographics, and

the system's circumstances and history, are more powerful than the actions of a single person (Greeno, 1998; Liu, Y., 2021)). Knowing the context of a school is essential for understanding actions taken by individuals and groups (Berg, 2020; Eckert, 2018; Min et al., 2016; Quintero, 2017).

### **Selection of the Topic**

Scholars and educators are paying more attention to teacher leadership (Barth, 2013). There are over one hundred published, empirical, non-theoretical, and theoretical studies of teacher leadership published over 28 years (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teachers themselves acknowledge other teachers who influenced their practice as leaders (Spillane, Hallett, & Diamond, 2003). Additionally, middle school researchers Yoon et al. (2015) reviewed middle school studies from 2000 to 2013 and found that while forty percent of the studies focused on curriculum and instruction, only four percent of the studies addressed school leaders: building level administrators, teacher leaders, and content level coaches. They concluded that there was a need for more research on the collaboration theme and to give “voice to . . . teachers . . . in the middle-level grades.” (p. 14).

Middle school researchers in the American Education Research Association Middle-Level Special Interest Research Group (Ellerbeck et al., 2016) identified “Middle-Grade Schools and Structures” as an essential area for middle-level education research. These structures include “components . . . that organize people” (p. 26). When these structures included teams, they provided for leadership functions in which teacher leadership can emerge. “Leadership in work teams is often distributed across a number of different individuals” (Mehra et al., 2006).

Therefore, team structures provide leadership opportunities. When a team understands and agrees



with its purpose or goals and all team members are considered in the team's deliberations a team shares leadership in which informal leadership can emerge (Carson et al., 2007).

What also determined my decision to focus on middle schools was that middle schools were the least represented of school sites in an analysis of seventy-eight teacher leadership studies reported in two teacher leadership research reviews (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) as illustrated in Table 11. Two later teacher leadership research reviews did not report the school level in their reviewed studies (Nguyen et al., 2019; Schott et al., 2020).

**Table 11**

*Teacher Leadership Studies by School Level*

Elementary Schools	Middle Schools	K-8 Schools	High Schools	Secondary Schools	Other Combinations
8	4	7	8	5	33

*Note.* N=78 studies

Five K-8 studies used the same data set; secondary schools include upper middle school levels; other combinations included studies with no grade designations, higher education programs or professional development schools with no grade designations, reviews of studies, districts, or a variety of school levels without the various levels explained.

After reviewing these studies, I determined that middle schools were ripe for studying teacher collaboration and the subsequent teacher leadership that develops. Since patterns of leadership vary from one school to another with differing contexts, for school leadership studies the choice of the level was important (Eckert, 2018; Morgan & Chapman, 2009; Quintero, 2017).

I chose to focus on how the implementation of New York State's ELA and literacy standards affected a school's teacher leadership because the implementation of the same standards as required of all schools and the varying schools' approaches could be compared. The

standards' implementation was also broad enough to encompass different choices so that each school made its own choice that depended upon its policy, practices, and processes.

Implementing new standards for student literacy allowed for teacher leadership to be viewed through an important change lens to compare the three case studies rather than a general view, which would be used if studying one school.

### **New York State Context**

As each school was subject to the larger system of state context, a brief background of this context is important for understanding. In 2010, the New York State Department of Education under the direction of the Commissioner of Education Dr. John King filed an application for a federal Race to the Top grant at the behest of the governor, the state legislature, the Board of Regents, and the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), the larger of the state's two teacher unions. Because of the state's dire fiscal situation resulting from the 2008 national recession and cuts to New York State schools and programs, obtaining this grant was considered critical. In applying for the grant of seven hundred million dollars, the State committed itself to adopt and immediately began implementing the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). In addition, the State committed itself to create procedures for evaluating teachers and administrators by incorporating the use of student performance data, including data on standardized tests.

The CCLS were promulgated and promoted in 2009-2010 by two national not-for-profit organizations, the National Governors' Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers (commissioners of education) assisted by Achieve, another not-for-profit organization made up of national business leaders and legislators. The CCLS specified English language arts and mathematics student learning standards by grade level. For the federal grant, there was a co-

commitment to develop statewide tests based on the CCLS for grades four to eight. Previously, the state could develop its own standards for the testing required under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). These new CCLS necessitated schools and teachers to change curriculum, instruction, and interim assessments to inform instruction.

The federal administration signaled, through the grant weighting review, that adoption of the CCLS and a co-commitment to evaluate teachers and administrators using student test scores would be weighted heavily in ranking states' grant applications. Although technically not requirements for receiving Race-to-the-Top funding, the heavy weighting of these two factors effectively determined which states would be funded. This produced a grant application that committed New York State and its schools to rapid implementation of the CCLS and the development and adoption of state structures and processes for evaluating teachers and school leaders. This evaluation commitment included using students' performance measures and their scores on state tests. Subsequently, the already required state tests under NCLB would now need to reflect the CCLS.

To meet the grant deadlines for implementation, these major changes were adopted very quickly with little time for full deliberation of their systemic impact and unintended consequences. This eventually precipitated accusations from teachers, school administrators, parents, students, higher education, and NYSUT that the State had committed itself to "too much, too fast" and compromised chances of implementing major changes in curriculum and instruction by linking them with controversial changes in teacher evaluation (Shedd, 2015).

The application's original high-ranking supporters fell away, with others encouraged to leave their jobs: the commissioner, the chancellor of the Board of Regents, and elected heads of NYSUT all stepped down or moved on to other positions by the end of 2015. The legislators and

governor advocated for change to dampen the uproar but held onto the educator evaluation system with the student testing component.

The State Board of Regents hired a new commissioner who immediately began planning for reconceptualizing the learning standards. The action plan that resulted involved classroom teachers, school administrators, and parents meeting over time through multiple collaboration structures for consideration and feedback. The “next generation” of standards was then built upon the previous CCLS and was expanded in-depth through statements about the importance of reading and writing, and an emphasis on literacy expectations in science, social studies, and the arts. With the governor’s tacit agreement, the commissioner adjusted the deadlines for using state test scores to evaluate teachers and administrators, although the principle requiring student performance data to be included as evaluation criteria was retained.

With NCLB’s reauthorization in 2015, a new federal law was passed, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This law still required student testing as part of each state’s individual plan and New York State chose to use the reconceptualized or next-generation standards as part of their plan for the state and schools to receive federal monies, about eight percent of a school’s income (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). A small portion that directs school policy, or in colloquial language this is “the tail that wags the dog.” This study is not intended to evaluate the standards themselves, nor the quality of their implementation, but to examine the leadership roles that teachers and administrators played in implementing them.

The State released a Next Generation English Language Arts Learning Standards Implementation Roadmap in April 2018. The roadmap included three phases: awareness, capacity building with extensive professional development, and full implementation including the resultant state tests. This study was initiated in the fall of 2018 and conducted in the 2018-19

school year when the schools were beginning to be engaged in the “awareness” phase of standards implementation.<sup>1</sup>

The biggest changes to the Next Generation New York State English Language Arts and Literacy Standards were emphasis and depth. This emphasis was on literacy in the content areas and the lifelong practices of reading and writing. Created by a collaboration between a number of individuals and groups these collaborators attempted to provide more clarity about what teachers were to do. These next-generation standards were multi-dimensional and integrated within discipline-specific content and literacy learning, such as in the science standards (State Education Department, 2018). The science standards framework contained science and engineering practices, disciplinary core ideas, crosscutting concepts, and connections to the ELA/Literacy standards (State Education Department, 2021b). This was especially relevant to the cases in this study because not all of the informal teacher leaders were ELA teachers but taught other content areas, e.g., science and social studies, and an emphasis on literacy was given in these other content areas with teachers utilizing the content to teach literacy.

The awareness development phase then and currently has been primarily coordinated by the state’s regional Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) that serve as extensions of the State Education Department collaborating with school administrators such as superintendents and principals. This study’s data collection took place the school year before the pandemic when the original raising awareness phase was in effect. However, the three schools

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<sup>1</sup>2018 was the year before the covid-19 virus shutdown and remote learning for schools was implemented. The environment and context of schools changed dramatically. Given the schools’ pandemic shut down in March 2020, the State The Board of Regents changed the implementation roadmap in April 2021. Currently, the phases of the roadmap are Phase I Raise Awareness to end in the 2021-2022 school year. Phase II Build Capacity with spring of 2022 the last state tests aligned to the former standards. Phase III Full Implementation was expected beginning in the school year 2022-2023 for grades PK-8 instruction including new state testing (New York State Education Department, 2021a).

were at various phases of implementation beyond awareness. The suburban school was actually implementing a new standards-based curriculum. The rural school content area teachers were integrating literacy within their curriculums and the urban school was beginning to adopt a new ELA curriculum and content area teachers were beginning to integrate literacy teaching strategies.

Administrative services of the state Commissioner of Education are delegated to and administered by thirty-seven district BOCES superintendents across the state, except for New York City which has its own system. They serve as the Commissioner's representatives in addition to serving regional boards of education selected by component school districts assigned to the various BOCES. These regional BOCES are part of a unique organizational structure in state education governance that offers partial state funding to school districts that share BOCES-supervised services across two or more districts. While various states have regional educational services, the New York State BOCES structure and legislative regulatory directives are different in their breadth of influence (Kachris, 1987). In this study, the three school districts were component school districts of three separate BOCES.

### **Selection of the Cases**

The three schools were located geographically in the mid-state area of New York State's "upstate," (Bird, 2003, p. 6); named such because it is the part of the state north and west of New York City. The choice of schools was guided by particular considerations. One was that the school districts were physically accessible from my home office within one and a half hours and that other Syracuse University researchers were not working in these districts. This provided an exceptionally large geographic region in central New York, the southern tier, and the foothills of the Catskills. In New York State, there are 731 school districts of distinct types, such as city

districts and consolidated districts that encompass towns, hamlets, and villages. Forty-two school districts and fifty middle schools were in the area considered for participation in this study. Elected local boards of education govern these districts as required by state law and by the Commissioner of Education regulations that the State Education Department administers under the State Board of Regents (New York State Education Department, 2021c).

One criterion for selecting these particular schools was that they are distinct middle schools; not part of a kindergarten to grade eight configuration or a junior high as part of a secondary school. This factor was essential because middle schools in and of themselves were developed to respond to early adolescent psychological, emotional, and cognitive needs distinct from younger elementary students and older high school adolescents (New York State Education Department, 2006). Mixing a school's organizational components would create a factor that could distract from a finer tuning of the school's context. My own school district was eliminated from the study, as was the district of one member of my dissertation committee who serves as a school superintendent, avoiding two conflicts of interest.

The next consideration was that the districts in which the school was located be different from each other. First, they are designated rural, suburban, and urban using federal definitions based on geography that relied on boundaries and population in relationship to urban areas. There were four categories: city, suburban, town, and rural with three subcategories for each (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Because in New York State town districts are combined into consolidated districts, the town classification was disregarded.

Districts and schools were compared based on their combined wealth ratios (CWR) determined by each district's property wealth per pupil and income wealth per pupil. A district's

wealth is a factor in student achievement with wealthier districts providing more advantages for students' achievement (LaFortune et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2018).

I applied the district wealth comparisons provided by The New York Statewide School Finance Consortium (2018). These comparisons between districts were expressed along a continuum with a decile rating from the poorest indicated by the numeral 1 to the wealthiest indicated by the numeral 10. Each district under consideration had a different decile rating. The rural district was rated 1, the poorest district in the study. The suburban district was rated a 5 average rating and the urban district was rated 2, having higher levels of student poverty than the rural district but more economic advantages for taxing resources.

My final and most critical determination concerned access to the districts through the school superintendents. As an outside researcher mostly unknown to school superintendents, my gaining access took from spring to the end of summer 2018 to complete. This included Syracuse University's Institutional Review Board approval requiring signed documents from the approving districts' superintendents. Three districts were initially approached and declined to be included in the study. The rural middle school principal had recently completed a terminal degree and was sympathetic to my query through a former colleague in the BOCES. This rural principal provided access to the superintendent. Finally, in the late summer of 2018, permission to research in each of the three districts' middle schools was sanctioned by their superintendents, who were all alumni of Syracuse University.

After attaining access to the urban and suburban districts through their school superintendents, each made final access to the middle school contingent upon their middle school principal's agreement. Each superintendent assured the principals that they had the superintendents' permission for the middle school to participate. After negotiating with the



principals by phone, I received access to the schools and their teachers at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year.

### **The Schools**

The middle schools and districts accessed were: **Twin Bridges Middle School** a rural middle school in the Twin Bridges Central School District, **Osage Middle School**, a suburban middle school near a large city in the Eastern Foothills Central School District, and **Sunrise Middle School**, a small city middle school, in the River City School District. Because of confidentiality agreements, all names: middle schools, districts, and participants are pseudonyms. These three schools with different geographic locales were typical prototypes of middle schools across upstate New York. I was never employed by any of the study school districts. The rural district was in my teacher center region, but I knew none of the middle school teachers, the principal, or the superintendent.

Table 12 provides the demographic factors of the three districts and Table 13 provides the schools' factors.

**Table 12***School District Demographic Comparisons*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Twin Bridges Central School District</b>	<b>Eastern Foothills Central School District</b>	<b>River City School District</b>
<i>District population</i>	4,947	12,756	45,140
<i>District population with bachelor's degree or higher</i>	16.3%	45.8%	25.8%
<i>Number of school buildings</i>	2	4	11
<i>Student population</i>	716	1,735	5,008
<i>Teachers</i>	77	166	528
<i>Administrators</i>	6	9	58
<i>Other staff (a)</i>	85	135	275
<i>Combined Wealth Ratio (CWR)</i>	1	5	2
<i>Student Racial Diversity Nonwhite</i>	7%	15%	58%
<i>Students with Economic Disadvantages</i>	61%	20%	76%
<i>English Language Learners</i>	0%	1%	5%
<i>Students with Disabilities</i>	13%	10%	19%
<i>Graduation Rate All Students</i>	84%	95%	63%
<i>Advanced Regents Diploma</i>	25%	76%	19%
<i>Dropout Rate for all students</i>	8%	3%	17%
<i>Students Opting out of NYS ELA tests</i>	18.8%	18.7%	1.7%

*Note.* a. Includes teaching assistants, River City factor was teaching assistants only

b. CWR 1= highest need to 10 = least need; NYS = New York State

Students with economic disadvantages: participation or their family's participation in economic assistance programs, free or reduced-price lunch programs, Social Security Insurance, Food Stamps, Foster Care, Refugee Assistance, Earned Income Tax Credit, Home Energy Assistance Program, Safety Net Assistance, Bureau of Indian Affairs, or Family Assistance: Temporary

Assistance for Needy Families. If one student in a family is identified as low-income, all students from that household (economic unit) may be identified as low-income.

U. S. Census Reporter (2019), New York State School Report Cards (2021d) reporting 2018-2019 School Year Data, Statewide School Finance Consortium (2021)

**Table 13***Middle Schools' Demographic Comparisons*

<b>2018-2019 School Year Factors</b>	<b>Twin Bridges Rural Middle School</b>	<b>Osage Suburban Middle School</b>	<b>Sunrise Urban Middle School</b>
<i>Grade Levels</i>	5-8	5-8	6-8
<i>Student population</i>	203	543	557
<i>Number of Teachers</i>	29	45	69
<i>Pupil/Teacher Ratio</i>	7/1	12/1	8/1
<i>Teachers teaching out of certification area</i>	0	0	15
<i>Teachers with fewer than 4 years of experience*</i>	4%	5%	34%
<i>Teachers with 4-20 years of experience*</i>	61%	48%	46%
<i>Teachers with 21+ years of experience*</i>	36%	48%	19%
<i>Per pupil cost*</i>	\$25,042.	\$16,795.	\$20,983.
<i>Number of Administrators</i>	1	1.5	3
<i>Teacher/Admin Ratio</i>	29/1	30/1	23/1
<i>Principals' tenure</i>	2nd year	9 <sup>th</sup> year	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
<i>Nonwhite Students</i>	6%	13%	67%
<i>ELA Test proficiency rate<sup>2</sup></i>	25%	41%	12%
<i>Students' chronic absenteeism</i>	15.5%	6.5%	32%
<i>Students classified as Economically Disadvantaged</i>	59%	21%	84%
<i>Students eligible for Free &amp; Reduced Lunch</i>	55%	20%	79%
<i>English Language Learners</i>	0%	1%	10%
<i>Students classified as disabled</i>	13%	11%	20%
<i>Need/Resource Capacity</i>	The highest high-need rural	Average need suburban	Highest high need other urban

*Note.* \* New data was available in 2019-20 for comparison <sup>2</sup>Proficiency = percent of students who achieved a level 3 and 4 on the state tests. New York State Department of Education (2021d), School Report Cards

**Twin Bridges Middle School** was a rural school fifteen minutes driving time away from a small city. It was similar to the suburban Osage Middle School in that it had an experienced faculty and a less diverse student population but more like the urban Sunrise Middle School with higher poverty of an estimated three out of five students classified as economically disadvantaged, a less experienced administrator, a lower pupil/teacher ratio, higher per-pupil pupil cost, and low CWR.

**Osage Middle School**, the suburban middle school, had a more stable administration and faculty. The assistant principal did not evaluate teachers, unlike the assistant principals in Sunrise Middle School, so while the teacher-to-administration ratio appears similar to Twin Bridges it is actually 45/1. As a suburban school, the ELA proficiency level was 41% a little less than the state's level of 45% but higher than the county level of 36%, which included a large city.

**Sunrise Middle School** was a needy urban school: teachers with less experience, a diverse student body with extreme poverty, four out of five students classified as economically disadvantaged and eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, and more students who needed special academic accommodations were classified as disabled or who needed English language learning. Poverty factors have a relationship to chronic absenteeism related to lower student performance as measured by state tests (Aucejo& Romano, 2016; Garcia & Weiss, 2018).

### **Teacher Leadership Definitions**

For this study, York-Barr and Duke's (2004) proposed teacher leadership definition was used: "teacher leadership is a process by which teachers, individually or collectively, **influence** their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities **to improve teaching and learning practices** with the aim of increased student learning and achievement" ( pp. 287-288,

emphasis mine). Teacher leaders engage in a process of influence for the improvement of teaching and learning. Their actions are for these key purposes.

### ***Formal Teacher Leaders***

Formal teacher leaders are teachers who were designated and assigned to play teacher leadership roles, which may include being recruited for the role full-time or part-time and they are usually compensated within their regular salary for these leadership roles (Portner & Collins, 2014). A part-time formal teacher leader may be referred to as a hybrid-teacher leader (Margolis, 2021).

### ***Informal Teacher Leaders***

There are teachers who may “emerge spontaneously or organically from the teacher ranks” (Danielson, 2006, p. 2) and are recognized by themselves and others to engage in the teacher leadership process of influence.

### **Data Collection and Participation**

For this study, I used four data sources: focused interviews, the CALL® a school-wide survey for descriptive purposes, documents sourced from the participants and online, and field notes. These data were collected from a mix of participants depending on their circumstances and their willingness to participate in the interviews and to provide survey data.

Document data collection started in the spring of 2018. The interviews, field notes, and survey data were collected from the summer of 2018 to June 2019. Additional document data was collected through winter 2021. These last documents were from the New York State Education Report cards that 2021 reported on the school year 2018-2019.

### **The Interviews**

“One of the most important sources of case study information is the interview” (Yin, 1994, p. 84). Interviews are good for concentrating on the topic of interest and interviews can provide multiple interpretations from the various participants. Interviewing was my primary way to get the informants’ perceptions. Direct observation was not part of the research design but I obtained direct observations by invitation. This was only made possible in two faculty meetings, a committee meeting, and one collaborative meeting between teachers.

***Interview participation process.***

First, each school principal agreed to be interviewed and allowed me to ask his or her faculty members to be interviewed. During this first interview with each principal, I asked the principals to identify teacher leaders both formal and informal. The principals agreed that formal teacher leaders were those who were named as such. Only in Sunrise Middle School did the principal identify a formal teacher leader, the instructional coach. Neither the principal of Osage Middle School nor the principal of Twin Bridges Middle School identified any formal teacher leaders.

All the school principals identified informal teacher leaders when asked to identify ELA and literacy teacher leaders in the sixth and seventh grades. All the principals included the school librarians in this group recognizing their essential role in reading.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Subsequent analysis revealed that a semi-formal category needed to be added, but principals interpreted teacher leaders to be those in formal and informal roles. However, there were teachers who played semi-formal leadership roles by virtue of their positions and/or designations by the principal, the superintendent, other central office administrators, or teachers within their schools. These are teachers that may be classified in one and/or two categories. This definition was separated from Portner and Collins’s (2014) definition of formal teacher leaders.

1) Those who formally volunteer, are assigned, or are selected as an add-on basis to their teaching for specific functions such as committee members, content area chair, and grade level chairs. They may be compensated for these add-on functions with a stipend.

2) Those who have implicit leadership functions noted in their job descriptions or professional training as part of their jobs such as school librarians and school counselors.

3) Those who are chosen by their peers for formal leadership positions such as union president or head of a professional organization.

These identified teachers were then recruited individually through email. All but one of the recommended teachers in each of the suburban and rural middle schools responded affirmatively and agreed to be participants. In the urban middle school, no teachers recommended by the principal responded except the school librarian. Subsequently, one teacher recommended later in the year by an assistant principal agreed to participate.

No teachers in the rural and suburban schools would commit to being interviewed until October after the school year was in progress. In the Osage Middle School, teachers agreed to be interviewed only on a specific day of the week because of their responsibilities for after-school programs with students on the other days. All of the teachers who agreed to be interviewed in Osage were those assigned to teach sixth-grade ELA.

In Twin Bridges, two of the teachers taught ELA exclusively, the others integrated teaching literacy with other subjects. The one teacher who eventually agreed to be interviewed in the urban Sunrise School integrated literacy instruction in the one subject he was assigned to teach. (His subject is not identified here to maintain confidentiality.) The librarians in all three schools agreed to participate.

Those who replied affirmatively to be interviewed were all the school librarians in the three schools and in the rural middle school, the sixth grade ELA teacher, and the sixth grade Academic Instructional Support (AIS) teacher. In the suburban middle school, all of the sixth-grade teachers who taught ELA and were in the process of adopting a new curriculum agreed to be interviewed. In the urban school, no teachers responded to this initial email.

After a research presentation at a faculty meeting in each school, all teachers were contacted by email and asked to identify colleagues that they turn to for teaching advice. In response, three suggestions were received from the rural Twin Bridges faculty: the sixth-grade



social studies/science teacher, the seventh-grade science teacher, and the sixth-grade ELA teacher. They were contacted and agreed to be interviewed.

At these same faculty meetings, all middle school teachers were invited to self-identify as ones who assisted other teachers and to participate in the interviews. At the Twin Bridges rural school, two teachers replied, a special education teacher and a social studies/science teacher. Following the faculty meeting at the Osage suburban school, no teachers responded.

During interviews with the Osage sixth grade ELA teachers and the school librarian, I asked them for informal teacher leader suggestions. Those suggested were contacted by email. Their colleagues declined including the ELA seventh-grade teacher and the assistant superintendent.

Immediately following the faculty meeting at the Sunrise urban school, the formal teacher leader instructional coach indicated she was willing to participate but did not respond to later emails or a note in her mailbox. No other Sunrise teacher initially volunteered to participate. Emails and personal letters were sent to sixth and seventh-grade teachers; no one responded. The principal sent text messages to those he had recommended originally with no response.

Finally, one of the assistant principals recommended a novice teacher whom she considered a teacher leader and asked him to participate, which he did for one interview. This teacher also presented at a later education conference and this presentation provided an additional understanding of his leadership work and perspectives. It was hypothesized that other Sunrise teachers declined to participate because of a widely publicized school incident. The school's principal indicated that in the past when there was negative press coverage of the school, the teachers declined to talk to anyone outside of the school.

Additionally, more teachers beyond those interviewed in all three schools provided useful survey data. Because of the confidentiality promised for the survey, they could not be identified.

Stake (1995) recommends planning for a “three-interview series” (p. 11) because he claims that single interviews do not provide a full understanding of the person and their perspectives. I found this to be true. The first interview set up the context of the experience by allowing the participant to tell how they related to the topic of collaboration on the new literacy standards and they provided a narrative on their own. It was also the beginning of a relationship between me and those interviewed, which was especially important to establish trust throughout the interview process. The second interview allowed the participants to recount their experiences with more details and to expand on their first interview, and the third interview allowed for following up on questions raised by others and the participants’ own reflections and additional issues.

In the recruitment information to principals and teachers, I proposed that there be at least two forty-five-minute interviews with individual teachers and principals and a third interview if the participants agreed. With one principal there were three interviews and with two principals, four interviews; the principals all remarked that these interviews provided a welcome time to reflect and discuss professional issues.

At Twin Bridges, I had two one-hour interviews each with two teachers, one interview with a recommended BOCES curriculum coordinator, and three with the superintendent. At Sunrise, one assistant principal participated in two interviews, and the other assistant principal, in three interviews. There was one lengthy interview with a teacher.

Fifty-four interviews were conducted over eight months from August 2018 to May 2019 with interviews from 45 minutes to an hour long, and at least one follow-up email to seven

teachers who provided answers to additional factual questions. All responded to those email requests. Table 14 provides a listing of the individuals interviewed and the number of interviews in each school.

**Table 14**

*Individuals Interviewed and Number of Interviews*

<b>Twin Bridges Middle School</b>	<b>Osage Middle School</b>	<b>East Middle School</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
6 Teachers: 16	3 Teachers: 9	1 Teacher: 1	10 Teachers 25 interviews
1 Librarian: 3	1 Librarian: 3	1 Librarian: 3	3 Librarians 9 interviews
1 Principal: 4	1 Principal: 3	1 Principal: 4	3 Principals 11 interviews
1 Superintendent: 3		2 Assistant Principals: 5	1 Superintendent 3 interviews 2 Assistant Principals 5 interviews
1 BOCES Coordinator: 1			1 BOCES Coordinator 1 interview
Total School interviews: 27	Total School interviews: 15	Total School interviews:13	Individuals: 20 Interviews: 54

All interviews took place at the participants' convenience during their planning break time. All of Twin Bridge's teacher participants were interviewed in their classrooms with no students present. For the teacher interviews in Osage, the first two interviews were in the school's office conference room with the third interviews in their classrooms by their invitation. The Sunrise teacher was interviewed in an empty team room.

The librarian at Twin Bridges was interviewed in a conference room for the first two interviews, the third was in the library at her invitation. The Osage librarian interviews were held in the technology room within the library. At Sunrise, the librarian was interviewed in a conference room for the first two interviews and in the school library for the third at her invitation. All principals, assistant principals, the superintendent, and the BOCES curriculum coordinator were interviewed in their offices.

Each individual interviewed was assured that they had the right to refuse to participate in the interviews, to refuse to answer specific questions for any reason, or to refuse to continue to participate in an interview once it had started. No participant refused to continue the interviews, declined to answer any questions, or declined to participate in follow-up interviews or emails.

### ***Securing the Interview Data.***

All interviews were audio-recorded per the signed permission of participants and confidentiality was maintained in managing all data. Each interview was recorded on my personal cell phone and then secured by Google Drive®. The audio interview data was then transferred to a home computer where it was secured on two external drives, and on a personal backup account in the cloud with Carbonite®, recommended by a computer technology professional. The audio data on the cell phone was deleted.

Initially, two professional transcriptionists transcribed fourteen of the interviews, deleting the transcriptions from their personal computers. When the transcriptionists were no longer available because of personal reasons, I used NVivo® technology for the remaining transcriptions. Using technology in this way was approved by Syracuse University's Institutional Review Board. Nothing was left in the NVivo® account or on university storage including emails, which were also transferred to the home computer.

The transcriptions were then reviewed for errors made by both the transcriptionists and NVivo®, by playing the audio recordings while reviewing the written transcriptions. Correcting each transcribed interview took three to seven hours, depending upon the transcription quality and length. Each corrected transcribed interview was then secured in a separate computer file and copied to paper and placed in a physical file accessible only by the researcher.

The appendices contain templates for the recruitment information used, the school district letter of participation, participants' consent information for both written and electronic responses, and presentation materials. No identifying information about their school is included.

### **The Survey**

I applied for and received a School of Education Graduate Student Creativity in Research Grant to secure a contract with the University of Wisconsin Center for Educational Products and Services (The Center) to utilize the Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning® (CALL) Survey on distributed leadership that Halverson and Kelley (2017) and others developed and validated.

The Center made each school's survey analysis accessible to me and that school's principal. These analyses are no longer available to the study schools as they chose not to continue their subscriptions after 2020. The results from this questionnaire provided data for a school's distributed leadership components defined within domains identified by the researchers. This description of five domains rated a school's leadership tasks compared to other schools of the same type: rural middle schools, urban middle schools, suburban middle schools, and their poverty level (Blitz & Modeste, 2015). Principals, teachers, and teaching assistants responded to the survey.

The survey results provided a view of each school's distributed leadership that was broader than what the interviews provided and gave other teachers a voice in the study. The surveys allowed me to obtain additional perspectives on leadership from staff members on general but not specific issues raised in the interviews (Stake, 1995). It also provided an opportunity to help develop a description of leadership patterns that would not be limited to the literacy and standards implementation issues, which those who were interviewed would address.

Blitz et al., (2014) validated the CALL® survey using a qualitative process of cognitive interviewing in the CALL® pilot study. Cognitive interviewing is a detailed process to ensure that a questionnaire's questions are clear and understood by participants to measure the questions' intentions. Cognitive interviewing is recommended as a method for developing reliable and valid questions in survey research (Collins, 2016; Desimone & LeFloch, 2004; Willis, 2004). This validation allows the respondents to give voice to their thinking about the questions through a "verbal probing" technique (Willis, 2004, p. 67), which gauges how a respondent responds to individual questions.

Blitz et al., (2014) probed the pilot study participants: principals, associate principals, teachers, department chairs, school counselors, and activities directors through direct face-to-face interviews on the specific CALL® survey items. For example, the researchers originally used the term "informal teacher leader" (p. 370) in their pilot study questionnaire but in the following cognitive interviews, they found that the definition changed based upon the school context and the individual responding to the question. The researchers concluded that informal leadership understandings were community context and culture-based, so they did not use the term informal teacher leader in the final CALL® survey. For validation, they applied their research to over two hundred schools located in seven states (Blitz, 2012).

The researchers developed five specific distributed leadership domains with sub-domains they applied to the survey. These domains were identified and classified by the researchers after they examined school leadership literature to determine which factors had the largest effect on student learning. These domains with their subdomains are outlined in Table 15.

**Table 15***Domains and Subdomains of Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning (CALL®)*

<b>Domains</b>	<b>Subdomains</b>
<b>1. Focus on Learning</b>	1.1 Maintains a school-wide focus on learning 1.2 Recognizes formal leaders as instructional leaders 1.3 Collaborative designing of integrated learning plan 1.4 Provides appropriate services for students who traditionally struggle
<b>2. Monitoring Teaching and Learning</b>	2.1 Formative evaluation of student learning 2.2 Summative evaluation of student learning 2.3 Formative evaluation of teaching 2.4 Summative evaluation of teaching
<b>3. Building Professional Community</b>	3.1 Collaborative focus on teaching and learning problems 3.2 Professional learning supports 3.3 Socially distributed leadership 3.4 Coaching and mentoring
<b>4. Acquiring and Allocating Resources</b>	4.1 Personnel practices 4.2 Structures and maintains time 4.3 School resources focus on student learning 4.4 Integrates external expertise into the instructional program 4.5 Coordinates and supervises relations with families and external communities
<b>5. Establishing a Safe and Effective Learning Environment</b>	5.1 Clear, consistent, and enforced expectations for student behaviors 5.2 Clean and safe learning environment 5.3 Support services exist for students who traditionally struggle

*Note.* From “Mapping school leadership and domains”, by R. Halverson & C. Kelley, 2017, *Mapping leadership: The tasks that matter for improving teaching and learning in schools*, Chapter 2, pp. 29-33. Jossey-Bass.

The CALL® survey measures leadership as a school function, not as a function of a specific individual. A computerized algorithm indicates which domains and subdomains receive attention in a school. The analysis assumes that no one individual or hierarchy of individuals can address all of the domain’s functions. The more domains and subdomains that are reported to be enacted, the more widely leadership functions are assumed to be distributed.

A sample of the questions asked in the survey is “Does your school have a formal leadership team? Which of the following best describes how the school leadership team members participate in decision-making, teacher scheduling, student scheduling, and discretionary budgeting? While the purpose of the CALL® for schools is for assessment, planning, and professional development, my purpose was for a school’s description and I used the information as it related to the schools’ leadership practices. Except in two instances noted in the case studies, the interview data and the survey data aligned. Results from the survey provided the top ten and the bottom ten leadership functions being performed as assessed by those responding to the survey.

The Leadership for Learning website and the University of Wisconsin’s Center on Products and Services provided Power Point® visual and written information that researchers may use to present the CALL®. I used this information when recruiting the school principals and at a subsequent faculty meeting presentation in each school when I answered teachers’ questions before the survey was made operational.

Following each principal’s first two interviews and the faculty meeting, each principal activated the survey through the special portal for their school. The Wisconsin Center for Educational Products and Services director at the University of Wisconsin emailed and called each principal to set up the survey access. Teachers, teaching assistants, and middle school administrators accessed the survey. In each school, primarily teachers responded during a three to the four-week time period set by the principal. Because of bi-weekly snowstorms with school closings, the first time period the principals set up was not long enough, so the time was extended in each school through the first week of the school’s holiday break in late December.



Following this time, I accessed the survey data online and created a summary for each principal. This summary was shared during the third interview with the Osage principal and the fourth interview with Twin Bridge's principal. The Sunrise principal included the assistant principals in the meeting, after I interviewed him, to share the summaries. The principals were to decide if they wanted to use the CALL® system for free until January 2020, a full year after receiving the summaries. The CALL® system afforded them access to suggested resources, information, and professional development ideas, for each area in which they could follow up within the domains. Sunrise and Osage principals indicated that they wanted to continue to use the CALL® and the online information; however, when contacted with a follow-up email, they did not respond. After the school year ended in 2019, the Twin Bridges principal left her position, and the Sunrise principal and the Twin Bridge's superintendent moved to other districts. None of the principals shared the overall results with their faculty, for reasons that they did not explain. The findings were presented to the new Twin Bridges superintendent who declined to have the school continue to participate. The Osage principal did not respond to an email requesting a response about continuing with the CALL® process.

### **The Documents**

Documents I collected for this study included: announcements pertaining to school-based teacher teams and/or committees dealing with the ELA and literacy standards; newspaper and newsletter articles about the district, the school, and district personnel policies; and the negotiated teachers' agreements provisions that contained formal teacher leadership information. Documents were scanned via the internet that pertained to the district and middle school including Board of Education (BOE) meeting minutes, school newsletters, and newspaper articles. Information about the incidents in Sunrise and Twin Bridges was available through

district websites and newspapers. Legal documents were also available online including teachers' contracts. In addition, the New York State Education Department provided information about each district and its schools through its online school report cards with access in 2021 providing 2018-2019 data, and other data documents, such as the partial New York State Basic Education Data System (BEDS) data and opt-out of state testing data district summaries.

Participants provided document data or it was found available in newspapers and newsletters and on district and school websites. These data, when determined useful, were stored in-home office physical folders. Online data, where necessary, were printed and stored in the same folders. Document data was also available from the New York State Education Department Website and the school report cards produced by the State Department.

In case studies, documentation evidence may confirm, contradict, qualify, or raise questions about data collected by other methods. Yin (1994) provided a scheme for using documentation data: verifying information collected from other forms of data collection such as the interviews, adding or amending documentation data collected to verify information—if other data are different, and if more probing is necessary to provide additional cues for investigation. The document data was important to supplement the interview data expanding understanding of the interviews.

### **The Field Notes**

During fieldwork and in preparing for the fieldwork in the case schools, I maintained a field study log that contained notes of informal observations, impressions, and personal perspectives about all phases of each case. The field notes were completed as soon as possible after each interview on a secure personal computer and then printed from the computer files. Each field note took an estimated hour and a half to write and process after returning from the

interviews. I used the field notes to also record the physical aspects of the school, record new concepts or ideas I considered, and recorded my thoughts and other factors relevant to understanding a school's leadership patterns. These data were secured in notebooks and placed in my home office in individual school folders. Only one other person lives in my home who has no interest in the data.

Employing field notes as another data source is recommended because using a variety of data sources is one way to provide validity checking of qualitative data (Patton, 1990; Tashakkor & Teddlie, 2013). These diverse levels of data provided a way to triangulate the results to form conclusions and commentary.

At the conclusion of the study, all data are to be scanned to a secure computer file and an external drive and scrubbed. Selective scrubbed written data may be provided to Syracuse University's Data Repository and the audio data will be erased after the study is completed.

## **Data Analysis and Synthesis**

### ***Beginning the Analysis Process***

In the initial coding of each document, there were general data points: a paragraph, a sentence, and a phrase in which the main idea was identified. An open coding method was used, as Saldana (2016) recommends, so that the most relevant ideas from the data for the research questions could be coded (Elliott, 2018). For example, what follows is a paragraph from one of the transcripts. I asked a teacher how teachers work with the student reading assessment from Fountas and Pinnell®. This assessment was used in two of the schools. In showing me the charts on anonymous students, this teacher spoke about collaborative grading.

*One thing came up in the past couple of years. I questioned how some students score so high in June of last year, and then they're testing back four or five levels [in September]. Doing the grading there are going to be small inconsistencies because you know comprehension is kind of subjective.*

*I emailed everybody in both buildings [elementary and middle schools] saying “All right, what are we doing? I’m doing it the way we were trained ten years ago. Which way are we going to do it now?” So, we got together. We got that all straightened out. We’re all going to do it the same way. [The way she was trained.]* (Special Education Teacher for ELA)

This piece of data was coded as ELA collaborative assessment grading informal teacher leadership (ITL). One teacher recognized a problem and prompted a broader discussion with other teachers and worked collectively to develop a solution. This was an informal teacher leadership situation. She did this on her own initiative without being given the assignment to do so. It was important because of its impact on students’ learning which led to a larger theme of teacher leaders’ actions to benefit student learning.

Each transcript was read in the same way and tagged with the main idea; this was a fluid approach that gave the most flexibility for later coding. These first codes were placed on paper post-its and highlights within the paper documents for use with further coding.

### ***Next Steps of the Analysis***

I initially coded the data, identifying the key points within the individuals’ stories drawing models and conceptions from the literature to explain the teacher leadership phenomena through the participants’ narratives. Codes were then related to various lenses: teacher leader types, teacher leadership spheres of influence, and distributed leadership. Themes, related to the research questions, began to emerge with this indexing or using “a priori” ideas (Elliott, 2018, p. 2855).

Although it seemed obvious, what was important was to go back to the research questions iteratively, going back repeatedly and asking, “How does this relate to the research question?”

There were alternate paths; however, the focus remained on the research questions. Overall, the data from each case were reviewed looking for patterns and noting where the data were discordant, for example, if the survey data told a story that was not consistent with the interviews.

### ***Data Triangulation***

I drew the various pieces together in narrative stories to give voice to the participants as they responded to the questions asked. The data from each of the three case studies were analyzed separately, comparing and contrasting data from the sources to provide coherent answers to the research questions.

### **Reporting the Findings**

In the description of the findings, I did not use a single theory. There is no comprehensive or widely accepted theory of teacher leadership that could be tested, much less one that incorporates the concept of informal teacher leadership. However, there are several studies and frameworks that provide different and useful vantage points for considering what formal and informal teacher leaders do. Bolman and Deal (1997) recommend that using different lenses offers a diverse view of phenomena that cannot be achieved using one position. This multi-faceted viewpoint provides a stronger understanding. The informal teacher leadership phenomena during educational reform were embedded within the various schools, their individual cultures, and contexts. It is my belief that using various lenses provides more dimensions to explain the complexity of informal leadership.

Harrison and Killion's (2006) typology of ten teacher leader roles with the addition of student advocate (Catone et al., 2017) and extra-curricular leader was applied to identify different forms of teacher leadership. Fairman and Mackenzie's (2012) sphere of teacher leaders'

influence developed from York-Barr and Duke's (2004) research was also applied within the case studies.

Given that schools that engage in distributed leadership offer opportunities for teacher leadership as asserted by York-Barr and Duke (2004), I applied four distributive leadership conceptions to the three cases. The first group of these conceptions was portrayed by Gronn (2002) who provided three configurations of the distributed leadership process starting with *spontaneous collaboration* when different groupings of individuals come together with different skills and other attributes to achieve a goal leading to an *intuitive working relationship* where leaders develop close working relations and rely on one another, and finally when distributed leadership becomes *institutionalized practice* over time and becomes institutionalized either formally or within normative routines. This distributed leadership practice becomes embedded within an organization's operational patterns.

The second group of conceptions is from Leithwood et al., (2006) who fine-tuned Gronn's distributed leadership process with expanded conceptions: *Planful alignment* is when leadership is developed with formal leaders and teachers through agreement. *Spontaneous alignment* is when leadership functions develop without explicit planning. Leadership assignments can be *misaligned* either through planning or spontaneously when those who are assigned the leadership functions refuse to accept the assignments and/or groups who are assigned leadership go their own way and act independently, which is *anarchic misalignment* (p. 258).

MacBeath et al., (2005) portrayed distributed leadership with a taxonomy of additional processes useful to describe different situations. He contended that leadership distribution can be seen as a range that suggests movement from something that is formally explicit to becoming

intrinsic within the organization. Starting with *formal distribution* through designated roles or job descriptions, formal teacher leadership would encompass this conception that embodies responsibilities and authorities for specific functions, such as department chairpersons, which over time may become part of a school's leadership core. *Pragmatic distribution* may be employed when formal leadership wants/needs to share responsibilities and teacher leaders take on these leadership functions, such as coordinating a one-day-a-semester half-day program for students. *Strategic distribution* may be reflected in assignments distributed to teams such as professional learning communities for daily embedded professional development, where teachers working together create learning for each other. *Incremental distribution* occurs when teachers have positive ideas and are supported in carrying them out, such as a new way to involve students in an after-school extra-curricular activity. *Opportunistic distribution* is supported by a school's leadership culture established by teachers and others rather than through the school's formal hierarchy. It becomes the way people work together. *Cultural distribution* occurs when leadership is infused through activities and routines, not being distributed by persons but by the activity itself. It is totally part of the "culture, ethos, and traditions" of the organization (p. 357).

Lastly, Spillane (2006), who is most often cited as developing and applying the concept of distributed leadership in education research, created a typology of distributed leadership with three major classifications repeated in his work with Diamond (2007): *Collaborated* distributed leadership is when two or more individuals are working in the same time and place doing the same routine, such as teachers working on instructional strategies to influence their professional learning community. *Collective* distributed leadership is when two or more individuals or groups are working separately but their actions are interdependent, such as teachers working on a student science club with the librarian developing the literacy component and the science teacher

developing the science activities. *Coordinated* distributed leadership is when leadership routines follow in sequence such as when a teacher develops a formative assessment tool, other teachers implement it and then another takes the lead to analyze the results. There was a fourth conception identified as *parallel*, which Spillane and Diamond (2007) view as wasted energy because two or more individuals are doing the same function without coordination.

Besides categories that describe leadership roles and processes, each school did not incorporate all of the essential elements of middle-level education, which I used as additional coding categories, including structural and organizational elements that had potential implications for teacher collaboration and leadership. Particular structures were present because the schools were “stand-alone” middle schools not mixed with other grade levels. These structural elements that supported teachers in their middle school work were:

- Grade-level interdisciplinary teacher teams were collaborative instructional teams that considered their students’ academic, social and emotional development.
- Time and space for teacher teams to meet.
- Content area grouping that allowed flexibility for various teaching and co-teaching arrangements.
- A team-community focus that was evident through the building layout and physical space arrangements, which invited and facilitated teacher collaboration.

I concluded each case chapter with a discussion of how the study’s data illustrate these different concepts. The comparison chapter 7 again brought these frameworks together to compare the cases with each other based on the research questions:

**R-1 What roles do middle school informal teacher leaders play in implementing the Next Generation New York State English Language Arts and Literacy Learning Standards in three types of middle schools: rural, suburban, and urban?**



**R-2 How do the roles of these informal teacher leaders relate to the roles played by principals and formal teacher leaders in implementing the Next Generation New York State English Language Arts and Literacy Standards?**

**R-3 In what ways does the leadership of informal teacher leaders in these three middle schools vary, and what might account for the differences?**

In the final chapter, consideration was given to whether and how this study might bring us closer to an actual theory of informal teacher leadership.

### **Addressing Possible Biases**

My bias has to do with seeing the background and the good in every person, each teacher, each administrator, each community member, and each student. Therefore, I did not seek to judge or evaluate the appropriateness of the actions of those I interviewed. In two of the case study schools, there were serious legal incidents that took place during the study year. These incidents could have consumed the study but after soul searching and consultation I chose to work around the incidents and remained focused on the study's purpose. The principal and an assistant principal participated in the urban school incident and the rural principal and superintendent were connected to that school's incident. None of the others I interviewed were involved.

One of the ways that I maintained focus around the incidents was to take time from being engaged in the study. This time provided the necessary distance to look at the data anew. While this added time to the study's completion, it moved the research away from the incidents' distractions, which were later resolved in courts of law.

Another point of bias could have been my view of teachers because of my former employment as a teacher center director. New York State Teacher Centers are advocates for teachers and their professional learning. However, as a certified school and district administrator, a former administrator of a large regional teacher center connected to two BOCES, and a former administrator for a state department of education, I have an understanding of administration.

More importantly, the triangulation process with the various data sources and my comparisons across schools enhanced my confidence in the study's findings and conclusions.

## Chapter 4: A Little Rural School Responding to Big Issues

### Twin Bridges Middle School

This case study highlights rural middle school informal teacher leaders who continued to play leadership roles despite administrative turnover over the year of this study and earlier years. It features stories about how these informal teacher leaders interacted with formal administrative leaders to change literacy practice in ELA and their content areas before and during the study.

After the start of the Common Core Standards implementation in 2012, state assessment results indicated that Twin Bridges Middle School was identified as a Targeted Support and Improvement School (TSI). The students had not reached the English Language Arts (ELA) benchmarks on the New York State annual tests; therefore, until their test scores improved, the middle school received targeted state support for instructional improvement along with other requirements. Because of this TSI designation, the district administrators expected teachers to teach with state curriculum modules that were said to be aligned to the Common Core Standards as a prescription to increase students' test achievement.

School districts had three choices to make regarding the ELA curriculum's instructional modules: to adopt, adapt, or justify using something else for instruction. As a TSI school, the Twin Bridges Central School District administrators chose adoption and teachers worked to implement the scripted ELA instructional modules.

In 2018, before this study began, the middle school was removed from the state list of targeted schools. Part of this accomplishment was credited to the belief that a new independent reading program, developed by a middle school ELA teacher and the school librarian, made a difference in how students performed on the state tests.

During this study, teachers were made aware of the next-generation ELA and literacy standards. Teachers started to implement instructional changes to integrate literacy within content areas. However, when a legal incident occurred mid-year and the school lost its school principal as an instructional leader, the next-generation standards awareness phase was delayed.

### *The School*

Twin Bridges Middle School was located in a 1930 vintage three-story building with imposing classical columns that previously housed the community's high school. At the school's entrance, the polished woodwork and heavy, wooden doors gave a physical feeling of historical times past. It was noted that in 1764, the village had one of the earliest private high schools chartered by New York State. However, the middle school was in the seventh school building built since that time and served students from a larger geographic area as a central school. Situated apart from the high school and the elementary school, which were connected in one contemporary building located across the village, the Twin Rivers Middle School had resisted proposed consolidation into the newer schools' location.

In the middle school, classrooms were located on the upper two stories off one central hallway on each floor. On the second floor, the fifth and sixth-grade classrooms were next to each other and the school library was situated at one end of the third floor. Along with the AIS ELA teacher's classroom and the faculty room on the basement level, were the seventh-grade science, mathematics, and ELA classrooms. In addition to the school principal, the school office was staffed by two administrative assistants. A district resource officer (police officer) was frequently in and out of the school office, as he had the two buildings to cover. Located down the end of the first-floor central hallway was the district office.

Twenty-nine faculty members taught 203 students in grades five to eight. Four of the middle school faculty also taught part-time at the high school: world languages, physical education, science, and technology. Four Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) assigned special educators counted as part of the faculty but were supervised by a BOCES administrator. Other professional staff members included a school librarian, school nurse, teaching assistants, and school counselor (Twin Bridges Middle School Staff List, 2018). Classified by the state definitions, 59% of the students were economically disadvantaged, and 6% were Non-White (New York State Education Department, 2021d).

***What the survey description revealed about Twin Bridges Middle School.***

As conceived by the CALL® distributed leadership model, student achievement is raised by distributing leadership within a school (Halverson & Kelley, 2017). The model assumes that leadership is exercised by anyone in the school, not just one formal leader, the survey is meant to identify just how broadly or narrowly leadership is actually shared in a particular school. Table 16 provides Twin Bridges Middle School's particular leadership strengths and challenges as reported by 42% (n = 10) of the school professionals according to their measure of each domain. Particular strengths and challenges that came up in the interviews are noted with sections bolded.



Table 16 Continuation

CALL® Leadership Practice Dimensions	Particular Strengths Identified	Particular Challenges Identified
<i>Acquiring and Allocating Resources</i>		*Only moderate parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences
<i>Safe &amp; Effective Learning Environment</i>	*Discipline policy is applied consistently to students of color and low-income students.	* <b>Slightly or not effective in eliminating student disruptive behavior.</b> *A plan for reducing student suspensions is only slightly effective.

Table 16 illustrates that within the middle school structure, time was provided to discuss students' work and behavior and that this collaboration time afforded leadership opportunities for many. There was integrated instruction provided for students with special needs by content area teachers and special education teachers, another leadership opportunity through collaboration.

Several challenges remained that would provide leadership opportunities and some of these are referred to later by the teachers and the principal, e.g., adequate opportunities to engage all students in extra-curricular activities. Other challenges that distributing leadership could possibly ameliorate were the lack of a school leadership team to take the pressure off the school principal to do it all, having teachers develop a plan for disruptive student behavior, and the need for student suspensions, utilizing the standards implementation process for a standardized grading plan through the curriculum council and addressing the individualized professional learning plans by teachers taking leadership for these plans. This information uncovered by the survey provides many opportunities for teacher leadership growth.

However, there was an item that related to teacher leadership support. "The school does not have incentives to recognize both individual efforts and groups of teachers who work together in efforts to improve student learning." This particular item was validated by the professionals indicating this need for teacher leadership development (Twin Bridges CALL® survey, 2018).

## The Participants

### *Teachers and School Librarian*

Rachel, the school principal, provided me with a full list of middle school teachers and their email addresses with suggestions of who should be interviewed for their leadership abilities. All but two of the six teachers she identified agreed to be interviewed. They came from different content areas in grades six to seven. Table 17 lists pseudonyms, grade levels, content areas taught, and years of teaching in the school of all the teachers and the school librarian I eventually interviewed.

**Table 17**

### *Twin Bridges Middle School Teachers & School Librarian Interviewed*

Teacher	Grade Level	Content Areas	Years in the School
Belinda	5	Social Studies & Science	30
Brianna	5-8	Library Media	12
Josh	6	Social Studies & Science	20
Justine	5	Special Education ELA & Mathematics	11
Kitty	6	Academic Intervention Specialist (AIS) English Language Arts	15
Oliver	7 & 8	Science	2
Ryanna	6	English Language Arts	30

### *School Principal*

**Rachel** was the middle school principal in her second year and was hired one month before her first-year assignment. Previously, she worked as an administrator for a nearby city school district after working for a state regional social services organization. Her advanced studies were in curriculum and instruction.

Rachel's primary focus was on the students, not only their learning in school but their personal needs. Prior to one interview, she was putting together weekend take-home bags for students' that included toiletry items and snacks. Into these take-home bags, she placed boxes of noodles, which within five minutes she said she taught students how to cook. After Thanksgiving



break, she commented that she preferred no long school breaks because students did not get fed without school lunches. Rachel's beliefs supported her work along with her concern about students' future success. She emphasized, "Do our kids have the skills to be successful, in whatever they're doing, once we let them out the door?"

During this study, she was embroiled in a mid-year crisis involving criminal legal action against a middle school staff member. Her assignment as a principal was cut short. Rachel submitted her resignation to take effect at the end of the school year after an assignment for the central office.

### ***Superintendent***

**Richard** was in the district for five years and was instrumental in developing a community-government-business-school group, which they described as a think-tank (Group meeting, April 2021). He discussed how this was important to the community, the district, and his view of schooling.

*People think there are no jobs here. We know they (the students) need training for jobs. They (companies) have a lot of high-paying jobs they can't fill. These companies will leave the area if they can't start filling them. So that's the real issue we have. So, we are now creating these pathways. It starts where there is an intersection between what kids are interested in, what their skills are, and what our region and the local economy are telling us.*

*We're trying to make it K-12 but it has its roots at the high school; flexible, personalized learning. We've stepped away from the traditional. We're too small to offer an array of electives that you'd like to offer kids. Our teachers, for example, can teach six periods. Instead of doing six traditional periods, we can have an interdisciplinary group of teachers who can construct flexible learning opportunities for kids. It could be a multi-year college credit-infused pathway or a basic exploratory experience for a kid. (Richard, School Superintendent)*

At the end of the study year, Richard moved to a larger school district to establish a similar collaborative group.

### ***BOCES Curriculum Coordinator***

**Vivian** was a BOCES Curriculum Coordinator who previously provided professional development services to the Twin Bridges Central School District. During 2018-2019, her one-day-a-week role was to coordinate Twin Bridge's revised Response to Intervention (RTI) process, a preventive method to identify and provide support for students who had learning and/or behavioral needs that could be served in the general classroom and did not require special education classification.

RTI required teacher coordination and collaboration between all of a student's teachers and special services inside and outside the district. A consultant firm was hired to do a special education needs assessment and to provide recommendations and RTI professional development sessions. Vivian served on the district's curriculum council for her role in coordinating the RTI changes and needed professional development.

### **A Rural Middle School**

#### ***Teaching assignments were departmentalized.***

Rachel explained that the school had recently changed middle school teaching assignments to departmentalize each of the core subjects rather than have students taught by a generalist grade-level teacher. Grades three and four in the elementary school had also started to departmentalize.

*We departmentalize now. Our elementary school, starting in third grade, is now starting to break off too. Our teachers are becoming content area specialists. We have ELA, we have mathematics, and then we have science and social studies--in one person. Now our students, instead of having one teacher all day long for all the content, we're starting to move them a little bit more, as they're coming into the middle school. They're getting a grasp of it all.*

*And it's better for our staff to not have to be an expert in everything, the jack-of-all-trades, master of none. We've been really able to take our elementary teachers with a K-6 idea starting in third grade; third, fourth, fifth, and sixth. Now, I have a teacher whose sole focus is ELA for all the kids, a teacher that's math sole-focused, and we rotate our kids. Then they see three different teachers for specific*

*content and we have our social studies/science combined. We have a team of three fifth-grade teachers and a team of three sixth-grade teachers. (Rachel, Middle School Principal)*

This organizational structure was relatively new and provided more collaboration rather than each teacher having a multi-content classroom. Each grade-level team was also assigned a special educator and an AIS teacher. The AIS teachers, primarily for ELA, used a student pull-out mode. Special education teachers, one for each grade level in ELA, and mathematics taught with both pull-outs and push-ins. The average class size for ELA was fifteen students. (New York State Education Department, 2021d).

Subjects that were not part of the core curriculum were called “XTs or extras” and included visual arts, instrumental music for the middle school band, vocal music, physical education, computer technology, world languages, and home and careers. The school librarian was not part of XTs but served all subject areas and provided a once-a-week sixth-grade library class.

Table 18 illustrates the assignments of the core subject teachers: ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies.

**Table 18**

*Twin Bridges Middle School Teacher Assignments by Grade Level & Core Subject*

<b>Grade</b>	<b>ELA</b>	<b>Social Studies</b>	<b>Science</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>
5	Ryanna	Belinda	Belinda	NI
6	Ryanna	Josh	Josh	NI
7	NI	NI	Oliver	NI
8	NI	NI	Oliver & NI	NI

*Note.* NI=Not Interviewed

***District planning with attention to the state standards.***

Each school district is responsible for implementing the state standards within the framework of its own Comprehensive District Education Plan (CDEP). Each year, the Twin

Bridge’s regional BOCES offers a group planning routine for district teachers and administrators working together to craft their CDEP. If a school was identified for Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) or Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), the district is required to have its CDEP approved by the state (New York State Education Department, 2021e).

BOCES also offers this team time and support as an optional service to schools that are not identified as TSI or CSI. Once off the list, the Twin Bridges Central School District chose to continue the BOCES CDEP process. The district’s 2018-2019 CDEP had a goal of “all teachers aligning instruction to the NYS Standards” (Twin Bridges District CDEP Plan).

Rachel spoke about teachers’ level of knowledge and implementation regarding the standards. She planned to work with the teachers on this goal.

*When you’re looking at implementation, it’s scattered because not everybody is on the same page. They’re all over the board. And they’re like, “Next-generation standards? We’re just trying to figure out the Common Core!” And then the modules, did they adopt them? Did they adapt them and who’s doing what? Do you script? Have you adapted? Do you teach every module, you know, every lesson in that order? Do you pick and choose what you want? Those are a lot of the questions I was having in the past year.*

*As a district, it was different depending on the level. And when you have instructional leaders change, they are like, “Oh, this one’s gone, so maybe we don’t have to do that anymore. Now we’re just going to do this.” Previous to that, we were one of the schools on the list, so there were people coming in telling them “This is how you’re going to do it.” Sooo, the teachers **are** still in that kind of mode, “Just tell me what to do.”*

*It’s a lot of conversation. I think the biggest key for us is communicating, where people are, and knowing where we need to go. So, using that (NYSED) road map “Here’s our road map. Here’s where we have to be by 2020. Now, let’s figure out how we are going to get there.”*

*And obviously, it’s not the same for everybody; it works differently for different people, like for some of our veteran professionals. Some of our newer staff have been in it. That is the only thing they’ve ever known is new. So, it’s a mix. I need to be ok with that. I need to support each of the staff where they’re at. It’s just like the kids. (Rachel, School Principal)*

Rachel was sensitive to individual teachers. She collaborated with them for solutions and change. As principal and instructional leader, she focused the school's work on student learning. Clearly, her first concern was the students.

*I always say to them, "Every decision that we're talking about, all of this stuff, we always have to put it on a face. Students should always be our moral compass. Put a face, pick a student, get that face right here in your brain as we talk about this change and what do you think it looks like?" (Rachel, School Principal)*

She noted that the state education department, by including educators in policy-making, had made the requirements more realistic, but they were still overwhelming for teachers. Rachel was cognizant of the emotional impact that affected teachers' responses to change.

*When teachers are completely panicked, I don't say, "Oh stop, it is what it is. Do your job." I say, "I hear you. I know what you are saying." I give them an opportunity to feel heard and to have a kind of a voice and say, "Ok, how are we going to do this?"*

*I like to collaborate, I'm a collaborative kind of person. I like to hear people out and then also share back, "Here's what I'm seeing. Here's what I'm thinking. Here's what I'm feeling. I hear you on this. Here's where we have to be. How do we do it?"*

*Some of them don't buy in, those are your stragglers. And you just say, "Come on, you're coming along. Kicking and screaming, you're coming."*

*But you know, for the most part, when you give people the opportunity they get it. (Rachel, School Principal)*

She modeled collaboration as she reached out to the staff to collaborate with her in solving the implementation of the standards but also stayed true to her commitment to students with teachers who were reluctant. Through her leadership and her collaboration, she "normalized the neutral zone" of change (Bridges, 2009). She recognized that zone where people are afraid of moving from what they know, in the current standards, to what may be different in the revised standards and she responded with empathy and support.

The interviewed teachers also agreed with Rachel's assessment that they were at various points in responding to the changes. Within the state's timeline for the next-generation standards, teachers were gradually being made aware of the changes in the reading, writing, and literacy skill requirements.

*We're actually just starting on our road map. We've laid out our roadmap to align with the state's 2020 pieces that they're looking at for implementation.*

*We've got a couple of things going with our staff. So, we're just starting . . . they've just started to kind of dip their feet in the next-generation standards. In the next two years, we'll really have it rolled out and will be putting chunks into place.*

*We have an instructional contract with the BOCES. Last year, we used her (Vivian) predominantly in math but she also has a strong background in ELA, so she'll be on board with me this year working with the ELA standards as well.*  
(Rachel, School Principal)

Rachel had lofty expectations of her ELA and literacy work with Vivian and the work with teachers started during the summer on writing in the content areas. Awareness and implementation of the next-generation standards were starting with time, dedicated by Rachel, to the teachers. The previous principal had built time into staff schedules for collaboration and Rachel continued to build on and increase that time.

*Every day our staff gets common planning time in addition to their individual prep. What we've tried to do, at least the past two years starting my second year here, is to have that dedicated time so that our fifth and sixth-grade team has the ability to meet and we try to have our special ed. and AIS people meet with them as well. They meet for about thirty minutes. They have time every day at the same time to do that.*

*Once a week, I play in the sandbox with them. Our conversations are anywhere from what's going on in the building, changes coming up, professional development opportunities, and topics of concern, whether it be for students, curriculum, or textbooks.*

*It was free game for whatever was the need. Sometimes there were things that I wanted specific input when I came in (to their meeting), so I would send them a message on Monday saying, "On Tuesday, when I get there, here's some of the*

*things I need to highlight.” Then the last 15 minutes was their time. It varied on what was going on, but they have that time every day; I just come in once a week.*

*Then we meet three times a month. First time is faculty after school, just our building. Second time is by content or department and that could be throughout all of our buildings, all of our ELA, all of our science, all of music would meet. (The third time is full faculty, PK to grade 12) (Rachel, School Principal)*

### ***Teachers embed writing skills across the curriculum***

Josh had a great deal of angst about students coming into the sixth grade who had a minimum level of literacy skills and that no one was held accountable for these students’ lack of skills.

*They come to us in the sixth grade and they still can’t take a five-paragraph article, tear it apart, tell you what was in it, main idea, supporting contextual evidence. I spend a lot of my time teaching them (how to read and write) when I should be teaching content and some cognitive skills. (Josh, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Science & Social Studies)*

He was frustrated and wanted to find a solution that he could integrate into his social studies and science classes.

Belinda was also interested. Earlier she had convinced the principal and district to provide her with an after-school class to support students who were having difficulty completing their assignments. Belinda stayed after school three days a week until five p.m. assisting and supervising students in completing their assignments. These students had difficulty reading and writing, so consequently, they had a challenging time with their independent assignments.

*We’ve had kids since the third week of school staying until 4 p.m. because they were falling behind right away. Why would you want to wait until five weeks when the reports come out or ten weeks when they are behind at three weeks? You’ve got to get them and they can get their homework done before they go home. (Belinda, Teacher, Grade 5 Social Studies & Science)*

Belinda took a leadership role advocating for these struggling students.

Together or in parallel, Josh and Belinda had discovered Hochman and Wexler's (2017) *The Writing Revolution: A Guide to Advancing Thinking Through Writing in All Subjects and Grades*. They both started to implement its ideas in their classrooms. The Writing Revolution (TWR) method guides teachers in how to "weave" writing into their content teaching.

There are six TWR principles for teaching writing:

1. Students need explicit instruction in writing, beginning in the early elementary grades.
2. Sentences are the building blocks of all writing
3. When embedded in the content of the curriculum, writing instruction is a powerful teaching tool.
4. The context of the curriculum drives the rigor of the writing activities.
5. Grammar is best taught in the context of student writing.
6. The two most important phases of the writing process are planning and revising. (Hochman & Wexler, 2017, p. 8)

While Josh bemoaned his students' lack of writing skills, Hochman and Wexler's principle number one directed him to teach the skills needed for his subject areas. He embraced this principle. His students' work covered the walls outside his classroom, evidence of their learning with essays and opinion pieces related to the subject matter in social studies and science. For example, students gave opinions pros and cons of climate change in agriculture with their research evidence cited.

Belinda collected evidence of her students' social studies writing work differently. In individual binders, she had each student's writing for every assignment arranged chronologically. She used this work at parent conferences to illustrate evidence of her students' learning. Students were able to see their progress. Her students, one grade level behind Josh, worked on the building blocks of sentences to explain their thinking.



In more detail, Belinda explained how she and Josh had influenced the teachers and then the district to adopt this method.

*We met during the summer, the fourth-grade teacher, me, and the sixth-grade social studies teacher two years ago, and then worked on notes together, on how to do it. And then last year, the third-grade teacher joined us because I was saying to the former principal that this would be so wonderful to get two or three grades through sixth here in the middle school to train them to do this and to think this way in the elementary school.*

*By the time we get the students, they should be better readers, better writers, and their comprehension should be better. When I first started this, some of the sixth-grade teachers got interested in it. Then the ELA teacher got interested. I shared all of this (the binders of work) with them.*

*I explained it to them and worked on it and then we just kind of worked together and thought, well wouldn't it be good to get Gina from third grade involved Susie works in her building so she talked to Gina. So, it was just kind of the four of us (Gina, Josh, Susie, and me) working together to get it moving. The third through sixth-grade levels have been working together for the last two years.*

*The fourth-grade teacher asked, "Do you want me to ask if we can get time during the summer to do this together?" So, I asked Josh, the sixth-grade teacher, and he said, "Sure." So, she got us the dates and he filled out the forms for a summer book study. (Belinda, Teacher, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies & Science)*

In the summer of 2018, the district administrators supported the book study, presented by Rachel, on *The Writing Revolution* with teachers working together. The 2018 district's negotiated agreement with the teachers provided books and stipends for two days of teachers' time. Forty-five teachers out of 77 (58%) attended the session, the largest number of teachers involved since annual summer book studies were started.

*Rachel was the first-year principal last year and she got the book study dumped in her lap. I said to her, "I can help you because I already have the information. I already have the kids' notes from two years." So that is how it evolved. (Belinda, Teacher, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies & Science)*

Belinda and Josh worked with Rachel to help share this literacy instructional method with the rest of the faculty. They encouraged and supported her because they knew it would be helpful

for other teachers to adopt this method. With the principal presenting, they thought the idea would have more legitimacy. Rachel was influenced by Josh and Belinda who showed her the results with their students and she eagerly signed on to present the book study.

*They get six hours of their own time to read through the book and then six hours on one day we all come together in the summer and dive in. Starting at the beginning of this school year, we're hoping to do it [adopt the instructional methods] as a district. Forty-five across the district is pretty significant for the number of staff we have. (Rachel, Middle School Principal)*

Also implementing the literacy standards, Oliver, the seventh and eighth-grade science teacher, had begun to integrate the literacy standards into teaching science.

*Currently, my teaching is tied directly to the literacy standards. I can actually show you. I'll go grab the cards I have just made that show the next-generation science standards, which currently give the connections to the literacy standards.*

(He shows me the set of flip cards he has made with the next-generation science standards he uses to teach in one color. The literacy standards are in assorted colors.)

*So, what I do has a direct connection. Literacy is a big part of science. (Oliver, Teacher, 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Science)*

Displayed inside and outside his classroom were students' science content posters evidence of the reading and writing literacy standards that resulted from these literacy integration efforts.

Also, his students produced videos and oral presentations that provided evidence of the speaking literacy standards together with their project-based science work.

***Another bottom-up initiative, spreading independent reading throughout the school.***

As a team, Ryanna, the sixth-grade ELA teacher, and Brianna, the school librarian, decided that traditional student book reports using just the books from the required modules was thwarting their goals of students enjoying reading and reading more because the required books were not engaging.

*A few years ago, the sixth-grade ELA teacher came to me and said, "I can't do book reports anymore." We used to do monthly themes, like October was*

*Halloween, scary stories, mystery, whatever, and then at the end of the month, everybody stands up and does their book report. "My book was about blah, blah, blah, blah." And we were both like, "I'm going to gouge my eyes out. I can't do this anymore." And the kids didn't like it either because they weren't into the books either.*

*Ryanna said, "I have this crazy idea, do you want to help?" And I said "Sure!" She had read Donalyn Miller's book, The Book Whisperer, and so we said together, "All right, we're just going to do this." We might have started out a little sneakily and didn't really tell anybody about what we were doing, just to see where we were going.*

*It's all about choice. It's all about freedom. You don't do a book report at the end of every book, you don't do any of that kind of stuff.*

*She has them write letters. They have a notebook with the form for a friendly letter and they write to her about their book and then she writes back to them about her book and makes connections.*

*It has worked really, really well, I would say probably better than anything else we've implemented.*

*It's something that we're very proud. We worked very hard on it. We went from being down at the bottom of the BOCES (component schools) with the ELA test scores to, I think it was second or third. I believe it was from our independent reading program. So, yeah, it was huge.*

*Even though they (the modules) were telling us, "Do this, do that, do this." We went with it anyway and said this is important. We'll do that but we'll also do the independent reading program.*

*Once our principal, it wasn't Rachel, saw the scores go up, they skyrocketed. She said "What are you guys doing? What is this? What's happening here?" Then she was totally on board and we're lucky that she was very supportive of it. She said, "Ok, we're going to make time for this even though the standards have an independent reading part of their modules."*

*We kind of made a monster, ~~like~~ a Frankenstein; we pulled stuff from everywhere. We pulled stuff from the ELA pool, we pulled stuff from Fountas and Pinnell®, which is the reading test we use here. We pulled a lot of stuff from Donalyn Miller.*

*I feel like this was the biggest thing, more than the new standards because you don't get better at reading if you don't read! It's like when you walk into a math classroom and everybody's doing math problems, that's what's expected. But when you walk into an English classroom and everybody's reading, "Oh, you're just reading here." No, we're practicing, so that was kind of fighting a battle.*

*The eighth grade ELA teacher was also very into independent reading, so she had a slightly different program because obviously if you're using the same program from sixth grade to eighth grade, they should be graduating to bigger and better stuff, hopefully.*

*And then, once we saw the scores go up, we went to the fifth grade ELA and the seventh grade ELA and said, "Hey, this is working. Let's see if we can work together." And they adopted it!*

*So now we have a five through eight accountable independent reading program that looks different at every grade level but everybody in the schools knows it. The kids are expected to be carrying an independent reading book with them at all times.*

*A couple of years after we started, the sixth-grade math teacher came to me and said, "So, when can I expect them to have their reading time?"*

*Whenever, because it helps with classroom management too. We call it, "Stealing time to read." When you (the teacher) walk out of a classroom or when the phone rings, you (the student) get out your independent reading book. They (the other teachers) are very excited about it and buy into it wholeheartedly now. (Brianna, School Librarian)*

Brianna's enthusiasm and enjoyment were palpable. Ryanna and Brianna decided to provide an adaption to the required ELA module-based curriculum.

Donalyn Miller's (2009) *The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Reader in Every Child*, promotes having students select their own books and read independently. She maintains that students who are encouraged and supported in choosing their own books and doing independent reading become better readers and interested in reading. Without seeking permission from the administration for changing the modules, Ryanna, with Brianna's support, modified independent reading in her ELA classes.

With Brianna's help, every sixth-grade student selected a book from the library to read. Ryanna provided a portion of time within her ELA classes for students to read their books and students had to carry these books with them to other classes. When there was an opportunity for

reading, students had a book to read. Instead of the traditional book report, students wrote letters telling Ryanna about the books or discussed the books with Brianna.

Ryanna responded to these letters and Brianna purchased library books that supported students' interests, as she added to the library's collection. According to Ryanna, at the end of the first year of the new independent reading program, her sixth-grade students' New York State test scores went up immediately and in the following years, there was consistent growth.

Ryanna and Brianna explained that they did not ask permission to change this part of the curriculum because they had incorporated it within what they were already doing with book reports. They just modified the strict modules to meet student engagement needs, and to make reading enjoyable.

During the monthly school librarians' meetings that Brianna attended, the regional BOCES School Librarian heard about what they were doing. The BOCES provided a special annual spring luncheon where they recognized librarians and others who supported school libraries for their work. The Twin Bridges middle school principal, Rachel's predecessor, was surprised when she was invited to the event to discover what the collaborators from her own school had done. During the next school year after receiving the school test data, the principal saw the student state ELA assessment scores rise. While the increased test score may not have been due solely to independent reading, the school was beginning to get off the state target list. The principal encouraged Ryanna and Brianna and supported their initiative to keep doing the independent reading program.

Their collaborative leadership work affected the whole school and was incorporated into the district's 2018-19 CDEP Plan: "All faculty and staff will encourage and support the Accountable Independent Reading program." Later within the BOCES region, Ryanna provided

professional learning experiences about this independent reading method to other teachers expanding her leadership influence outside the boundary of her school to affect change that was impacting student learning.

***Supporting collaboration that leads to teacher leadership.***

At Twin Bridges Middle School, time, proximity, and trust supported teachers' collaboration. Other researchers have also found support for these collaborative factors.

**Time** for collaboration allowed for better teaching and student learning (Goddard et al., 2007; Ronfeldt, 2017; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Times for focused collaboration were essential for Ryanna and Kitty's (the AIS teacher) ELA to work together, examining student work and planning for instructional changes.

*Kitty and I talk a lot. We didn't always have planning time together but I would send her my plans at the end of the week for the following week and she would always be willing to incorporate what I was doing, vocabulary, or whatever it might be (for the AIS students).*

*I have a basic shell of a plan of what I'm planning to do for the following week. And then we collaborate based on what we know about our students and what their needs are and what might make things difficult for them and how we're going to overcome those things so they can do the work that we need them to do. (Ryanna, Teacher, Grade 6 ELA)*

During an invited observation of their weekly meeting that Ryanna and Kitty had because of a recent schedule change, I observed that they compared notes and discussed their successes and challenges with individual students. Throughout the meeting, they coached each other by making suggestions to try the latest ideas, checked what worked, and agreed to follow up with individual students and communicate these results. Back and forth, they influenced each other to try new instructional strategies.

Richard, the school superintendent, also provided time for staff collaboration.

*We started doing K-12 meetings, which is a new concept for the district. We wanted somebody that was teaching seniors to be in the same room with people teaching kindergarten. We've been trying to work on opportunities for them to share with each other.*

*I think just setting the structure is a big thing. I think I see that as my role, that I need to set the direction for the district and what's our priority. We're gonna work on establishing the larger priorities. And then I have to try to carve out time and opportunity for them to be able to work in that area. (Richard, School Superintendent)*

Rachel endorsed this method for more staff collaboration.

*Twice a month, we (the curriculum council) meet and lay out our agenda and the things we're looking at. On the fourth Wednesday of the month, we meet as a PK-12 district driven by our curriculum council. (Rachel, Middle School Principal)*

These times structured with the curriculum council for staff collaboration allowed for teachers informally to become leaders within the groups working together.

**Proximity** increased the opportunities for teachers to collaborate (Spillane & Shirrell, 2018).

Jane's classroom, the sixth-grade special education teacher, was located through shared double doors with Ryanna's classroom. Because of their adjacent classrooms and similar schedules, Ryanna and Jane found it easy to partner for students' planning and co-teaching ELA. This special educator teacher also provided leadership in technology integration.

*What's great about Jane, as a special ed. teacher she's not just involved only with doing modifications for students with disabilities, she's very much involved with technology. She's involved with all the students and is willing to help me plan when we plan. (Ryanna, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> grade ELA)*

**Trust** was a critical factor. It was not something that could have been structured but was built on relationships and respect over time.

*Jane and I work together because we both know the curriculum so well, and have worked together so long, it's usually a quick conversation. Same with Kitty.*

*Ultimately, I know me. For my classroom, I want to know that the person that's going to come in and work with me knows the curriculum like I know the curriculum. And if you do, we can do things together.*

*It's more than just co-teaching. She knows her stuff and I don't worry. I'm not afraid to stand by or just jump right in and do the teaching.*

*I think it's good for kids. When you get that synergy. (Ryanna, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> grade ELA)*

Ryanna also had long experiences and collaborations with Josh based on trust from their shared work and teaching expertise. She understood his work with integrating literacy into his content areas.

*Josh is the science and social studies teacher in sixth grade and I value his opinion on a lot of things. Because in sixth grade, we're department allies. We were gen ed teachers, we taught everything at some point in our careers. We've talked about almost every subject.*

*We've had a lot of conversations about what we're seeing and what we can change and what vocabulary we can agree to use (with the students).*

*We co-taught a lesson last year together, which was really cool. I'd like to do it again this year but it takes a lot of intricate planning because of classes overlapping. My classes are seeing me twice (extended periods) whereas others are only seen in a single time period, which is hard. (Ryanna, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA)*

### ***Teachers support struggling learners.***

Teachers involved in this school recognized struggling learners, whether they were individual students or groups of students. The teacher leaders helped their students in a variety of ways. Belinda advocated for a student in her after-school program who was classified with a disability and continued to present the student's learning problems to the principal and the special education staff until she saw that the student got the necessary services to provide for her learning success.

*I have a good relationship with the principal. I went to her because we have a student who is in the sixth grade and reading at a second-grade level.*

*Did I tell you about her? She breaks my heart. She stays after school with me three days a week until four o'clock. I have been helping her get her homework done for part of the time and then I go out in the hall with her.*



*She remembers content from my classes about science and social studies, she has the answers, and she volunteers. But she cannot read. She just cannot read the textbooks.*

*If anyone has sat down and listened to her read and read with her they would know that she has many strategies for reading. She is a ball of fire. She wants to learn. She wants to do a good job. She is a great auditory learner.*

*What they are doing or not doing in special education is not working. So, I went to the principal, "If you want to help her become an independent functioning individual, then we need to teach her how to read. She needs to be immersed in reading."*

*And so now, she's going to be taken out of two classes a day. The child needs to become an independent reader, not accommodated with a one-on-one aide. She's an auditory learner. There must be ways to teach her. Having an adult sit next to her in a noisy classroom with distractions is not the answer.*

*I'm advocating for this student. She's now going to get direct instruction, which she needs, but there are others like her. We need focused accountability.*

*That's why I don't retire. I care too much. I told Rachel, "I have hope now that she (Rachel) is here." She came into a mess. We've had a bunch of principals. (Belinda, Teacher, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies & Science)*

Following the summer book study, Josh continued to exercise leadership informally and offered to organize a group of teachers who would share and meet to discuss their continuing work on teaching writing within the content areas. To his disappointment, only he, Belinda, and the two elementary school teachers who collaborated with them earlier continued to meet. He was also concerned about accountability for professional development and that could not see how the book studies fit in with individual professional development plans.

*The problem with the seminar book studies is that teachers read the book but there is no mechanism to force them to do the work. It's not like they have worksheets to follow.*

*So, did they read it? And then we spend six hours on one day on it. How much participation did they give? Were they really involved in the seminar? And then most importantly, if those two days are true, did they turn around and incorporate it in the classroom?*

*So, what we've done is that there is a third, fourth, fifth, and sixth-grade teacher; the four of us that spend a few days during the school year going into it even more. (Josh, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies & Science teacher)*

While the lack of other teachers willing to follow up was a major disappointment to Josh, Rachel continued to emphasize using the TWR instructional methods in response to implementing the next-generation standards for literacy.

*We started The Writing Revolution with a couple of our staff members not in ELA, but in other content areas.*

*When you're looking at implementation, it's scattered, not everyone's had the same piece. (Rachel, Middle School Principal)*

These new instructional strategies became part of the emphasis on implementing the standards. Ryanna understood Josh and how he incorporated writing into his science and social studies instruction because students did not have the skills necessary for the sixth-grade content.

*He's a fantastic teacher of writing even though he's teaching content. He's done such an amazing job with incorporating writing and seeing the value of getting knowledge from reading and then writing about it. (Ryanna, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA)*

In another area, Justine, the fifth-grade special education teacher, was concerned about students' assessment grading and how that would affect literacy teaching that focused on their learning needs. She had raised the issue of inconsistent scoring of the special education students' ELA internal assessments with the teachers involved in the scoring and promoted a change to which the teachers then agreed.

*One thing came up in the past couple of years. I questioned how some students score so high in June of last year, and then they're testing back four or five levels (in September). Doing the grading (on the Fountas & Pinnell® reading assessment) there are going to be small inconsistencies because comprehension is kind of subjective.*

*I emailed everybody in both buildings saying "All right, what are we doing? I'm doing it the way we were trained ten years ago. Which way are we going to do it*

*now?" So, we got together. We got that all straightened out. We're all going to do it the same way. (The way she was trained.) (Justine, Special Education Teacher)*

Informal teacher leaders see a problem and take action for positive change that benefits students.

***Superintendent's ideas about teacher leadership.***

Richard acknowledged that some initiatives have informal teacher leadership built-in when teachers developed ideas and made decisions about their classroom instruction. He expanded this discussion about what he saw as a teacher leader.

*I think the most important quality for them to have would be to have curiosity, to try to get better, or at least the desire to get better. When I look around, the people who are stagnant are the people who don't seem to have the recognition that they could do better. That they're not trying to evolve and become better; they are sort of creatures of habit, some good, some not good.*

*I think a good quality of a teacher leader or superintendent is sort of a curiosity to be better and then have the opportunity to be better. Do you know what I mean? I think, there are creative people who sometimes are stifled by the environment that they're in.*

*So, I think that has to come together where there's an outlet for them to be able to expand and grow. And then, they have to have the desire to be different. I think that's the trouble, they don't because they don't see the need to. They just do what they do. It's a static type of position and we're not in a static environment, shouldn't be. (Richard, School Superintendent)*

Richard appears to view teacher leadership as having an impact within the classroom as teachers innovate and change their teaching, but he doesn't seem to connect this with teacher leadership outside the classroom. Both Richard and Rachel indicated to me that no formal teacher leaders were designated in the district or in the middle school.

The 2018 agreement between the Twin Bridges teacher association and the district provided for the superintendent and the teachers association to work together to establish formal teacher leadership positions, mutually agree on their duties and set stipends for such formal leaders. But Richard preferred to utilize the stipend process, also made available in the contract,

to pay teachers for extra work, rather than establishing formal leadership positions. He did not want to pay for formal teacher leaders nor be required to collaborate with the teachers' association, according to the contract.

Creating positions had less flexibility than having teachers serve on committees paid by stipends. He explained how he used the stipend flexibility for special projects and for specific circumstances. Instead of appointing formal teacher leaders, the superintendent established a curriculum council, which offered semi-formal teacher leadership roles.

*We just adjusted what stipends are offered. Some things come up, like when we look at the schedule. How much flexibility do we have? What can we do? It all has to be within the contract and budget.*

*Well, that's what I think people don't think of. They think of it as two different things, the money part, and the instruction. But how good we are managing the money is in fact what we can do with programs. So, we're trying to get as much as we can through creative means, through grants, through state supplements through sharing (with other districts) like at BOCES.*

*If it sounds like there might be a chance that a shared position may be an aideable position; that's something I think that's going to grow tremendously. If they [State Education Department] lift the cap on what you can get aid on, you're going to see a lot of shared positions.*

*It makes it more doable if you factor in more aid. (Richard, School Superintendent)*

Rachel agreed with the concept of the curriculum council.

*Two years ago, the superintendent put together the curriculum council. It's made up of the superintendent and the building leaders—the building principals. And then, teachers apply. They put in their letters of interest, and the superintendent selects teachers from each building and various content areas. (Rachel, Middle School Principal)*

The superintendent saw the curriculum council as a whole district advisory mechanism for achieving district goals.

*We (the administrators) use them as sort of the connecting piece. We tell them repeatedly, "You are not making decisions." Some decisions have to be*

*administrative decisions but they're instrumental in being able to relay information, or a lot of times it's just gathering information.*

*We are needing information from grade levels or departments or building levels as they know what is going on. They're tuned into the bigger picture of--how does this fit into a district goal?*

*I think we should have this (the council) in place forever. You could substitute different people, but some kind of structure that relays information in a consistent way and promotes consistency. (Richard, School Superintendent)*

While Richard saw the semi-formal teacher leadership positions on the curriculum council as useful for communication purposes, their decision-making was curtailed. Richard discussed the curriculum council as an opportunity for teachers to take a leadership role and present to their colleagues during the PreK-12 faculty meetings to share ideas.

*The last couple of meetings were different in that we asked them to collaborate around specific issues like discipline, the stuff that works, and then assessment grading.*

*The typical pattern has been that we'll carve out a piece of that. They'll be presenting to their colleagues—different people, different meetings. (Richard, School Superintendent)*

During the study year, the learning standards were not prioritized by the administrators for the council. The superintendent's overarching goal was consistency and continuity across routines for all grade levels. Three major priorities resulted:

1. To develop a long-range student intervention continuum with change components.
2. To improve teachers' grading practices.
3. To address student management and discipline within classrooms and schools.

These issues were particularly important to the superintendent but not as important to the teachers. Forty-one percent (n=10) of those responding to the CALL survey thought that dedicated time was needed to work on learning standards. The superintendent's concerns, student intervention, grading consistency, and student behavior, were related to working on the standards

but they appear to have been separated. The superintendent dictated a top-down agenda on grading while he tried to get teacher input from the council members who had other concerns.

*How come we're not making sure a kid can read and write and do the appropriate math on grade level before they go on to the next? Grading and discipline should be less important. (Josh, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies & Science)*

Josh also expected more direction from the superintendent on the curriculum council and closure with policy.

*There's really no one that is pulling things together. The philosophy is that he (the superintendent) wants them (the teachers) to buy in voluntarily.*

*What he's doing, and I think if I'm interpreting it right, with the discipline policy that he's been messing with for two years, is that he's finally uttered a preference. That's one of the first times he actually had an idea he brought in because he's always, "We're not here to make policy. We're here to make suggestions."*

*We haven't changed anything about RTI yet. We've been talking about it for a year. This year, sometime last year. (Josh, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies & Science)*

Justine, the fifth-grade special education teacher, was not engaged with the council's process for RTI change, even though as a special education teacher she would be affected. She appeared disgruntled and left out.

*(On RTI) I don't really know exactly what their endpoint is. It feels like they don't really have an endpoint.*

*We've had the RTI consultant in a couple of times but that was not helpful to me at all. If they're looking at RTI and they want to bring in someone to fix or change or say what we're doing well with RTI, they need to see more of what we are doing.*

*I think the consultant would have much better information and more accurate stuff to tell us if the consultant came up and observed. Live it before you make a recommendation on what you don't know. (Justine, Special Education Teacher)*

While there was progress with the district goals, there was an evident tenor of disappointment. Josh, Kitty, and Oliver served on the curriculum council. Because of her

AIS role and the council's priority to reestablish RTI to meet students' special needs, Kitty volunteered for the council. She wanted to be involved, as they discussed decisions that impacted her work with students.

*I'm not sure if there really is a leader sometimes. With the work that we're doing on the council, various committee (for the three priorities) members will kind of head-up something. People step up. They kind of like to talk to each other as to who's going to do what. (Kitty, Teacher, AIS ELA)*

Although the curriculum council offers opportunities for teacher leadership, there are questions about how the teachers choose and enable this leadership and the influence that they have on their colleagues for positive change.

The survey descriptive response, noted in Table 16, paralleled the interview data. It is interesting to note that within the "focus on learning" domain students who have special needs are addressed satisfactorily and that the discipline policy is consistently applied for a safe learning environment. The first issue is one that the curriculum council was attending to and the focus may have been reflected in the survey. The superintendent included this concern within the curriculum council implicitly with a focus on RTI; however, students' overall disruptive behavior was still a concern for those who responded to the survey, and the new principal's focus was directed toward school discipline rather than the learning standards.

Along with another item on the survey, the librarian and science teacher thought that the breadth of extra curriculum activities should be expanded beyond athletics and they initiated a science club. This club addressed an issue in the survey about extra-curricular activities meeting more students' extra-curricular needs.

The survey provided a broad overview of leadership issues where the school does well and where there are challenges. They especially coalesce with the items in the professional learning domain, such as a common standards approach needed for grading. The curriculum

council was tasked to advise on a new standardized grading system rather than focusing on the learning standards to drive this new system. If the superintendent had used the standards approach to the grading consistency he envisioned, this may have engaged teachers rather than attempting to get them to “buy in” to his grading initiative.

Teachers who collaborated to improve teaching and learning are not recognized for their leadership and this may have to do with the egalitarian nature of teaching; however, as the survey illuminated, teachers are breaking from their silos and do want this recognition like the teachers who advanced teaching writing within the content areas and those who are working on the curriculum council. It was also recognized that the principal has to “do it all” with the suggestion of creating a school leadership team to take on leadership responsibilities.

The school’s survey responses do not indicate teacher collaboration as a particular strength but the school librarian noted that teachers collaborated frequently when there was an already trusting relationship related to whether the teacher was seen as having expertise. This is an issue that the distributed leadership research and the teacher leadership research also raises (Berg, 2017; Crowther et al., 2002; Danielson, 2006; Spillane, 2006).

Overall, the survey supported information collected in the interviews and raised issues not discussed explicitly, e.g., student suspensions and parent conference attendance and its relationship to student literacy. There are connections between the interview data and the survey that need further explanation, such as Josh’s comments about the teachers’ summer book study learning and the lack of individual professional development plans. Josh was concerned that accountability for the summer learning opportunity was not integrated within teachers’ professional learning needs that applied to their teaching.



**Summary: Teachers take initiative and use their influence for change when they see students' needs for learning**

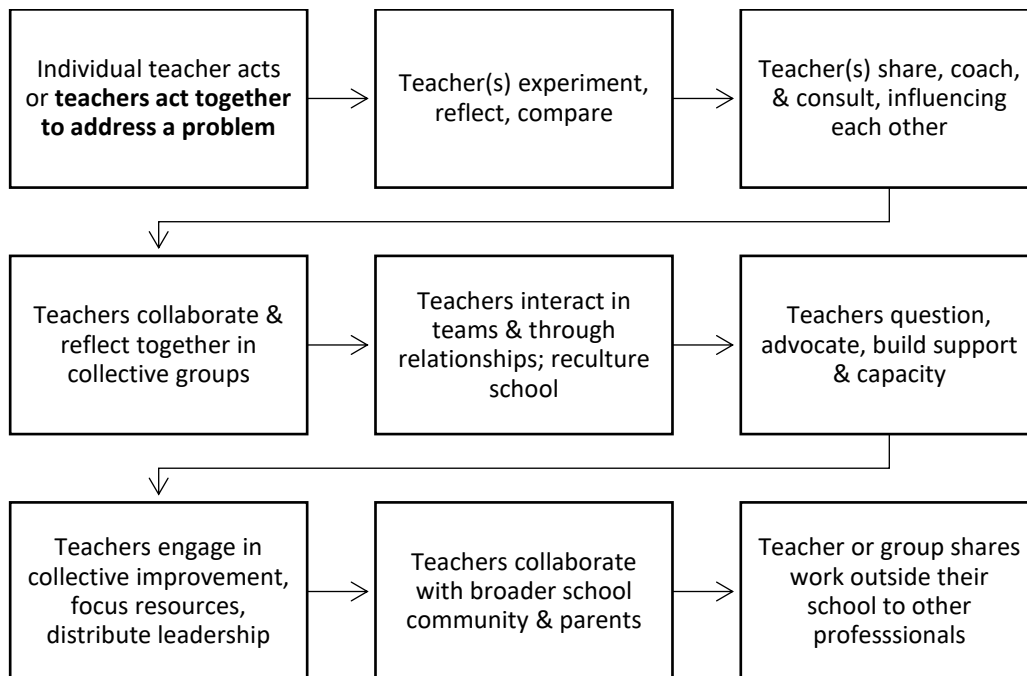
Twin Bridges' teachers made changes when they were dissatisfied because they perceived student learning was hampered. They used their influence together to make changes. The principal supported them with these changes and collaborated with them to make the changes school-wide.

When teachers saw a need for a process for integrating writing into the content areas because their students did not have the necessary writing skills, they changed their literacy instruction in the content areas. When a teacher saw that students had difficulty finishing their assignments she advocated for after-school sessions, which were established. When the sixth-grade ELA teacher and the school librarian saw a need to encourage independent reading to help students become better readers, they collaborated and started making changes within the ELA classroom and the school library. Then, they influenced their ELA and grade-level colleagues to agree to change. Eventually, the whole school was influenced, confirmed in the 2018 Comprehensive District Education Plan.

Teachers influenced their teams with information and directions from the curriculum council that enhanced their K-12 faculty meetings for learning. A teacher observed that one student needed a different reading intervention and advocated for that change. Another teacher recognized a problem and collaborated with her colleagues to agree to a consistent assessment process. In all instances, two or more informal and semi-formal teacher leaders acted to influence others to increase student learning (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). This was informal teacher leadership through collaboration, illustrated in Figure 5 according to Fairman and Mackenzie (2012) teacher leadership's actions for influence.

**Figure 5**

*Twin Bridges Rural Middle School Teacher Leadership Influence from the Classroom to the Outside Environment*



*Note.* Adapted from “Spheres of teacher leadership” by J. C. Fairman & S. V. Mackenzie, 2012, *Professional Development in Education*, 38(2), p. 251. Copyright 2012 by Taylor & Francis Ltd. on behalf of the International Professional Development Association (IPDA). Adapted with permission.

The school’s CALL® report was shared with Rachel who understood the role of teacher leaders. She recognized teacher leaders’ value because principals in small schools without other professionals support, other than administrative assistants, carried a heavy load. Rachel expressed her frustration about all the changes being required.

*And then when we’re talking about the roll-out of the next generation standards, that’s a learning curve for everybody to figure out where the gaps are. We have a lot of things all starting out of the train station at the same time.*

*In a small district, you wear the hat of everything. We don’t have specifically a curriculum and instruction person. So, we don’t have all these people. Typically,*

*your building principal in our district is your go-to for everything—your homeless liaison, all the FERPA [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act] requirements, instruction, curriculum.*

*We don't have assistant principals. We don't have deans of students. We don't have a director of curriculum and instruction. And so, when we talk about teacher leaders, we don't have necessarily formal teacher leaders.*

*It's people who kind of bubble up to the top, or they have an interest, or they have a passion, they're solid. They're solid in their content or they have gotten some of the professional development, so they've got that first kind of, "A-ha, hey, I'd like to learn a little bit more about that."*

*A lot of our teachers just seek out that person who knows what's going on. It's very informal, that's a teacher leader. It's very informal. (Rachel, Middle School Principal)*

In working toward the next generation standards, Rachel had seen that the teacher leaders she identified were playing important roles. One of those informal teacher leaders was Brianna, the school librarian.

*The teachers will come to me and say, "This is what I have to do. What can we do together?" People are always very willing to say, "Hey, I see you do this very well; can you help me with that?"*

*So, for my part in it, [adopting the Common Core] when the modules came out, they all had recommended texts for each unit and supplemental reading. I tried to get as many of those as possible so that the teachers had them if they needed them.*

*Just helping wherever I could, providing space, providing materials. We did a lot of training with the elementary school, so I tried to go to as much training with them as I could. (Brianna, School Librarian)*

Brianna saw a need to be a resource provider and as an informal teacher leader took action.

All the teachers on the curriculum council were semi-formal teacher leaders; they all volunteered and were selected to be on the council. Theirs was a semi-formalized role because of the selection process and the superintendent's expectation that the council member would be a

two-way communication link providing advice from their vantage point of the classroom and reporting back to the council what the other teachers thought.

*How I work is to offer suggestions at the meetings, take information from the meetings, and share it with other teachers. I have a weekly meeting (with the sixth-grade team) for planning purposes because I do a sixth-grade Reading and Writing workshop with the AIS students. (Kitty, Teacher, ELA AIS)*

Collaborating on the curriculum council was one way that teachers could serve as teacher leaders.

Additionally, teachers influenced their peers through informal means through their partnerships, groups, teams in grade levels and departments, and volunteering to serve on special committees such as the CDEP team. Distributed leadership was embodied in their actions in a situation or a routine. The teachers themselves were distributing leadership to each other within those venues.

Researchers have found that smaller schools tend to have less formal leadership than larger schools with formal leadership teams (Camburn et al., 2003, cited in Spillane, 2006). This was the situation in the Twin Bridges rural middle school where teachers played informal leadership roles extending their influence beyond their individual classrooms to benefit their students. These informal teacher leaders were experts in their content areas and had experience in their grade-level teams.

***Leadership turnover impacts teachers.***

One factor that was notable in Twin Bridges was the leadership churn, a theme that existed in this school and district with its impact on teachers' work. In one session, Ryanna had attempted to count up the number of administrators, the superintendents, and the principals with whom she had worked over her 30 years in this district. She gave up counting after realizing she had missed two or more.

*I think the tough part for us has been we've had so many different administrators. Each building has multiple administrators. (Richard, School Superintendent)*

With each new administrator, there were new expectations, but teachers maintained the culture.

All of the Twin Bridges Middle School teachers interviewed were informal teacher leaders as they worked on ELA and literacy. They were the glue, no matter the administrative turnover, that maintained the school culture and continued working with their students no matter what happened.

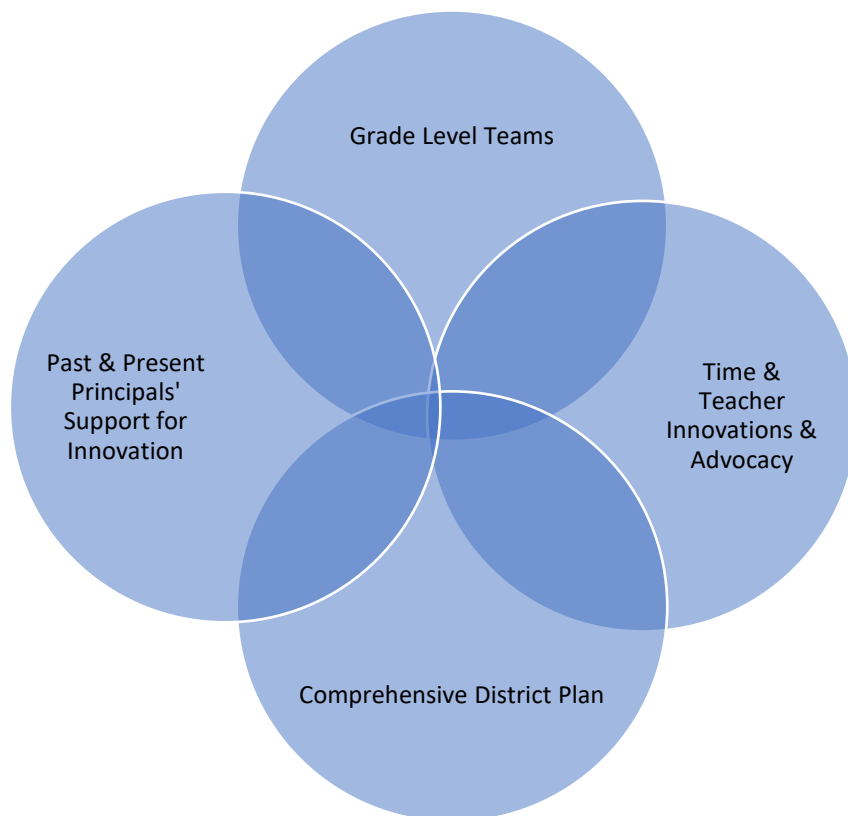
***Factors related to ELA and literacy instruction.***

At Twin Bridges, there were several factors related to ELA and literacy instruction.

Figure 6 captures the intersection of these factors.

**Figure 6**

*Twin Bridges Rural Middle School Factors Related to ELA and Literacy Instruction*



Each of these factors was exemplified in interview data presented earlier, and the structural components of the middle school. **Grade-level Teams** were established for all grades five to eight, consisting of the core content areas, and together with the independent reading supported by the **Comprehensive District Plan** highlighted literacy's importance for all curricular areas. There was **Time** to discuss student work through these classroom teacher teams and partnerships with the AIS teacher, special educators, and school librarian provided support to develop instructional **Teacher Innovations**. This time was also accorded through the faculty working meetings and curriculum council. The **Past and Present Principals' Support for Innovation** was integral to this system of literacy instruction supporting students along with **Teacher Advocacy** for individuals and groups of students. All of these factors worked together

to create collaboration opportunities for informal teacher leadership in this small rural middle school.

## **Chapter 5: Suburban School Teachers Working Together on Curriculum Modules**

### **Osage Middle School**

Suburban middle school sixth-grade English language arts (ELA) teachers were immersed in implementing a purchased ELA curriculum. The written curriculum consisted of timed units with scripted lessons, and interim assessment modules aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. This case details how these ELA teachers worked together to adopt and implement this new curriculum for their students and how their actions illustrated informal teacher leadership.

#### ***The School***

Located off the front parking lot on a busy town highway, Osage Middle School's quietness enveloped the front office. Teachers quietly and softly came in and out of the school office during their break periods to access their mailboxes or to talk to office staff.

Classrooms were located in the back of this multi-level building structure with teachers grouped by grade and content areas. The three sixth-grade ELA classrooms were adjacent to each other in the same hallway. With their classrooms' proximity, teachers were nudged to collaborate.

The library-media center was near the school entrance and school office, which illustrated its importance. Student artwork filled the walls. Within the school's office area was a small conference room that was used for all but the final teacher interviews. The interviews with the principal were held in his office.

In 2018-2019, Osage Middle School was the only middle school in the Eastern Foothills School District for 543 students, grades five to eight. The faculty was composed of forty-five teachers, with an average class size of nineteen students. Other staff included the school principal



plus a half-time assistant principal, two school counselors, and two administrative assistants but no school resource officer.

***What the survey description revealed about the Osage Middle School***

As reported in Chapter 4, the CALL® model supports an assessment not just of one formal leader but all leadership sources. While specific questions are directly applicable to the principal, such as the principal being involved in teachers' professional development, the leadership practices can be initiated by teachers and others. Table 19 indicates what staff members saw as Osage's particular leadership strengths and challenges.

**Table 19***Osage Suburban Middle School Leadership Practices: Strengths and Challenges*

<b>Leadership Practice Dimensions</b>	<b>Particular Strengths</b>	<b>Particular Challenges</b>
<i>Focus on Learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Appropriate services exist for students who struggle, especially ELLs, and students with LD.</li> <li>*ELLs are neither over nor under-identified.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*There is disagreement about whether there is a school improvement plan.</li> </ul>
<i>Evaluation of Teaching and Learning</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Individual teacher accountability for recommended teacher improvement responses is needed.</li> <li>*Schoolwide formative assessment is needed.</li> <li>*Teacher knowledge about formative assessment is needed.</li> <li>*Common standards approach for grading needs to be developed.</li> </ul>
<i>Professional Community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Principal attends professional development regularly; is an active participant.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*A formal process for teachers to observe each other is needed.</li> <li>*Individual professional learning plans should be developed.</li> <li>*There is a need for instructional coaching and mentoring beyond a year.</li> <li>*Poor performing veteran teachers continue to teach.</li> </ul>
<i>Acquiring and Allocating Resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Teacher expertise is used for teaching assignments and teachers are assigned to match students' learning needs.</li> <li>*School leader steps in only to support teachers' efforts to resolve parent/teacher conflict.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*A formal process to determine if extra-curricular activities provide adequate opportunities to engage all students is not developed.</li> <li>*There are no community forums to hear parents' concerns.</li> <li>*No process for coordinating community organizations.</li> <li>*Survey on school climate not developed.</li> </ul>
<i>Safe and Effective Learning Environment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Clear consistent student behavioral expectations.</li> <li>*Classrooms are extremely safe and clean.</li> </ul>	

*Note.* ELL = English Language Learner, LD = Learning Disabled

In addition to identifying the top leadership practices, the CALL® analysis provides other commentaries. According to the CALL® responses for the Osage Middle School, there was a strong focus on learning with the principal who participated in professional development along with the teachers. In the interviews, the principal emphasized the Board of Education (BOE) policy goal of inquiry-based learning. Along with the goal for inquiry-based teaching, the BOE established two other student learning goals:

1. All students of the Eastern Foothills Central School District will learn in a supportive district culture and climate that fosters a love of learning while providing innovative educational opportunities in programs that inspire creative, self-motivated, confident, and resilient learners who take pride in their work.

2. All students at the Eastern Foothills Central School District will experience a comprehensive educational program that is meaningful, collaborative, and purposeful, designed to promote persistent, curious, and self-disciplined learners. (Eastern Foothills Central School District Board of Education, 2019).

This focus on learning gave support to a coherent process for adopting next-generation standards' policy expectations that the administrator translated into action both with individual teachers and teachers working together. The CALL® survey responses indicated that the school took responsibility for educating all its students seriously, including those who are English language learners and students who have disabilities. This was mirrored in the BOE policy indicating "all students." Everyone had a leadership responsibility to advocate for and to address student needs.

## **The Participants**

### ***The Teachers***

According to the principal, there was little staff turnover. In 2018-2019, only five teachers had been in their positions for three years or less. The district required all sixth-grade core content middle school teachers to teach two subjects. According to the state report cards,

none taught outside of their certification area but I could not ascertain if the teachers had middle school generalist certification or dual certification in the two subjects they taught (New York State Education Department, 2021d).

The sixth-grade ELA teachers, identified by the principal, included: **Kathryn**, ELA, and Social Studies Teacher, the newest teacher in this group. In her third year, Kathryn came to Osage from teaching in the nearby city district. She completed her student teaching at Osage. **Susan**, ELA and Science Teacher, taught at Osage for over 14 years and was certified as a reading teacher. **Teresa** also taught ELA and Science but was at Osage longer than Susan.

### ***School Librarian***

**Phyllis**, School Librarian, was not involved in implementing the scripted ELA curriculum; however, the three sixth-grade ELA teachers considered her a resource for their technology integration into the new literacy curriculum. Phyllis was in her fourth year at the school with MLS school librarian certification.

### ***School Principal***

**Michael**, School Principal, was Osage's principal for nine years. This was unusual in the United States; school principals on average serve less than five years in any one school (Levin & Bradley, 2019).

*I really didn't have a burning desire to be an administrator. I like teaching and I like kids. I like being in the classroom and I do so miss that aspect of it, you don't have that direct relationship with kids. But I think I was ready for a different challenge and leading a building kind of appealed to me. (Michael, School Principal)*

For this study, I interviewed all of these individuals. Additionally, the CALL® survey response included more staff; 49% (n=22) of the professional staff completed the survey.

### **A Suburban Middle School**

***Structures for teachers to work together.***

The other core content sixth-grade teachers taught mathematics plus social studies or science. This resulted in four teams with three teachers in each team illustrated in Table 20.

**Table 20**

*Osage Suburban Middle School Sixth-Grade Core Content Teams*

<b>ELA Team</b>	<b>Social Studies Team</b>	<b>Science Team</b>	<b>Mathematics Team</b>
*Kathryn	*Kathryn	*Susan	Will
*Susan	Betsy	*Teresa	Betsy
*Teresa	Jimmy	Will	Jimmy

*Note.* \* Teachers interviewed. All names are pseudonyms.

Teachers had cross-curriculum partners that resulted in three partnerships. Each partnership taught the same student cohort A, B, or C as illustrated in Table 21.

**Table 21**

*Osage Suburban Middle School Teacher Partners/Content Area with Grade Six Student Cohorts*

<b>Student Cohort A</b>	<b>Student Cohort B</b>	<b>Student Cohort C</b>
Kathryn: ELA & Social Studies Will: Science & Mathematics	Susan: ELA & Science Betsy: Social Studies & Mathematics	Teresa: ELA & Science Jimmy: Social Studies & Mathematics

Sixth-grade students remained with their class cohort throughout the day. This provided an experience where students changed classrooms for their four core subjects but had only two teachers, limiting their teacher transitions (Osage Middle School Webpage, 2019).

In grades seven and eight, teachers were grouped according to content areas: English, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign language, visual arts, home and careers, technology, health, physical education, and music. Similar to a high school or junior high, students changed their classes throughout the day.

***Changing student demographics creates a new context for instruction.***

Osage experienced student change over time with increasing numbers of students who had higher poverty, and more students with different national origins, and racial backgrounds. This was similar to other suburban schools nationwide, especially those schools near the urban core (Gill et al., 2016). These “inner-ring suburbs” (p. 2) had increasing student poverty and were becoming more economically stressed.

At Osage in 2004-2005, 4.3 % of students qualified for Free and Reduced School Lunch. In 2018-2019, this increased to 20%. Also in that year, 21% were classified as economically disadvantaged (New York State Education Department, 2005; New York State Education Department, 2021a).

The principal commented on this gradual change.

*We have had a large increase in our free and reduced lunch and the poverty rate. When I first started teaching here, about twenty years ago, the rate was under five percent. This building is now over twenty percent.*

*The type of student here has changed, and that has to change the way we teach kids. It's got to change how we treat them. It's got to change how I administer discipline. So, we have to change how we do things here in order to work with the change in population. I don't think the people have changed, but our school population is changing, and we have to adjust to that. (Michael, School Principal)*

The teachers also commented on the poverty changes and other social changes.

*We have more and more of an influx of students that are coming from families in poverty; households that don't have two parents, and blended families. We're seeing so many students that are not in the traditional family, two parents with kids. (Kathryn, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science Teacher)*

*We've been trained to be very aware more so of kids' mental health needs because there's a sense of too much baggage they're coming with now.*

*I have two students that were molested by the age of five by family members. I just can't even imagine dealing with that. And it's just the tip of the iceberg.*

*We've all been made to be aware of, to look for the signs. And if there's something we question, the guidance counselors are very good about stepping in and talking to the child.*

*The district has employed additional mental health workers. We have besides the two guidance counselors; we have a social worker here half the day. That's a first.*

*We haven't had social workers here in this building before. There are so many kids that have that need to talk to somebody and the psychologist is only here every other day. It's nice to have another set of hands or someone if the other two helpers are busy. (Susan, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science Teacher)*

The district recognized changing students' social and emotional needs and was responsive. While students in suburban districts are less likely to be in poverty than in urban districts, the increased change in student poverty, as well as increased changes in student trauma and health issues demanded school leaders' and teachers' attention.

The district took steps to address these social changes with new professional staffing, and teacher training, and to meet the academic challenges—new curricula. Fifth and sixth-grade teachers played a leading role in selecting and piloting the new ELA curriculum. This middle school ELA standardized curriculum and materials, along with a new science curriculum, were purchased from the regional Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES). By adopting a structured ELA module-based curriculum aligned to the next-generation standards, it was believed that the middle school students would have equitable instruction, rather than having each teacher follow their own instructional preferences.

***A critical element for teachers to collaborate.***

Like other middle schools, Osage created times and team arrangements for teachers to collaborate providing for early adolescents' learning (Ellerbe et al., 2016). Sixth-grade core curriculum teams met on alternate days, ELA and mathematics teams on one day, three days a week, and social studies and science teams on alternate days, twice a week. Built into the contracted school schedule was an extra fifty minutes four days a week. Mid-week, on one of

those days students left early and it was reserved for all core content teachers to meet for professional learning time regarding curriculum and instruction.

The other days were reserved for teacher-supervised extra-curricular activities or teacher-special help time with individual students. According to Michael, this scheduled part of the school day started about ten years ago. When student cohorts went to non-core content classes, there was a daily prep period for teacher-partner collaborations.

There were regular opportunities for Osage Middle School sixth-grade teachers to collaborate:

- The same grade-level core content teams.
- Two-teacher partnerships.
- Content area teachers with special education teachers.
- Grade-level same content area teams.

Another scheduled opportunity was a once-a-month after-school whole faculty meeting dedicated to collaboration and professional learning. All the faculty meetings were planned by the principal

*I generally don't have staff members lead faculty meetings. The teachers usually sit in grade-level teams, like the fifth-grade team, the sixth-grade team, social studies, ELA, science, and math teams.*

*Most of the staff meetings are instructional-based. If I have some information I need to get out to the staff, from a managerial standpoint, I usually just e-mail it out or go to talk to the teams individually because they all have team meetings.*  
(Michael, School Principal)

Velma, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, and Michael created additional time for the ELA teachers to collaborate, to implement the new curriculum. This extra time occurred when the contracted curriculum consultants engaged with the team or when Velma was called to assist or if the teachers themselves needed extra time to collaborate.



*The administration is clearly behind it (the curriculum implementation). Things are being purchased by the district, “Whatever you, whatever you folks need is being supported.”*

*Absolutely, not even just materials. The principal even said, “If you guys need a half-day or so, if you need a few periods together, I can get subs if you want to work to get stuff done.”*

*That’s because it’s so hard to sit and work together for 40 or 45 minutes after school when you’re just figuring out what you need to do. (Teresa, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)*

***ELA curriculum adoption: A bottom-up and top-down process.***

Together the teachers initiated the curriculum change process. They were concerned about students not getting the same education and tired of sharing the student books with other classrooms. A year before this study, the final ELA curriculum selection was decided after a two-year process of study by teachers and administrators. After that, the district adopted the purchased curriculum.

*We used to have a program way back before the latest standards, HM [Houghton Mifflin]. It was great for a while, but then the needs [student needs and the standards] started to change and the focus was away from fiction to more non-fiction—informational. That didn’t work for the sixth grade anymore. So, we kind of started going back to doing our own thing.. Because before, it [HM] put all K-6 on the same page.*

*But then, when we concluded that HM had stopped meeting all of our needs some of us went back to doing some novels and pulling materials and activities off of Read Work®, and things like that.*

*There was a constant barrage (from teachers) to the administration that we needed something else because we realized that we were not all on the same page. We were all trying to meet our kids’ needs but in all our own way. And what might happen in my room would obviously be very different from what happened in a different classroom, even though we might be trying to meet the same standards.*

*We actually met and we came up with a whole list of criteria that we wanted the new program to meet. (Susan, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)*

Teresa commented about how the process for change was driven by teachers concerned with students' learning and how Susan, as an advisory committee volunteer, stepped up to be involved.

*There was a very reasoned process for the change. Prior to the committee, there was another one before that, which I was on. We were exploring this same topic but just weren't finding what we thought would be the right fit.*

*It disbanded for a while, and then the next school year, it picked up. Susan decided she would be on the committee because it was volunteer, and the committee members had more of a sense of direction where they wanted to go.*

*The committee was of all different teachers and grade levels plus administrators and Velma. I think our principal attended those meetings and then they made the decision based on the 21st-century learning components.*

*Another nearby district uses this, so I think Velma had spoken with people out there quite a bit. And then, one teacher per grade level piloted one module, one unit with a month or ten weeks of work. (Teresa, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> grade ELA & Science)*

Teachers collaborated and participated in the curriculum decision-making, one area of teacher leadership.

The state released the next-generation standards after the district decided to purchase the new ELA curriculum. Michael explained the standard's implementation process.

*Last year was our 'get acquainted' year with the (revised) standards. The administrators (district and schools) spent some time with our BOCES representative to educate us on what the changes were going to be, what the potential impact was, and how to get the word out to the staff.*

*(To the teachers they said) "Hey, here's the new standards, start to digest them, start to have some understanding of what they are this year 2018-19, and then when 2019-20 goes along, we'll get more in-depth with them to understand what this means for your instruction."*

*Then the BOCES representative came and spoke at my faculty meeting to share what she thought it would mean to teachers, and we spent a faculty meeting going over that and discussing it with the staff. Since that time, there's been a follow-up with the BOCES.*

*We believe we've chosen a new ELA program that does meet those standards.*  
(Michael, School Principal)

BOCES played an essential role in the district's implementation process for adopting the revised standards.

***A third partner in the adoption and implementation process: The regional BOCES.***

To change the curriculum according to the standards, the regional BOCES was an important partner with the district and the middle school. The new ELA curriculum was purchased through the district's BOCES. This curriculum was developed by a company that the New York State Education Department had contracted with earlier in its Race-to-the-Top federal grant cycle to provide curriculum services to the state. When the district invested in this curriculum through BOCES as a shared service, which means that at least one other district must purchase, they also contracted for the accompanying outside consultant services to support the curriculum implementation.

Velma was instrumental in adopting and implementing this particular curriculum. She coordinated the sessions between the teachers and the curriculum consultants.

*The consultants are available to us anytime we need them. When they are not, Velma comes. She'll come to answer any question like there's no problem at all about it.* (Teresa, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)

These inter-relationships with the BOCES are dependent upon local staff members' personal relationships with BOCES personnel and the level of support provided by their BOCES. Trusting inter-agency relationships, facilitated with state resource support, were critical to teachers collaborating for curriculum change. These collaborations also provided opportunities for teacher leadership within the schools and throughout the BOCES.

***Integrating a top-down theme into the new curriculum***

Because of attention to 21st-century skills, the BOE made inquiry-based learning a priority. This was in addition to approving new curriculums.

All students of the Eastern Foothills Central School District shall be engaged in inquiry based instructional practice that encourage collaboration, risk-taking, and critical thinking with demonstrated evidence. (BOE Goals, 2019)

Michael saw no conflict between the inquiry-based learning the BOE required for the next-generation standards and new curriculum implementation, but the teachers were not involved in the inquiry-based learning decision as they were with the new ELA curriculum.

*In K-6, a lot of those discussions took place with more specific information about what the teachers should expect, and what is expected. We talked a lot about how it's attached to our board goals.*

*Our board goals are such that inquiry-based learning or project-based learning is a priority for the board of education and it should be paramount in every teacher's instruction as they do their planning. I think that dovetails pretty much exactly what the new-generation standards are saying.*

*The page we've been focusing on is page three of the (state literacy) framework, which has the life-long practices of readers, and lifelong practices of writers. We've made links to inquiry-based learning and had the teachers work with this framework in a meeting to say, "What does this mean for you? What does this mean for your classroom?"*

*We try to be clear with the teachers, "This is not a—we'll do this once or twice a week. The students have to have access to these practices every day, throughout the day. It's a shared responsibility for everybody, not just the ELA teachers.*

*We've been working on increasing inquiry-based learning and project-based learning for four years now. Now the new practices are coming along, they are almost identical in many cases as to what we should be seeing in the classroom, so it's kind of helped out that way.*

*I've had some good conversations with our curriculum teams in science, social studies, and math about continuing to try to move forward to meet the board's goals, to try to get away from the sit-and-get model of sitting in rows and listening and taking notes for forty minutes. That's a difficult way for kids to absorb information and we want them engaged more and thinking more. (Michael, School Principal)*

The sixth-grade ELA curriculum team was concerned about inquiry-based learning because they were not included in the principal's recent conversations. Michael believed that the new ELA curriculum was already inquiry-based and met the next-generation standards; therefore, the teachers were already doing this. There appeared to be disagreement about what was expected.

Susan commented that although she liked inquiry-based learning, not everything should be taught this way and she wanted a choice dependent upon what her students needed. A teacher's choice related to students' needs was a future harbinger of her approach when adopting the new ELA curriculum.

*I think project-based learning (PBL) came from the superintendent. He kind of trickled it down to the administrators and then the administrators kind of forced it.*

*I like it but I almost feel it's overdone sometimes. Just when I see kids not writing well, I have a hard time getting away from direct instruction and turning everything into inquiry and PBL-type things.*

*Maybe it's the old school in me or maybe I just know better because I've seen it all come around. I just think there is a time and place for everything. (Susan, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)*

As she had been the pilot teacher for implementing the new curriculum modules and was certified as a reading teacher, Susan strongly influenced the other sixth-grade ELA teachers.

***Embracing working together with teacher collaboration.***

The implementation of a new curriculum required teachers who were willing to work together and collaborate. Each ELA team member commented on the newly adopted ELA curriculum and how its implementation actually resulted in more collaboration. This curriculum challenged them and collaboration was critical.

*Sometimes I'll bring a sample of something that I have a question about, such as how to grade. Just today we were talking about the end of the unit assessment and*

*what we would want to keep (from the way it's done in the manual) or if we want to change it based on our kids' needs.* (Teresa, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)

Teresa articulated explicitly that the teachers were not just focused on fidelity to the curriculum scripts but on their students' needs. She also defied the shibboleth of experienced teachers not wanting to learn and teach in new ways. Teresa welcomed the new curriculum because it connected her to her colleagues through their collaborative working together and moved away from each teacher "doing their own thing."

*Most of my big sisters have all retired, so I'm the last one left. But I would always share, even now with the new teachers.*

*I love it! I love it! I just think the communication grows tighter. I think that only benefits not only your own instruction, but it benefits what the kids are receiving from you and it benefits the way they are internalizing as well.* (Teresa, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)

Her comments also speak to how informal teacher leaders influence through sharing resources.

Because of their years in the building with their collaborative relationship, teaching the same two subjects next door to each other, Susan and Teresa worked closely together.

*We talk a lot. We're constantly talking about the kids and just seeing what's best.*

*She might take her homeroom out and take them to my homeroom, it might be about overlapping things that we're both seeing.* (Susan, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)

Susan and Teresa have built up a trusting relationship similar to Ryanna and Josh in the rural school. These trusting relationships supported reciprocal informal teacher leadership or the intuitive relationships in distributed leadership identified by Gronn (2002).

However, Susan was sanguine about being seen as the new ELA "curriculum expert" because she volunteered and piloted the first unit of the new curriculum package. As a teacher leader, she influenced the other ELA teachers and helped them through the first unit sharing

instructional strategies and student concerns. The egalitarian nature of teaching may have come into play.

*So, when module two comes, we're (ELA teachers) all on the same playing field because I haven't done that one.*

*My partner Betsy teaches math (and social studies). We work together to address parent issues. She will copy me any kind of email she sends a parent and vice versa. Or if a parent just reached out to her, she would make sure that I'm aware of what was happening.*

*We'll share student work informally. I'll share what I'm seeing, and she'll share what she's seeing, and we notice quite often that we're seeing the same types of things. So, we reach out to the parents or go to the AIS teacher. (Susan, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)*

Teresa illustrated her collaboration and teacher leadership influence with Jimmy, her math and social studies partner. During a total school staff development day, Jimmy said to her,

*"Our kids have to do some reading in social studies, and I have a packet of a section on Egypt I want them to read. Could you go over with me how you are having them write these 'gist' statements? And really, what are they? Because I want to start using that same verbiage with them in social studies." (Teresa, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)*

For the sixth-grade ELA teachers, teaming was very interactive. No one person was the expert, everyone shared their expertise. Within the group, leadership was distributed dependent on the team-determined tasks. When the team met to collaborate, they all knew their goal was to implement this new ELA curriculum.

*I don't know that they (the administration—school and district) know how much we collaborate. I don't know. Nobody comes and says to us, "Oh, are you guys discussing?" I think they just assume that because we are a team; we are professionals, and we will work together. (Teresa, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)*

They had a hand in selecting the new curriculum and accepted its goals, which prompted each of them to implement it, as much as possible, with fidelity. They each shared their concerns and their work with each other, influencing each other to new considerations and ideas.

***Collaboration and nurturing independent reading.***

The lack of a school librarian's aide in the library, a structural issue, thwarted increasing the school librarian's collaboration with teachers. Added to this was how the library was perceived by the teachers with previous negative library expectations created by the former librarian. Both of these issues limited Phyllis's collaboration with teachers. Unlike her collaborations with the sixth-grade ELA team, Phyllis struggled to have her role recognized by teachers who were in the school for many years.

*I put out a menu for the teachers to say, these are the things I can do. This year I finally put together a staff orientation for new staff. If I can't get the old staff to collaborate with me, I'm going to go with the newer staff.*

*We don't have a lot of extra time for planning and without additional professional library staff, I can't go to team meetings unless I close the library. I do meet with each sixth-grade ELA class once a week. I'm afraid if I collaborate more, I'll just be pulling my hair out because I don't have anyone to do the support staff work. It's a double-edged sword. (Phyllis, School Librarian).*

The internal school context of this school library was affected by historical and budget choices, which in turn affected the teachers' choices about working with the school librarian and how the librarian could work with them. School librarians or teachers choose to embrace collaboration and leadership as part of their role or they work against it. According to Phyllis, the former librarian chose not to be collaborative but functioned as a traditional books resource librarian (Johnson, 2012)

*When I came here four years ago, the previous librarian didn't do much with the library, managing or making this a learning computing center, so it left me a lot of room to grow the program. (Phyllis, School Librarian)*



Part of the literacy change was something the rural school librarian and ELA teacher also adopted. After a nearby statewide school library conference highlighted Donellyn Miller's *The Book Whisperer* (2009), Mary, a seventh-grade ELA teacher, started collaborating with Phyllis. They focused their collaboration on students' free selection of library reading materials, with subsequent extensions into Mary's classroom.

At a following teachers' conference, Phyllis spoke about how she joined with Mary to expand independent reading beyond the classroom to the school.

*We do a little project where they do a choice reading and then we create these little book blurbs that could be hung in the bathrooms and things like that to highlight books for the students. They are like a book review. She, me, and then the kids present. The students present their work to their group. (Phyllis, School Librarian)*

According to Mary, students increased their independent reading both in school and at home, rather than just for assignments.

Each year, Phyllis produced a school library annual report where she assessed her own professional goals and communicated with teachers, administrators, and the BOE about the school library's student effect. This concise report illustrated a marked increase in students' library use—students taking out books and other materials. In three years, according to these student measures, students' library activity had doubled with students reading more. The informal teacher leadership that Mary and Phyllis exhibited demonstrated student change.

### ***Modifying scripted modules to meet students' needs.***

After a half-year of implementing the new curriculum, the teachers shifted their thinking and articulated concerns about using scripted modules. This shift was the result of their experience and their assessment of their students' needs to engage with the curriculum and be successful. In response to their students' needs, they modified their scripted lessons' instruction,

the strict timed implementation, and supplemented the module materials to increase student engagement both for students who were advanced and for those who struggled. Their professional changes were subtle, meeting what the teachers perceived to be students' needs. Each ELA teacher discussed it differently. Susan emphasized the need to accommodate differences among students:

*The units are good, really good. For the kids, it's what they need, as far as the structure and the skills. But it's not as fun as what we used to do. So, I think in the future once we get this under our belts and feel comfortable with it, I would like to make some changes. Because I just see some things that we're told to do that don't fit what my class needs.*

*So, I do think it will eventually become more mine. I could even see using different books, as long as I am still doing the skills.*

*Now, in my opinion, I do think, that when I was piloting this, I definitely could see how more kids could be involved in the classroom instead of being pulled out, where a special ed. teacher pushed in and they could go along with the lessons.*

*I think of the higher-level kids, I just feel they're left out of a lot, and in a lot of things, they're already there. But I can personalize it, and no one really knows.*  
(Susan, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)

Teresa saw the need to adjust the pace of lessons:

*I see that pacing is a problem. Sometimes I feel like the kids need more time to discuss and to work with the skill, I come from that mindset of mastery and I know how to move ahead and let go, but I feel like if they're with me, how do you put more on their plate?*

*These are very intense lessons. Kids want to share and discuss. It takes time. It's different; it's depersonalized because it's so curriculum-driven, and the procedures are so different.*

*I feel like I don't give the kids enough time to let their hair down and just share a story that ties in with something (they are doing). Or I feel like they collectively don't grasp the skill as well as I would like. So, I provide a little more time with it.*  
(Teresa, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)

Kathryn believed the lessons needed to be more varied and exciting:

*The first five lessons of this latest module are literally the same lesson. And it was really dry. I started the module two days ahead. It allowed me to use a video that I found that connected exactly with what we were learning. It brought the text to life a little bit. It really wasn't part of the module. Also, because I was two days ahead of the others, I reformatted the assessment and both of my teammates are using it (the video and the assessment). (Kathryn, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Social Studies)*

Each teacher felt the need to alter the script, the timing, or supplement the modules. This conflicted with what they were being told by the curriculum consultants.

*I asked her, "How long, in your experience consulting do you find it takes teachers to feel they are fluent enough in all the different aspects of the program and the implementation of it to make it their own?" She said, "It's usually three years." (Teresa, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)*

The ELA teachers were collaborating and influencing each other as leaders for change.

There was also a reflection on the initial choice of the curriculum. This curriculum had been the only one that fit the criteria determined by the teachers' advisory group as Susan explained:

*This was the program that met most, if not all of the criteria. So, at the time when we picked it, it was good, and it met our needs. But again, we only had a choice of three because the teachers didn't want to buy textbooks. They wanted real novels. of the three. But again, in sixth grade, we couldn't even look at the other two because they didn't create them yet!*

*This was a great choice because we didn't have anything, and they (the teachers) didn't want to wait. When you come right down to it, we were right, because we did look at Scholastic. We didn't look at McMillan or any of those book companies out there. (Susan, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)*

Individually, even though they thought this curriculum was the best choice, these teachers made the leap to make modifications. Together, they encouraged each other. Using their professional expertise, (these were expert, experienced teachers) they adapted the curriculum to fit their students' needs. They distributed leadership throughout their team; they influenced each other.

During my interview with Phyllis, I told her that the sixth-grade ELA teachers reported that students had difficulty finding an author's main point or main idea. Phyllis had not heard this from the teachers.

*I don't always experience it. I guess they're (the students) more passionate about the books they're choosing and reading. They seem to understand the author's main idea.*

*Everybody reading the same book (with the new ELA curriculum), it's ok, but I don't think you learn enough the whole year. You really want students to choose. That's how you grow readers. Let them choose what they want to read.*

*I come from a constructivist background that is child-centered, you look at the whole child, so I see education a lot differently. I find that sometimes that people who came up through education, don't always get that child development piece. That's what I always kind of felt was missing.*

*Because I also worked in the city, we would have students (pre-service teachers) from the education department and we would have students from human development. I just found if they're K through 6 they don't get it. I felt like they never got that child development piece.*

*I don't see as much innovation (technology) as I would like. But we haven't had the tools either. We just did a huge upgrade, so we do have more technology to work with.*

*I do see a lot of compassion. In general, I see a lot of compassion and respect for students. (Phyllis, School Librarian)*

Phyllis asserted that the scripted curriculum approach did not fit a child development approach; interesting, because the middle schools' movement philosophical touchstone addresses the developmental needs of early adolescents (Ellerbeck et al., 2016). However, Phyllis was not privy to the modifications the ELA teachers made in response to their young adolescent students' needs.

***Boundary spanning: From the classroom or library to the school, district, and beyond.***

The sixth-grade ELA teachers informally advocated for change by questioning. They expressed their concern to the principal that they did not know what the seven and eight-grade-

level ELA teachers would be doing in the next school year to continue the ELA instructional processes of their new curriculum.

*Unless I physically go or unless we physically go and ask what they're doing. I don't know what they are doing next year. I have asked. We all have asked, "Is this going to continue in grades seven and eight?"*

*Because honestly, to be put through these paces—the kids through all this and really engage them in literature and literary skills in a different way to just go back to what they have been doing, it's a step backward. (Teresa, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)*

Following the sixth-grade ELA teachers' questioning, the principal planned a meeting of the sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade ELA teachers. The sixth-grade ELA teachers moved their student curriculum concerns beyond their own classrooms to the school. This is an example of boundary spanning, moving from the boundaries of their classrooms to other classrooms, not in their grade level.

Student needs were the main concern for Phyllis too. She was concerned about their interactions with her and their love to read and do research by using the school's library. Phyllis was also a boundary-spanner as she went beyond the school library with her interest in school and community connections. All of her district foundation grant projects included a community component. When she invited authors to talk about their writing with students during the day, this was followed by a special session for community members later in the evening.

Phyllis clearly saw her role as a leader in her work with students and teachers, and on special projects with the public librarian. She embraced the concept of a school librarian as an instructional leader and the ELA teachers and the principal responded because of her expertise and her can-do attitude. Phyllis approached her leadership position both through the formal functions of her job as a school librarian and informally engaged teachers with technology and the innovations she created.

Without support staff, Phyllis created job-like experiences for students to do library work so she could collaborate with teachers on the curriculum when they came to the library, even if she could not go to them. While Phyllis didn't consider this ideal, because she could not attend team meetings, she innovated a solution for collaboration time with teachers.

***Various structures can support teachers working together.***

Having taught in a large city school, Kathryn made positive comments about the new ELA curriculum because she liked the opportunities to share her technology expertise with the other ELA teachers, which influenced the others' instruction.

*Before I came to Eastern Foothills, I worked in a large district. They have departmental heads just for ELA, and then there are literacy coaches. We did a lot of work on the standards, so I became very familiar with them and can rattle them off the top of my head.*

*These modules are allowing me and my teammates to have real academic discussions about curriculum and instruction that I couldn't have in the past because teaching philosophies were so different. Now, we're all doing the same strategy, we're all teaching the same essential texts, and we have real discussions about our profession.*

*I'm really happy that we have a unified curriculum. I had a hard time my first year here I felt so isolated.*

*I love this school year so much because we have something in common and now, we can really talk about English language arts and not about "we don't have enough novels for everyone to be teaching the same thing."*

*It's really great to have something that unifies us and makes us collaborate with one another.*

*I'm really happy now that we can have a unified curriculum where we're all doing the same thing. I just really love collaborating with other people and I think it came from my prior experience.*

*I'm a computer gal, and I really like to share.*

*I noticed that in the past, things I shared wouldn't be used, but now we're doing the same thing, I see that my resources fit hand in glove with the strategies. The*

*new curriculum has totally allowed everyone to embrace those resources.*  
(Kathryn, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA and Social Studies)

The scripted instructional lessons gave Kathryn, the newest ELA team member, an opportunity to collaborate and to share with the other ELA teachers where once she felt left out. Her facility with technology encouraged her to display her innovations and her teammates reciprocated. Technology was useful as a collaboration tool, which supported informal teacher leadership.

Phyllis, the school's librarian, collaborated with all the sixth-grade ELA teachers.

Kathryn commented on this powerful collaboration she had with Phyllis through their joint emphasis on technology.

*My librarian and I have become pretty close because she is huge with technology. She understands so many new programs; she gets trained on all sorts of the newest and greatest pieces of technology. She knows I'm a tech person, so we collaborate a lot.*

*She'll come in and co-teach a lesson with me on citations and the first year I felt like I sort of needed her and now I don't really need her to teach citations anymore. But it's just so fun to collaborate.* (Kathryn, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Social Studies)

Susan also spoke about Phyllis and her willingness to collaborate with the team.

*Phyllis is wonderful. Whatever we want, we just have to ask, and she'll help us out; whether it's a research project or anything, she's game. She's just so knowledgeable too. She's always going to training and things like that. All I have to do is basically tell her what I foresee wanting to happen in class and she would help me with it.* (Susan, 6<sup>th</sup> Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)

Phyllis also wanted to collaborate with the sixth-grade ELA team but understood their demands for implementing the new curriculums.

*The fifth and sixth-grade teachers are very stressed with ELA right now trying to implement that, so I'm not getting much from them.*

*I believe in collaboration. That's what they (school librarians' preparation programs) teach us. And I have a student-teacher coming too. They're rare, like dinosaurs, they're almost extinct now. We're desperate, they're still desperate for*

*librarians in this area. She is starting on Friday, so I sent an email to introduce her, and part of her (assignment) is she is expected to work with the teachers.*

*I think this might be a great opportunity to collaborate with her. I hope it will work out.* (Phyllis, School Librarian)

Even though she worked hard implementing the new ELA curriculum, Kathryn quickly responded to this opportunity and collaborated on a social studies unit with the librarian student-teacher. This instruction focused on economics and environmental concerns, which connected student activities engaging community organizations—an example of a teacher whose informal teacher leadership extended outside of the school into the community.

***Administrator-created committees offer teacher leadership opportunities.***

Susan joined the new ELA curriculum selection team and shared leadership with others in the decision-making.

*So, when the opportunity came up to pilot the new ELA program, I jumped on it, I was on the ELA committee.* (Susan, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)

Phyllis volunteered to participate in the district’s diversity committee. This committee, which provided parent resources, developed a one-day high school program on diversity and racism. She provided resources to the committee and engaged in their discussions. While she thought that a one-day program was not going to resolve long-standing issues, she said, “It was a start.” She was able to provide leadership through resource sharing and her community connections.

***Professional learning communities provide teacher leadership opportunities.***

Another structure was the professional learning community. To engage in professional learning communities (PLCs), a school either designs them explicitly or implicitly (Chamer-Laird et al., 2016). Osage administration used time and grouping structures for the implicit support of content area PLCs and grade-level partnership PLCs. According to the CALL® survey, a formal system of teachers observing each other to function as critical friends did not



exist in the Osage Middle School. However, if teachers had a trusting relationship with other teachers, this happened informally.

*I have a special ed teacher that pushes in with me for one ELA block and then the teacher aide pushes them in for science later in the day. Alice (Special Education Teacher) used to do the special ed. our first year together. It was really so we could bounce ideas off of each other and it was just natural. (Susan, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)*

Margolis (2008) argues that for teacher leadership to develop, positive reciprocal relationships and a supportive emotional environment that enhances the informal resources of teachers working together are necessary. Mandates are not sufficient for school change. The potential of teacher leadership, both formal and informal, “is only optimized when supportive structures and relationships are in place” (p. 308). At Osage, the time structures and the new curriculum itself either explicitly or implicitly supported these professionals to learn together and to take action for change.

***Switching from formal coaches to semi-formal and informal coaching.***

Coaching is a two-way exchange. It occurs when the individual being coached confers with the coach about the result of a coach’s suggestions; there is a back-and-forth interplay. (Fishbaugh, 1997). In this study, Susan, the sixth-grade teacher who had piloted the first new ELA unit, initially worked as a coach. She was designated as a pilot teacher to coach the others. This modality switched from formal to informal coaching when Susan was no longer in the pilot teacher role.

In previous years in Osage, there was a coach who was a formal teacher leader for ELA instructional support. A decreased budget forced the elimination of this formal teacher leadership position.

*I think we've gotten rid of all our coaches. We don't have any curriculum coordinators either. Velma does the curriculum work but she has a lot on her plate.* (Michael, School Principal)

Teachers recognized that the coaching change was prompted by budget cutbacks; however, the changes had the effect of increasing teacher collaboration and expanding experienced teachers' expertise in not relying on a coach for instructional support.

*We used to have a coach that would meet with us for our needs and then talk to us and give us some ideas. But yeah, that's again, budget cuts. It was a teacher who had been here a long time and went into that and then retired.*

*Then they never filled it (the position) again because of money. That's always an issue.*

*It was nice to have someone to go to for a specific question. So now you've got to do it informally with whoever's got the most skills. That's exactly what we do in a lot of our team meetings or just kind of on the fly in the hallway.* (Susan, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)

In making this adjustment from formal teacher leader coaching to informally coaching each other, the ELA teachers understood each other's leadership influence while working together toward their common goal of implementing the new curriculum.

*We don't have literacy coaches here. We, the teachers, are really our own coaches as we're meeting every other day as a team.* (Kathryn, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Social Studies)

Susan and Kathryn's comments highlighted how the middle school moved from having a formal teacher leader/coach to having teachers take on this teacher leadership role albeit informally. They regretted their loss of a curriculum coach but recognized their own professional expertise and quickly learned the new curriculum materials and instructional processes. Collaborating with each other, they supplemented and adapted the new materials and instruction to their students' capacity and modes of learning.

Phyllis's leadership role as an informal coach encompassed collaborating with teachers as she provided suggestions and information. She brought innovative technology to teachers to enhance their instruction or to integrate technology with literacy instruction. Phyllis spoke about how she influenced teachers by working together with them through technology integration in ELA with students.

*Every year I try to do something a little different that keeps people thinking that these are the things I can help you with, these are things we can do together. I started a fake news unit with one of my sixth-grade classes and I used Tear Back®. In Google® it's an add-on if you use Google Chrome Pear and Deck®. You can take the Google® slides presentation you have done and can add in slides that ask students questions. So, it's an interactive presentation and if they have a Chrome Book®, they get to answer on their Chrome Book®, and then I have it, I see it on my Chrome Book®. (Phyllis, School Librarian)*

Phyllis and the teachers shared this recent technology and reworked it as needed back and forth, involved in reciprocal leadership.

***Using student assessment to support curriculum change.***

The ELA teachers worked together to analyze student test data and formative assessments of students' learning and were given additional time to do so when the principal provided substitute teachers. That support was essential and important to the ELA teachers because they used the new ELA curriculum unit tests and interim assessments to assess what students needed: reinforcement, reteaching, differentiation, or module modification. In addition to the common assessments, each teacher collected formative observational data and shared them with her colleagues.

Teachers commented on the assessment techniques as they applied them to individual students and what they had to do to adjust their teaching.

*The students have got to go to different parts of the room and write things out on chart paper, there's a lot of mobility in the lesson. It's so different from the way it was taught in my first fifteen years, so different.*

*And then it's looking, listening, circulating, and reading what the kids are writing and engaging them in conversation, so that I can say to myself, "They really understand it. Or, nope, they really don't, and here's what you need to do differently. Or here's half of them are really understanding the other half are going to need to be pulled aside, ask them to stay after."*

*When I see those kids that have diverged at something, I know I've got to pay attention to that person more. And whether it's reminding them or working with them one-on-one, those are all informal kinds of things. (Teresa, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)*

*I'm tracking different data points with kids all the time. Right now, I'm targeting a lot of writing skills. At this moment, I just feel like it's really important to make sure that I'm always tracking the data to see what more I need to do to support kids. (Kathryn, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Social Studies)*

*With this curriculum, the assessments come with it. They had to take two texts and prove their claim, using proof from both texts.*

*We informally do some exit tickets. It's just kind of daily check-ins with the kids, just to see how they are doing. (Susan, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)*

The teachers all see the importance of daily formative assessment whether it's using the common assessments from the curriculum or their own observational knowledge and techniques they have honed through their experience. They share this information on an informal basis about their students but to my knowledge did not apply it in a "critical friends" mode.

Michael remarked about using student assessment data to assess the ELA program itself.

*We will determine to look at the test data mostly to see if the kids are actually learning and understanding the material, and that's got to be through our assessments, common assessments, that we give three times (during the school year) that are part of our plan, and state testing, which is at the end of the year.*

*I think looking at those data points will hopefully tell us whether or not it's been successful. (Michael, School Principal)*

The school principal also sees assessment, and not just the end-of-year summative assessment, as important to develop and implement the new curriculum. With his supportive leadership, the teachers adapted the curriculum to fit their students' needs.

In the new ELA curriculum, common assessments were included as part of the instructional units. In social studies and science, the ELA teachers were also engaged with partner teachers. Because of the pattern set by the ELA common assessments, the ELA teachers influenced their partners and together they developed common assessments in subjects that had none before.

*In the science curriculum, we are going to be creating some of our own assessments because none really came with them.* (Susan, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)

### **School Principal Supporting Teacher Leadership**

Teacher leadership scholars stressed the importance of administrators providing support for teacher leadership, whether they are designating formal teacher leaders or recognizing informal teacher leaders (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The CALL® survey responses confirmed what teachers told me in their interviews, namely, that Michael played a key role as an instructional leader. He demonstrated this by being clear about his expectations, recognizing the faculty as professionals, and respecting their teaching and their judgments. Each one of the sixth-grade ELA teachers and the school librarian appreciated his support.

*He actually reads my reports. He looks at my goals and helps me try to achieve them.*

*I try not to bother him too much because I know he's so busy. But when I go to him and say, "I'm thinking about doing this . . ." and he asks about it and says, "That'll be great." Or ask questions for me to think about.* (Phyllis, School Librarian)

*Our administrator is asking us what we need for next year with this curriculum and he's trying to coordinate the schedule to accommodate the instructional needs and the reteaching needs of students to that schedule. That will help us do some groupings for interventions.* (Kathryn, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Social Studies)

*Last year, Teresa and I got to go to another school district that was using this curriculum to ask questions and share ideas. We got the release time to go. (Susan, Teacher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science)*

Michael relied on the teachers who implemented the new ELA curriculum and saw his role as primarily supportive. Without additional professional administrative staff, Michael felt he could not give more attention to instructional leadership within classrooms.

*I think if administrators truly had the time to do walkthroughs, three or four walkthroughs a year, and then spend time doing some coaching, then I think they would make a difference. But at the same time, the teacher also has to have time because they don't have any time in their day really to receive coaching. So, time is the resource that is probably the biggest impediment to instructional change for coaching. I think that is just how it is here.*

*I got a part-time assistant principal, which I'm thankful for, but she's here for only three hours a day or so. She just handles some basic discipline and then she's off to the high school in her athletic director role. Athletics definitely takes precedence.*

*All those management things that come with running a building take a lot of time to do those things, whereas if you have a full-time vice-principal I could spend more time in instructional shoes. (Michael, School Principal)*

Michael was pressed for time with forty-five teachers to evaluate and give instructional feedback after formal observation sessions. There was not enough time for classroom walkthroughs and monitoring instruction. The part-time assistant principal managed student discipline issues and did not evaluate teachers. Michael mentioned that one of the experienced school counselors provided him with needed school management assistance but she could not evaluate teachers.

*But when it comes to consistent instructional feedback, (having a full-time assistant principal) might be one of the areas where it would help us provide more feedback or free me up to do more instructional things as opposed to the nuts and bolts of running the building, like creating alternate schedules for a presentation we have coming up with a new jazz band. (Michael, School Principal)*

Major challenges provided by the CALL® survey in Table 19, indicated teacher evaluation and monitoring as needed. While the teachers interviewed for this study were experienced, expert

teachers, and informal teacher leaders who coached each other, there may be others who need more evaluative feedback.

When asked about the possibility of peer evaluation, Michael said the district talked about it three years ago but there was teacher union opposition, so it did not go far. However, the sixth-grade teachers worked well together collaboratively, which took the pressure off the principal to provide instructional leadership so he provided reciprocal support to these teacher leaders (Anderson, 2010).

Phyllis, the school librarian's point of needing more resources and changes needed for collaboration was also substantiated in the CALL® survey. According to the Osage responses, there was no formal school plan for teachers to work together although with the scheduling structures of the core content areas this was implicit.

For monitoring the teaching and learning domain, according to the CALL® results, the principal recognized the teachers' expertise in assignments and student groupings. While the sixth-grade core subjects in ELA had moved to common formative assessments because of the new curriculum, the survey indicated that not all grade levels or content areas were doing so. This made it difficult for teachers and the principal to assess student progress across a grade level. This observation was also reflected in Table 19.

Kathryn reported that she and her social studies colleagues found it daunting to create common assessments for their subjects. The new ELA curriculum provided needed assessment models. This was an area that Michael agreed needed more attention in addition to his being able to be in classrooms more frequently.

While he did not have time to be a "direct" instructional leader every day, Michael attended the ELA professional development sessions with the faculty members and counted on

their professional acumen for team collaborations, partnerships, and use of their professional learning opportunities to work through knotty issues while implementing the standards.

*I've already observed a few ELA lessons and I went for the training myself, to see how this new curriculum is different in the classroom, and I really like it. It seems very straightforward, and the instruction leads you to a certain understanding and vocabulary of the subject matter, so I really like the program. (Michael, School Principal)*

The survey results recognized his efforts to “attend professional development regularly as an active and productive participant” seeing him as one who is genuinely interested in their work (Osage Middle School CALL®, 2019).

As was described earlier, there were opportunities for teachers to create PLCs given the time blocks. Implicitly, the teachers came together formally because of time but informally in regard to sharing leadership. In this school, distributed leadership was developed through routines that were produced within the team structures according to content areas. This was done by design. Distributed leadership also occurred within the advisory committee with teachers’ working together to select the new ELA curriculum. The middle school contract was designed to provide after-class time for collaborations, student extra-curricular activities, and teachers applying for innovative teaching grants. All of these routines could involve more than one teacher working together.

Within the Osage Middle School, informal leadership was also distributed by circumstances or what Spillane (2006) calls “defaults” (p. 42). Because the principal lacked time to coach them and there was a shortage of funds to pay for coaching assistance, teachers had to assume coaching each other (another instructional teacher leadership role), collaborating to implement the ELA curriculum and modify the modules when they saw the need in regard to their students.



In response to the survey questions on allocating resources, teachers affirmed that resources were made available to adopt the fifth and sixth-grade ELA curriculum that shifted resources, such as eliminating a former coaching position—a formal teacher leader. Nevertheless, the principal recognized the expertise of the teachers and their teacher leadership to assume the collaboration needed for implementing the curriculum so they received extra time and consultant services. Teachers exhibited leadership in using their own expertise for coaching each other. Overall, the leadership shifts and distribution were observed in this middle school with the new ELA curriculum adoption and implementation.

### **Literacy Change: Support for Teacher Leadership**

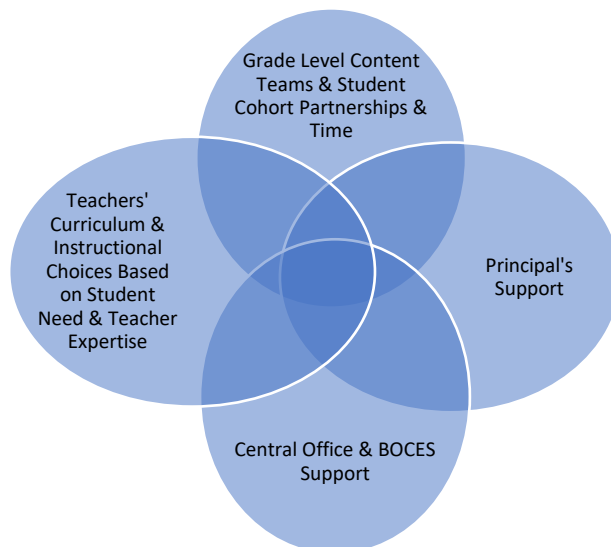
A number of factors in this middle school context supported literacy change and hence, informal teacher leadership. As in all middle schools that adhere to the philosophy of teaching young adolescents, teacher teams are essential. In Osage, there were four grade-level content teams and three student cohort partnerships of core content teachers. Each of the ELA teachers, all informal teacher leaders, was a partner in the student cohort partnerships. Therefore, to each partnership, they brought their collaborative leadership skills and expertise further developed within the changing ELA literacy curriculum. This was a curriculum they helped chose and adopt through a collaborative process.

The principal's direct support with extra time and his respect for the teachers' professional decision-making were also critical contextual keys to informal teacher leadership. This support provided teachers with allowances for diversion from strict adherence to the scripted literacy curriculum to make decisions based on their students' needs given the teachers' expertise. Additionally, the central office provided resource support through the BOCES for the

literacy curriculum adoption and implementation. All of these elements were interwoven for informal teacher literacy leadership. Figure 7 illustrates these elements.

**Figure 7**

*Osage Suburban Middle School Factors Related to ELA and Literacy Instruction*



### **Summary: Demonstrating informal teacher leadership**

All of the teachers on the sixth-grade ELA team and the school librarian exhibited teacher leadership and were viewed as leaders by the principal.

*I think teachers who are willing to step up and be on a committee, teachers that are willing to be flexible and learn new things. We talk about that growth mindset. I think it's important for teacher leaders to have that growth mindset. To be able to say, "Ok, the district has decided this is our new program. Let's move forward. Let's do it. Let's dive in. Let's experiment. Let's pilot this."*

*I have teachers who are piloting it, they have not complained. They have worked the program with fidelity. They have experimented. They have, I think, really done a good job of accepting the district's decision on moving forward with that program and I think the grade 5-6 teachers are excited about what that new program brings to their ELA instruction.*

*I've got teachers on the diversity committee and the technology committee. I have a math teacher who won a grant for a glass board. I've got six grant applications*

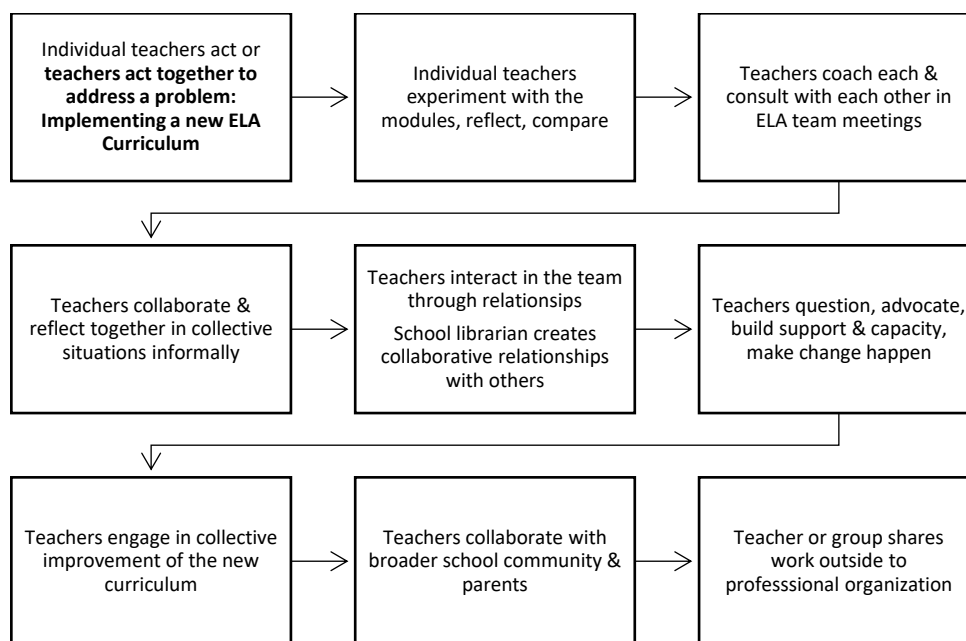
*right here that are going to the foundation to show that these guys are going above and beyond their (required) instruction.*

*So that's what I think a teacher leader is, is willing to change and grow, and try new things. And if you get stagnant, it's going to show in your teaching. (Michael, School Principal)*

Michael was clear about whom he considered as a teacher leader and gave them his support. One could ascertain that all classroom teachers could exhibit this leadership, especially those who were innovative and saw their role as going beyond the “stand and deliver” type of teaching. He was passionate about teachers who engaged students actively.

The grade six ELA teachers exhibited informal teacher leadership without designation or assignment through distributed leadership within their team; they coached and confirmed each other as leaders. They also collaborated with the school librarian, who through her job functions and actions was a semi-formal teacher leader.

According to researchers Fairman and Mackenzie's (2012) teacher leadership construct, the actions taken by these teachers' were teacher leadership actions that influenced others for student learning (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Each ELA teacher took individual actions, experimented in their classroom, reflected on those actions, and then took those initiatives to the group for influence. Using the Fairman and Mackenzie frame, this influence is illustrated in Figure 8 as applied to this case.

**Figure 8***Osage Suburban Middle School Teacher Leadership Influence from Classroom to Classroom*

*Note.* Adapted from “Spheres of teacher leadership” by J. C. Fairman & S. V. Mackenzie, 2012, *Professional Development in Education*, 38(2), p. 251. Copyright 2012 by Taylor & Francis Ltd. on behalf of the International Professional Development Association (IPDA). Adapted with permission.

Phyllis embraced an instructional leadership role when she started initiatives to influence the school curriculum. She began to develop her leadership capacity through her librarian training, a role that was encouraged by the New York State librarian training program at universities and colleges and the librarian’s professional association (New York State Education Department, 2020a). Through her actions, she influenced teachers to change their instruction using technology and adopt the independent reading approach that honored student choice.

Barth (2001) contends that all teachers are potential leaders sometimes and in selected circumstances. Each of these sixth-grade ELA teachers and the school librarian demonstrated

teacher leadership, taking opportunities to show that their work supported and complemented each other for the benefit of student learning.

The implementation of a new ELA curriculum with guiding support, a supportive principal, time for collaboration, and even disconcerting issues such as the principal not having teacher evaluation assistance or funding for formal instructional coaches bolstered support for the sixth-grade ELA teachers and school librarian exhibiting informal teacher leadership. Given the challenge of a diminishing school population with more low-income students, this school's leadership capacity must grow and respond.

## Chapter 6: Challenges of an Urban School

### Sunrise Middle School

The Sunrise Middle School had challenges that other urban schools are reported to have, extreme poverty, diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and community tensions with misunderstandings about student behavior (Welsh & Swain, 2020). According to the school's New York State Report Card, 79 % of the students were receiving free or reduced-price lunch, 67 % were nonwhite, 10 % were English language learners, and 20 % were classified as disabled (New York State Education Department, 2021d). There was also a history of parents complaining about student behavior problems (Local newspaper reports, 2017; Superintendent's community meeting, 2018). This case study examines the formal administrative leadership and the school structures that enhanced teachers' leadership during 2018-2019. Teacher leadership opportunities were abundant in this urban middle school for those teachers who chose to respond.

Sunrise Middle School was classified as a Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) school by the New York State Department of Education (NYSED) under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This meant that the school had to develop and implement an improvement plan, survey parents, teachers, and students, and receive support from the NYSED staff. If the school did not improve over time, it would be classified as a Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) school (NYSED, 2018). At the beginning of the school year, the principal anxiously waited to hear about the school's classification and hoped that it would not fall into the more stringent CSI classification. Moving to this classification meant that it jeopardized the district, moving closer toward a state takeover.

Mid-year, Sunrise Middle School experienced a severe legal crisis that directly impacted the principal and an assistant principal. During the crisis, the assistant principals reported

teachers experienced behavioral difficulties affecting their students' ability to teach. By mid-spring behavioral issues still surfaced but teachers and administrators continued to do their work within the processes established between the principal and the teachers.

In Sunrise, several structural factors were important for ELA and literacy and opportunities for teacher leadership: Marzano's High Reliability Schools® framework development, time structures governed by the teachers' contract, school history, and the organizational agreements using the professional learning community (PLC) model for grade-level interdisciplinary teams and content area duos, the use of technology, and the district's central office expectations and actions. Added to this was the administrators' and the teachers' dogged commitment to the students.

### ***The School***

Sunrise's neighborhood was made up of single houses with the surrounding area bordered by industries, and large and small commercial enterprises. It was blocked off from the central city by two intersecting interstate highways. The school building was a late 1950's block-style three-story building originally built as the city's junior high; it was one of River City School District's two middle schools that served students grades six to eight.

The school's office was busy and noisy with parents, students, teachers, and staff coming and going, some with two-way radios. Located at one end of the main office was a faculty room. The school library was in a separate section of this second floor and was staffed by a librarian and a full-time library aide.

The main school office was staffed by a principal and two administrative assistants. Two assistant principals' offices were located away from this office but after the incident they were moved nearby. Two school counselors' and one social worker's offices were located directly off

the main office. Other staff included 69 teachers, plus teaching assistants and aides who worked with students in addition to hall monitors and home-school liaisons. A school resource officer patrolled the hallways.

In 2018-19, Sunrise Middle School served 557 students (New York State Education Department, 2021d) and in 2019, the Public School Review gave a grade to Sunrise Middle School as being within its top 5% of New York State student diversity rankings. The Review, a for-profit online rating organization, utilized this formula for its ratings: “The chance that two students selected at random would be members of a different ethnic group. Scored from 0 to 1, a diversity score closer to 1 indicates a more diverse student body” (Public School Review, 2019). Applying this formula, Sunrise had a diversity score of .72, the most racially diverse student population in the three middle schools.

At the time of this study, Sunrise Middle School served all of River City’s grades six to eight English Language Learners (ELL), several displaced from Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria. Of the school’s total student population, 22% were Hispanic/Latino compared with the other middle school, which had 10.6% Hispanic/Latino students (New York State Education Department, 2021d)

***What the survey description revealed about Sunrise Middle School.***

Table 22 presents the CALL® survey information with the top leadership practices and challenges for Sunrise. These descriptions indicate distributed leadership factors extant or factors needed for student achievement.



Table 22

*Sunrise Urban Middle School Leadership Practices: Strengths and Challenges*

<b>Distributed Leadership Practice Dimensions</b>	<b>Particular Strengths</b>	<b>Particular Challenges</b>
<i>Focus on Learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Appropriate services exist for students who struggle, especially ELL and students with LD.</li> <li>*ELL and students with LD are accurately identified.</li> <li><b>*There is a collaborative school-wide focus on learning with daily, weekly, and monthly meetings.</b></li> </ul>	
<i>Evaluation of Teaching and Learning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Summative evaluation of student learning is integrated into classroom teaching.</li> <li><b>*Teachers assess student learning periodically with a unit, at least weekly, and more than once a week.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Walkthroughs and peer coaching do not enhance teaching.</li> <li>*There is little alignment between state test scores and student grades.</li> <li>*Student grading data needs to inform school goals.</li> <li><b>*Teachers need formative feedback with a process for peer feedback.</b></li> <li>*Collaborative analysis of student work is needed.</li> </ul>
<i>Professional Community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>*Time is scheduled to discuss instructional strategies.</b></li> <li><b>*When teachers meet to discuss student goals they talk about instructional strategies with ongoing reflection.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*A formal process for teachers to observe each other is needed.</li> <li>*An evaluation of school-based professional learning is needed.</li> <li>*Opportunities for team teaching are needed.</li> </ul>
<i>Acquiring and Allocating Resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>*External expertise is integrated into classroom instruction.</b></li> <li><b>*There are processes for coordinating participation with external expertise.</b></li> <li><b>*There is structuring and managing time to allow for grouping teachers into teams with student scheduling and programs that offer targeted instruction.</b></li> <li>*Many public meetings were held</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Low parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences.</li> <li>*There are no community forums to hear parents' concerns.</li> </ul>

Table 22 continued

<b>Distributed Leadership Practice Dimensions</b>	<b>Particular Strengths</b>	<b>Particular Challenges</b>
<i>Safe and Effective Learning Environment</i>	*There are consistent discipline expectations for male students.	An RTI program is needed. *The effectiveness of the anti-bullying plan is uneven. *Address the school attendance problem. *The discipline of students of color occurs not at all or a little.

*Note.* ELL = English language learners, LD = learning disabilities, RTI =Response to Intervention

Sections of the table are bolded that apply to teacher leadership opportunities. There were school-wide expectations for collaboration that provided these opportunities. Teacher meetings focused on instruction and also utilized the Marzano support through the Reliability School model. There were missed opportunities for teacher leadership primarily in the area of feedback on instruction offered by collaboratively examining student work and allowing teachers to observe each other.

## **The Participants**

### ***Teacher***

**Louis**, the lone teacher interviewed, was a novice core content teacher in his second year at the school. One of the assistant principals identified him as an “up and coming” teacher leader, having made great strides in his teaching and also recognized by the outside community. He provided a great deal of information about teaching and the teachers both in the interview and during a public conference presentation on professional learning communities (PLCs), and also by returning factual information in emails.

The survey results provided additional viewpoints from professional staff about the school’s leadership elements with 24% (n=18) responding to the CALL® survey. These included

the teachers who were not interviewed. Because the survey was confidential, I was not able to know if Louis participated. The survey was administered before the legal incident.

The principal suggested that the limiting factor for teacher participation was the legal incident mid-year together with previous incidents producing negative school publicity resulting in teachers shutting their classroom doors to all outsiders. Another possible limiting factor was that teachers expected to be paid for additional duties even if they occurred during the school day or minutes after contracted hours. According to the principal and the school librarian, teachers gave up their lunch breaks to provide remedial student help but received stipends for this work.

### ***School Librarian***

**Bonnie**, the school librarian, transferred to Sunrise Middle School from within the district. She had been an elementary school librarian in two elementary schools half-time each. The middle school position was full-time. Originally from the area, she came back to River City after working in another small urban New York school district. Bonnie assumed the role of semi-formal teacher leader both as the school's technology liaison and as a school librarian.

She formally applied and then was selected for a district-created school technology liaison role that provided teachers with professional development about integrating technology into the curriculum. In addition to her monthly meetings with the district's school librarians, Bonnie also met monthly with the director of technology and the district's technology committee members who represented all the other district's schools. Crossing the boundaries of these roles from Sunrise to the other district schools, she had influence as a teacher leader within and outside her school.

### ***School Administrators***

**Thomas**, School Principal, also came back to the region after being a high school English language arts (ELA) teacher in a large New York urban district and then as a school principal in another state. As the Sunrise school principal, he was in his third year, hired after the school and district experienced contentious principal turnovers. His district charge was to develop student behavioral control within the middle school and to improve student achievement, as measured by the state tests. He was building trust with the staff by attempting to change the school culture focusing on instructional change and increasing student achievement. This was after the school's earlier contentious staff turnovers and the distress teachers experienced with public exhibitions against the school and district.

*My first year here was devoted to teacher self-care. It was just trying to make teachers . . . teachers were using phrases to me like they were having post-traumatic stress. They sort of lost their way a little bit. Maybe they had to see by the end of the first year that I was invited back to believe that they still have a principal who's around. Maybe we can do what this guy says now. We'll work with him. (Thomas, School Principal)*

The positive change of having a principal with a longer tenure than six months to a year led to hopes for improvement and change. Principal tenure has a definite impact on schools as they attempt to change by implementing new standards ~~reform~~ (Snodgrass Rangel, 2018).

**Ann Marie**, Assistant Principal, was proud of living in the school district and was new to her administrative role. As an instructional coach during the district's Common Core Standards' first implementation, Ann Marie was a formal teacher leader. She was a literacy specialist in the district, a semi-formal teacher leader, before assuming the formal teacher leader role.

**Sam**, Assistant Principal, was an assistant principal in another New York urban school and a former physical education teacher. He had also returned to the River City region where his family originated. All of the professional staff interviewed chose to come back to the district.

### **An Urban Middle School**

***High Reliability Schools® Framework interwoven with collaborative change.***

Thomas had advocated for and received district grant support for the Marzano High Reliability Schools® framework addressing the school's curriculum and instructional changes he saw needed for success.

*We're working with the Marzano Research Lab on the High Reliability Schools model.*

*This is what I told my staff, "The curriculum is in a bit of flux, the state's changing, we're trying to keep up, so we're going to focus on instruction because good instruction can outrun an inadequate curriculum any day of the week; in my opinion." So, our focus is going to be on instruction."*

*I chose Marzano because I have a background in it and because it's good. The research base is great. We're focusing on levels one and two primarily, safe, and collaborative culture and effective teaching. (Thomas, School Principal)*

The Sunrise Middle School was the only school in the district that adopted the High Reliability Schools® framework whose consultants provided professional development and support to the teachers and administrative staff. Thomas justified his choice based on his research and his prior work with the framework. At the end of his first year as principal, he advanced these same concepts about the framework with the Sunrise faculty who accepted its adoption.

To initially implement the framework, administrators selected two teams of ten teachers, both experienced teachers and novice teachers, to attend intensive summer professional development seminars. Influential teachers, such as the teacher union's building representative, were included in the group. During the summer of 2018, these teachers and the three school administrators participated in the out-of-state Marzano Summit professional learning experiences.

*We're really working on that and I think we're starting to make some headway. It's a tough road, thanks to a grant we've been able to take two teams to the Marzano summits with their expertise and they just have phenomenal presenters.*

*That's helped me change minds. Strategically, when you talk about distributive leadership, I chose different levels of teachers.*

*On each team, that we took on these experiences, I had reluctant veterans, I had natural teacher leaders, and I had not the newest teachers, but those three to five-year teachers. Then, there are the veterans who have kind of traditionally tied up the leadership spots and become a power base. I wanted to reign those teachers in.*

*Strategically I had a mix of them on both teams. I took people who were with us already and I tried to pull in some people who were reluctant. I avoided markedly negative people; I don't have many of those left in the building; maybe four or five.*

*I've isolated them, that sounds mean, but that's what you have to do. They're going to make one of two choices, they're either going to come along so they can rejoin the group and not feel isolated or they're going to leave, and I always win.*

*One of the challenges in schools is the research that shows it takes five to seven years (for change and reform) and most principals only last three to five years. They haven't pushed me out yet. Some of my friends, when I came back here told me not to take the job because they said it would be a career-ender. I hope not.*

*My goal is high-quality instruction in every classroom. We've really dug into the new art and science of teaching. I know that all the teachers are trained. They know the three instructional categories, ten design questions, and forty-three elements. Every teacher has access to the Marzano compendium, so they just have a whole library of strategies at their fingertips.*

*A very critical friend at the state ed department asked, "What have you done for student impact?" Which is pretty tough on me; I've provided this professional development, and these tools, and these strategies. They're like, "Yeah, but who's accountable for doing it that way?" It's the year-three question for me. So, this year we're starting with everybody setting a professional growth goal. (Thomas, School Principal)*

Thomas was confident that adopting the High Reliability Schools® Framework would be successful for this school. In his first year, he worked to build teachers' trust and enacted procedures to control students' behavioral problems focusing on their getting to class on time. He supported them to build their instructional and leadership capacities using the structure supported by the framework.

The High Reliability Schools® framework is based on five progressive levels of school development:

1. Safe, supportive collaborative culture.
2. Effective teaching in every classroom.
3. Guaranteed and viable curriculum.
4. Standards referenced reporting.
5. Competency-based education.

For the 2018-2019 school year, Sunrise Middle School administrators and teachers agreed to concentrate on levels one and two, having a school culture that supported collaboration with every teacher teaching effectively.

The Sunrise teachers defined what teaching effectively meant. They selected elements from the framework that should be observed in all classrooms and added other elements that should not. Teachers selected these specific priority elements within their grade level teams and the final decision was made by the school's leadership team. Figure 9 presents these elements as they were displayed on a poster in each grade-level team's conference room. The numbers refer to the 43 elements within the framework.

**Figure 9***Sunrise Urban Middle School Instructional Framework*

<b>Should See and Hear Almost Daily</b>	<b>Could See and Hear But Not Daily</b>	<b>Never See or Hear</b>
<p><b>Feedback</b></p> <p>4. Informal Assessments of the Whole Class</p> <p><b>Content</b></p> <p>6. Chunking Content</p> <p>8. Recording and Representing Content</p> <p>19. Reflecting on Learning</p> <p>22. Organizing Students to Interact</p> <p><b>Context</b></p> <p>24. Increasing Response Rates</p> <p>32. Motivating and Inspiring Students</p> <p>36. Acknowledging Adherence to Rules and Procedures</p> <p>40. Displaying Objectivity and Control</p> <p>41. Demonstrating Value and Respect for Reluctant Learners</p>	<p><b>Feedback</b></p> <p>2. Tracking Student Progress</p> <p>3. Celebrating Successes</p> <p><b>Content</b></p> <p>12. Engaging Students in Cognitively Complex Tasks</p> <p>14. Generating and Defending Claims</p> <p>21. Elaborating on Information</p> <p><b>Context</b></p> <p>43. Probing Incorrect Answers with Reluctant Learners</p>	<p>*Students Humiliated, Disrespected, or Ignored By Staff</p> <p>*Sarcasm</p> <p>*Students Rejected From Our Classrooms</p> <p>*Cell Phones (unless used as part of classroom instruction)</p>

According to Louis, teachers thought number 12, engaging students in cognitively complex tasks, and number 14, generating and defending claims, were the most important for increasing student learning. But what was essential when discussing instruction was that the framework helped establish a common vocabulary.



Administrators and teachers referred to this chart continuously when they discussed instructional strategies, as it hung in each team room. One team had worked on an instructional strategy that they called RAP.

*What we came up with as a team is the RAP strategy, which for two-point response (on the state test) has become huge. And I think they will become bigger once the state figures out where it is going to go.*

*And in ELA especially, they are huge now. So, RAP stands for Restate the Question, Answer, and Provide evidence for your answer.*

*Every teacher teaches it in their own content. So, for me, it was, we want you to restate the question. I want your answer, which is often their opinion, and I want you to give me two pieces of evidence from the document explaining why you say what you say.*

*In English, it's very similar, but then it also works in areas like math and science, where they are using numbers as their proof or concepts as proof. And, I have seen an absolutely significant increase in how quickly and how efficiently they write them from the beginning of the year. Now, they're writing five, six, or seven sentences on their own, which is pretty phenomenal. (Louis, Core Content Teacher)*

The High Reliability Schools® Framework promoted the use of state standards for building assessment strategies that define the intended results first.

Louis gave his perspective on the Common Core standards compared with the New York State Syllabus in his content area. He called the next-generation standards the New York State Common Core.

*There are two main sets of frameworks or standards. There's the Common Core and then the classic New York State syllabus. The Common Core ones are much more broad aiming at enduring issues, which you know, five years from now, the state tests are going to be like.*

*The syllabus is: Can you remember these facts? The Common Core is, Can you think about it? Can you read and write based on the standards?*

*In my content department, we have picked five of the big Common Core Frameworks and we can apply them to the New York State Standards. This same*

*thing can be done using the New York State Common Core, and it works pretty well.* (Louis, Core Content Teacher)

Louis's approach to instruction was using larger concepts and higher-level questioning levels with the revised Bloom's taxonomy for question development (Krathwohl, 2002). He found that this approach was successful for his students and he shared this information with his interdisciplinary grade-level team.

***Professional Learning Community (PLC) teams provide teacher leadership opportunities.***

One formal structure that was created before Thomas became principal was interdisciplinary grade-level teams. Each grade level—six, seven, and eight—had two teams. These six teams were designed to support teacher collaboration and the teachers supported this team structure. After Thomas became principal, the administrators and the teachers framed them as PLCs. Thomas believed these PLC teams had strong teacher power working together collaboratively within a community to develop and learn new effective instructional strategies, which would apply to multiple disciplines.

Although the schedule for team meetings was organized by the current administrators, Thomas would have designed the teams differently.

*The team structure was in place. It is not a structure I would have created. I think it's had its place in time.*

*There were some benefits when I was in the other state where they had massive middle schools, twelve, thirteen hundred kids. We were able to make them feel smaller with team scheduling.*

*Here, we break our grades in half, so it's two hundred kids per grade roughly so what we call a grade group, each team has a hundred kids. We are too small a school.*

*And then the students have gaps in literacy. In this middle school, it's nearly impossible to put student groups together for remediation because of the way the team structure is formatted.* (Thomas, School Principal)

Each of the school's six grade-level PLC teams included an English language arts teacher, a mathematics teacher, a science teacher, a social studies teacher, and a special education teacher. Students were assigned by cadres to these teams of teachers who then instructed the same cadre of students. The collective arts teachers (visual arts, vocal music, and instrumental music) and the group of family consumer science, foreign language teachers, and physical education teachers were each grouped into separate teams, two groups. Thomas evaluated these groups of teachers who were not on the PLC teams, while the assistant principals were assigned each to evaluate teachers who were on three grade-level teams.

Middle school philosophy assumes that special student learning needs should be addressed in regular classrooms. The Sunrise Middle School's PLC interdisciplinary team construction reflects that middle school philosophical principle. This middle school belief encourages and supports teachers to address student needs across disciplines and a special educator was placed on each of these PLC teams to help them do so. But Thomas was concerned that the team structure created problems for students who had considerable literacy learning needs. Because of the tight team time structure with the connected student cadres, it was difficult to group students across teams for remediation.

The administrators had different relationships with the PLC teams. Thomas saw his role as "captain of the ship" to keep the PLC teams on course. He nudged people to improve their instruction by asking teachers probing questions and he attempted to engage the teachers in roles of being critical friends.

*When we're focusing and when I'm guiding the team, it's collaborative. How do we really operate as a professional learning community? It's not easy.*

*Generally, teachers who have been in the district for a long time get some training. They come back, they go in their classroom, and they just do what*

*they've always done. They're exposed to the research; they know it's good but you know that was on Friday--staff development day.*

*When they sat down on the weekend to write their lesson plans, they pulled out their binder that they used before the training, and they didn't do anything to incorporate the training and they planned for the week. And continued on with life. (Thomas, School Principal)*

Every six instructional days, Thomas met separately with each PLC grade level team with Ann Marie or Sam occasionally joining him. In these meetings, Thomas shared information from the various district department meetings and discussed the team's progress toward meeting the team's instructional goals.

When he was not present at the team meetings, Thomas expected teachers to discuss how the agreed instructional strategies were working for literacy and to collect student evidence data, which resulted from the specific instructional method they chose to apply.

Thomas asserted that he tried not to assess and take over a team meeting; that he preferred team members lead and guide the discussion. But he also expressed a sense of urgency about teachers examining student literacy evidence within their teams.

*We're now preparing for this Friday, which is day six in our world. Day six is when we hold team meetings and see how we're doing with support strategies, outlines; things that I need from them.*

*They're choosing a specific skill (for literacy instruction) setting goals with metrics, which is really throwing some of them. Some are very challenged with goal setting. That it is something that's transparent, measurable, and accountable.*

*If they write, "Students will understand." Well, that's great that they understand, but how do they demonstrate understanding in a way that we can measure it?*

*Day six is a biggie. I want to transition to where day six is more and more the PLC process, working with others, and giving feedback. I'm trying to do that and told them that was my goal for this year.*

*Some of them are so sloppy with how they work with others, but I don't want to take over their meeting time. I'm trying to get the team leader (who was chosen by their team colleagues) to give the team leadership. (Thomas, School Principal)*

Thomas wanted the team leaders, designated as such by their team colleagues, to assert more directive leadership when the team was examining instruction. These team leaders were also members of the whole school's leadership team. Early in the school year, each team created or reviewed its norms and chose a leader. This leader represented their PLC team on the school's leadership team.

Thomas directed the PLC grade-level teams to work collaboratively through an action research framework for team-designed instructional strategies. He wanted them to evaluate their selected literacy instructional strategies within their classrooms and then share their student formative assessment data to see what worked. Different teams implemented different strategies. Thomas resisted a couple of teachers' suggestions that every team should work on the same strategy.

*Each team creates or chooses an area of need that they would research and then employs a strategy. They would do their own common assessments within their teams about the use and impact of the strategy.*

*The first thing they would do for their first set of common assessments would be to just sit there to see how many kids were able to successfully employ the strategy.*

*Then the next step, that once kids are employing the strategies, is to ask, "Is it having an impact in my particular class?" Just wonderful conversations, there are math teachers who are like "Well, we can use this phrase, but we had to make an adaptation. The strategy gets good credit for writing but for math, we had to use the adaptation."*

*Once the teachers did that and one teacher showed it had a remarkable impact on her class, others bought in too. It's really exciting, those kinds of conversations. It's kind of something special.*

*And I've been sharing that with the teachers, "I don't think you all realize we're harnessing learning skills and outcome study skills. We're harvesting strategies that kids can apply to problem-solving. It doesn't matter the context of the problem and that can be an impactful thing."*

*Different teams are working on different areas. I've gotten some pushback from some people who think I should do a single strategy throughout the whole school. And I'm like, "What?!"*

*Some teams are building background vocabulary. Some teams are doing a couple of different acronym-type phrases such as RAP. It's been exciting, it's been great.*

*A teacher last year who I thought was totally burnt out, wasn't in good relationships with her kids, coasting with her instruction, but a competent teacher. She got invigorated.*

*This year she is doing a six-step vocabulary instruction with her kids and teaching it to the rest of the team. I think she's doing it too slow, but the kids are getting a solid understanding. I'm not pushing too hard, just sort of gently.*

*(She says) "Yeah, we could do two words a week instead of one. We could push a little bit harder." She's building relationships with them because she is more engaged and they're more engaged. It's the most fun watching the change in her. She doesn't see the change. She didn't see how bad things were. (Thomas, School Principal)*

Earlier, Thomas planned a time for the teams to share their action research with the other teams. This sharing day was to be part of a special faculty meeting where the teams would display on posters their team's work. Every teacher on each team implemented the jointly agreed-upon instructional strategy and collected their students' data. The posters were to have presented their attempts with the instructional strategies and the student and teacher outcomes. Unfortunately, this activity was quashed when the district had one of its every other week snow days. This planned activity did not happen later in the year either because of the incident that engulfed the school and challenged the administrators with legal action.

The assistant principals were also expected to coach the teams on instruction but this happened infrequently because their primary role was taking care of student discipline. For these assistant principals, this was a major frustration. They found little time to provide team instructional leadership when they were called to task for students' behavioral issues, such as student emotional outbursts, or student infractions like running out of the school during the

school day. Additionally, when they were able to meet with their three assigned PLC teams, the teachers only wanted to talk about managing student behavior. And there was another dilemma, Ann Marie and Sam had the responsibility for formally evaluating the individual teachers on specific teams.

*Unfortunately, as I'm sure Ann Marie said, our job becomes so discipline-oriented that we don't have an opportunity to get in the classrooms.*

*So, I spent yesterday in a second-period English class because I was looking at a couple of kids discipline-wise. I got into the class and could at least talk to the teacher while the class was working.*

*I try to get myself into two or three classrooms a week. Just to do those little things. Fortunately, two of my grade eight teams have our most experienced teachers.*

*From the discipline side, because of structure, our kids need that to be very top-down. But instruction-wise, it's not. (Sam, Assistant Principal)*

Because of the student discipline issues, these administrators were not able to focus on instruction or assist in distributing teachers' leadership.

*You talk about shared leadership with these guys, I would never sit back and say I know it all. They're in the trenches, they're there.*

*I just never bought into a top-down approach. I was trained that leadership was to be shared. (Sam, Assistant Principal)*

Anne Marie had been a formal teacher leader and Sam was prepared as an administrator to share leadership, they were knowledgeable about distributed leadership and its potential. Moving from an instructional coaching position to administration was difficult for Anne Marie because the assistant principal's position was so focused on student discipline rather than instruction.

However, she, like Sam, adopted a coaching mode when evaluating teachers. This evaluation mode was supported by the High-Reliability Schools® model. With her background in literacy, she was also able to provide coaching on reading and writing instruction. They both

recognized that teachers had this leadership capacity but again, I was unable to assess these interrelationships with the middle school teachers.

Within the PLC teams, there was an interdisciplinary perspective across the core subjects that provided a focus on instructional techniques applicable to all subjects. Dynamic duos were established within grade levels of the same content area. The duos had a content area focus and could also compare notes about their PLC teams' instructional strategies.

Informal teacher leadership develops in different ways within the PLC teams. One way was that teachers asked questions and challenged other teachers about their work with students, serving as critical friends. In one instance, Thomas reported that a teacher was resisting her team's suggestions about implementing the team's agreed-upon instructional method, insisting that it was the students who were not "getting it." The other team members suggested that the teacher try different ways to construct her lessons. Two teachers then volunteered to take a look at the students with whom she was having trouble. They stepped up to take on the role of critical friend. When Thomas relayed this scenario, he expressed approval that the team members were beginning to assume these leadership roles.

***Time, space, and teachers' content duos supported teachers' collaboration.***

Teacher preparation time and teachers' schedules were hallmarks of the district's negotiated agreement.

Preparation time shall be provided within the pupil's instructional day for teachers of intermediate grades (4-6) of not less than two hundred minutes per week spread most equitably over not less than 4 days. . . Secondary school teachers shall have a one (1) hour duty-free lunch period except where local building conditions prohibit it. In no case will there be less than a 45-minute duty-free lunch period.

(River City School District Negotiated Agreement, 2018)

Bemoaned by Thomas, the middle school teachers' time structure was governed by this negotiated agreement, and teachers held strictly to this structure with little flexibility. Their



classes were 38 minutes long with teachers assigned to five classes; therefore, teachers taught directly for about three hours and 15 minutes each day.

The schedule was also organized for PLC team time once daily for 38 minutes assigned PLC team time. All teachers had a 45-minute lunch period without students plus a 38-minute individual prep period. During their lunch break, teachers could choose to work alone or together or be paid for providing student remedial services. Same grade level content area teachers were scheduled for the same individual planning periods so they could be “dynamic duos”.

Table 23 illustrates how the teams and duos were aligned for the core subject areas with the six interdisciplinary PLC grade-level teams and twelve duos. Dynamic Duos were two teachers in the same content area and grade level.

**Table 23**

*Sunrise Urban Middle School PLC Teams and Dynamic Duos*

Grade 6 PLC Teams A & B		Grade 7 PLC Teams A & B		Grade 8 PLC Teams A & B	
<i>ELA Grade 6 Duo</i>		<i>ELA Grade 7 Duo</i>		<i>ELA Grade 8 Duo</i>	
ELA Teacher A	ELA Teacher B	ELA Teacher A	ELA Teacher B	ELA Teacher A	ELA Teacher B
<i>Mathematics Grade 6 Duo</i>		<i>Mathematics Grade 7 Duo</i>		<i>Mathematics Grade 8 Duo</i>	
Mathematics Teacher A	Mathematics Teacher B	Mathematics Teacher A	Mathematics Teacher B	Mathematics Teacher A	Mathematics Teacher B
<i>Science Grade 6 Duo</i>		<i>Science Grade 7 Duo</i>		<i>Science Grade 8 Duo</i>	
Science Teacher A	Science Teacher B	Science Teacher A	Science Teacher B	Science Teacher A	Science Teacher B
<i>Social Studies Grade 6 Duo</i>		<i>Social Studies Grade 7 Duo</i>		<i>Social Studies Grade 8 Duo</i>	
Social Studies Teacher A	Social Studies Teacher B	Social Studies Teacher A	Social Studies Teacher B	Social Studies Teacher A	Social Studies Teacher B

The brief time duration of classes and the strictly structured teams were sources of frustration for Thomas. In a former position, he worked with double class periods, which gave teachers more time for instruction.

*We have an obnoxious teachers' contract that works against some department content-level work. We're looking for ways to do more of the department-type work because we're not really structured for that with the interdisciplinary teams.*

*It's built into the schedule so that they can work together. I call them dynamic duos. But right now, I don't have a duo day.*

*So, I'm trying to figure out how I fit in more days. Sometimes every six days, it's actually two periods on day five-plus day six, it's eight periods of work. And so, on those days, I have to try to front-load three days of deadlines.*

*Then, I get 200 emails to go home to every night to follow up. So sometimes even like, oh my god, there's another day, six days already, it just seems like it vaporized. So, the idea of fitting in another day for more meetings is a little daunting. Yeah, but I'll figure it out. (Thomas, School Principal)*

While the principal had made peace with the time requirements, he was continually guiding or attempting to guide the PLC teams to become critical friends in reviewing teams' goals for instruction. He also attempted to do this with the dynamic duos, same grade-level content teachers, by urging them to work together during their prep periods scheduled at the same time each day.

In this regard, the teacher Louis commented on how he works with his duo partner.

*During my fifth period, the other teacher has his prep period as well. For more days than not, he and I are getting together. I'm telling him what I'm thinking. He's telling me what he's thinking. And we scrap the huge parts of it and say, "Let's come up with something better together."*

*He and I are really, really good together where I think I'm much more creative and he's much more practical and it works very, very well. Try narrowing this down so that it is consistent throughout the whole school. Math and math have the same prep period, English and English, or whatever it is. (Louis, Core Content Teacher).*

Louis worked well with his duo partner because of their complementary work modes. They distributed leadership in developing their content units. Also, for both the duos and the PLC teams trust was a vital factor for teacher collaboration. Team members and the duos developed trust with each other through their instructional work together. Trust was also encouraged when

the teachers developed a common vocabulary because of the High Reliability Schools® processes. They made themselves more understood.

*Most important is that we now have a common language and expectations of each other. Even I, who hasn't been here that long, but even when I started, it was kind of everybody was calling things different names and had different expectations. And the Reliability Schools® Framework has done a lot to really narrow our focus in terms of lesson planning, which is great. (Louis, Core Content Teacher)*

They also developed an understanding of how to teach effectively from the High Reliability Schools® process and did not rely on tightly scripted modules for this.

### ***Technology facilitates opportunities for collaboration***

Sunrise Middle School teachers used technology continually by emailing each other and with administrators who used instant messaging. Students were allowed to use cell phones for instructional purposes. Teachers who were facile with technology developed diverse ways to communicate with colleagues, parents, and students. Louis thought using email was an effective way to reach parents during the school day who could not or would not answer their phones or text message.

PLC teams were expected to use technology for their planning and meetings. One teacher on each team volunteered to keep meeting notes thereby influencing others with that teacher's interpretation of the meeting. These notes were then posted to the team's Google® docs folder online. Team members and administrators accessed the team folders that contained the agenda, and notes for working together. I did not have access to the team folders.

Technology also enabled teachers across the school to communicate prior to establishing a new way of presenting half-day instruction to students. The faculty were dissatisfied with the previous half-day situation where students were disengaged from their shortened classes. This was disruptive to the faculty and hampered any real learning. To deal with this problem, two

teachers and Bonnie, the school librarian, initiated a change in the school's approach to half-days. Teachers communicated and signed up to develop creative classes from which students could choose rather than following the truncated half-day schedule. Bonnie's technology acumen as a semi-formal teacher leader provided a seamless process and made it easy for teachers to be involved and distribute the leadership needed for that day.

During 2018-19, broadband computer access was increased for students and teachers to expand their technology connections and all the students were given Chromebooks® for their schoolwork (District Technology Report, 2018). Teachers used Chromebooks® for instruction in all content areas using the Google® platform to share their work. Bonnie played a major instructional leadership role in assisting teachers with their competence using this new platform and providing additional instructional resources to engage students.

*Recently I've been doing break-out boxes. It's like a big, bag of locks, all different types. I produce combinations of words and directions you make a game basically out of whatever (topic or book) they're learning in any subject. And they have to work with the team. It's a collaborative thing.*

*Last week I collaborated with the English teacher because they were reading The Outsiders. We did a break-out box where all the puzzles were about the book. So, she helped with some of the content, providing quotations, they've been talking a lot about themes in the book. She had quotes ~~and~~ they had to match up to the theme and I put them in each column and that became the three-digit lock-block combinations. (Bonnie, School Librarian)*

Bonnie's technology liaison additional semi-formal teacher leadership role added an expanded technology component to her collaborative teaching and research roles within her school librarian semi-formal teacher leadership position. This leadership influence was expanded through co-teaching. Louis explained how she collaborated with him and his classes.

*So, for each of those projects, I taught it. I taught the content of what I needed to teach. And then we went down as a class to the library to take the content and*

*work on a research project. She really gave them the foundation of here's where you're gonna go to research, how to research keywords, things like that, how to cite. We did that for both projects. It's us coordinating with her. (Louis, Core Content Teacher)*

Bonnie and Louis both described Bonnie's teacher literacy leadership actions with Bonnie influencing Louis's instruction.

### ***Managing the school with the leadership team***

Selected by their PLC teams to provide team direction, PLC team leaders were semi-formal teacher leaders who served on the school leadership team. Thomas noted others who are on the leadership team.

*Plus, I have a member from the other group; traditional arts--visual and performance arts, and technology and, family consumer science; a representative from foreign language, both assistant principals, and a member of the student support team—either a guidance counselor or the social worker or the school psychologist and the instructional coach. (Thomas, School Principal)*

This leadership team met occasionally, when called together by the principal, and provided advice to the administrators on the school's operations. Without interviewing these teachers, it was difficult for me to gauge the PLC team leaders' leadership training beyond the High Reliability Schools® model or to discuss their relationships within their team, with the administrators, or with the sole formal teacher leader, the instructional coach. Louis commented about the teachers who were on the school's leadership team. As a novice teacher, he was not on the leadership team.

*Typically, veteran teachers get selected as team leaders. Our school has a very high turnover rate. From my understanding and my discussions with them, it's you know, once you're here, you are kind of grandfathered in and you're a leader, and a certain amount is expected. They gladly take it over because they live and die by the school, which is great.*

*They kind of just take it over [the teacher leadership type positions] and anyone is really willing to join, or anyone that is really able to join. They just have to join.*

*But usually, you know, small fries listen to them. And we chip in and pitch our ideas too.*

*Of course, they represent our opinions (on the leadership team) but it's really this group of teachers who have been here for longer than three or four times as long as many other people. (Louis, Core Content Teacher).*

The leadership team brought recommendations and comments from the PLC Teams for consideration. One of their important contributions was the agreement crafted for the definition of quality instruction displayed in Figure 10.

***Instructional coach: Formal teacher leader role.***

Although I was unable to interview the only formal teacher leader, Assistant Principal Ann Marie provided me with insight into the role. She was a former instructional coach, and formal teacher leader, and was knowledgeable about the role. Originally, instructional coaches were created by the district supported by a state grant to create career ladders for teachers (District archival materials). This was a formal teacher leadership opportunity.

After the grant was finished, the positions were continued only in the neediest schools especially to focus on connecting the results from the state tests to the standards and instruction. According to Ann Marie, the instructional coach met with the PLC teams regularly to discuss student needs and instructional possibilities. The coaches also provided professional development on the learning standards.

*It was the instructional coach's responsibility to report back to the building (from district meetings on the standards, curriculum and instruction, and assessment data) and be the turnkey for professional training. It looked very different in every building.*

*The district provided professional development targeted to the standards for all our ELA teachers. The instructional coaches branched out and hit the other content areas. We were the head trainers; our role was to provide internal professional development.*

*Things have changed to help support that, as a district, to help meet those standards. There are now department chairs. The department directors have*

*chairs beneath them that help support teachers with literacy within their content areas. (The department chairs have a teacher liaison in each school.)*

*It (instructional coaching) was very much a collaborative culture, I would sit with the teams and we would have our data days. (Ann Marie, Assistant Principal)*

The collaborative culture of working with the instructional coach could allow for informal teacher leadership to emerge.

***Relationships with the district office.***

The school was tightly coupled with the central office for curriculum and professional development. “We don’t produce a lot of curriculum here. We don’t produce a lot of professional development.” This was the start of a conversation with Thomas about curriculum change and professional development at Sunrise.

Thomas described himself as an assistant director to the district curriculum department directors in each of the core content curriculum areas, ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies. These four central office department directors supervised district core content chairs who collaborated with teacher liaisons from each of the schools to adopt curriculum district-wide such as *The Reader/Writer Workshop* model.

Thomas did not discuss how the curriculum teacher liaisons worked but talked about his working relationship with the English language arts chair.

*Specifically for ELA, as far as for curriculum revision, which comes mostly from Bill Harrison [a pseudonym]. Bill’s a great dude and is a good people person. He is our English department chair through the department meetings.*

*I make sure that when I am meeting with teachers about instruction that we’re speaking the same language and we’re not contradictory. I suppose it’s great for vertical alignment because they (the curriculum department chairs) definitely have it (the various curricula) in their heads all the time. I have six state tests to worry about (three grade levels, ELA, and mathematics).*

*I meet with the department chairs of the different areas once a month. We discuss what is coming in, different initiatives. These are formal meetings, formal*

*meetings with an agenda. The district's level PLC includes administration and the department chairs.*

*Bill is remarkably knowledgeable. He really leads the charge for that. I mean, he can call the standards right out of his head. He's my Britannica.*

*So, I rely on Bill for the curriculum. He doesn't always keep me apprised of the direction he's going in so I get as much instruction as I can at the director's meetings. (Thomas, School Principal)*

Although Thomas appreciated Bill Harrison's knowledge and work, Thomas had problems with the district selecting curriculum models that he felt did not fit Sunrise. He explained his view about the district using the BOCES (Board of Cooperative Education Services) and how the school was required to adopt their services because of the district curriculum and professional development decisions to use those services.

*In New York, there are a lot of things that bounce through the BOCES. I think different BOCES have different strengths. Ours? Very strong in data, very strong in hardware technology. Different BOCES have other strengths, but everything has to be regional.*

*When other schools throughout the BOCES chose a particular system for literacy, we (the district) jumped on board with a pretty sizable investment.*

*I have some issues with it for our school population. Literacy teachers love it, I understand it, but it doesn't fit into the time and structure for learning that we have. If I ran a private reading academy, I would be totally on board with it. But for here, I don't have the staffing capacity for all the testing, so we don't get the data until November. There are major gaps in literacy skills here.*

*Part of me just wants to dig in and take steps and tell the district curriculum directors, "This is how we are going to do it," but that's not really the culture here. It's hard to do that. It doesn't make you popular." (Thomas, School Principal)*

Another one of Thomas's criticisms of the district's adoption of curricula was the piling on of new expectations district-wide without regard for an individual school's initiatives and teachers' work overall.



*With English language arts, we're in a pretty good place in the sense that we have had consistent staffing, so not a lot of new (ELA) people to bring in. I can personally challenge the district, just sort of slamming us with the Reader/Writer Workshop® model. It's another program. They've hired consultants to come in and talk about doing things with "fidelity".*

*It's not in sync with our common language of instruction (from the Reliability Schools® model). There's some solid research behind it, but I don't think it necessarily provides the ability to customize the necessary strategies for all of our kids to reach the standards.*

*You know from my side of it, my teachers are exhausted about having to spend their professional development learning this new program. They're exhausted by it. It's happened for years in the school district.*

*I feel like every time they get their feet wet in something and are learning how to swim, something else comes along and then they are going against the tide and starting over.*

*We haven't been able to sit down and do a good solid two days of focus work (on the standards), we just don't have it. We don't have enough time to do what I think is the critical work, to really lay out the standards.*

*The ELA coordinator is super emersed in this work. We speak regularly at meetings and I'm sure there are conversations with teachers about things that he's doing that I'm not up to speed on. (Thomas, School Principal)*

Thomas criticized the Reading/Writing Workshop® model because it was not providing students with direct instruction in reading and writing skills, which he thought the Sunrise students needed. He believed students needed foundational skills first, to be successful and to benefit from the Reading/Writing Workshop® model.

While the district utilized BOCES resources, it created pressure and tension on the Sunrise school staff who had developed their own capacity based on working with their literacy-struggling students close-up. Thomas also had a problem with the Fountas and Pinnell® method that his teachers were using for student reading assessment because of the time needed for initial student testing. He also thought this method lacked a clear connection to the standards.

Thomas thought he had little influence on curriculum directives from above. He was expected to just manage his school and follow directions from the central office with their curriculum directives from the BOCES.

***The survey coalesced with the interviews.***

Additional survey descriptions were consistent with the information gleaned from the interviews. The Marzano goal regarding teacher and school collaboration adopted by this middle school was being met according to the survey respondents. However, there still appeared to be a hesitancy regarding the sharing of student work and classroom assessment that a professional learning community enacts with critical friends to examine teaching strategies connected to student outcomes. Thomas applauded teachers when they exhibited this leadership.

In a subset of the CALL® that focused on the explicit PLC Teams, the respondents rated those teams with the results illustrated in Table 24.

**Table 24**

*Sunrise Professionals' Rating on the PLC Teams*

<b>Collaborative Activity Impact</b>	<b>Quite a bit to a great deal</b>	<b>A little to somewhat</b>	<b>Not at all</b>
Mapping Curriculum to the Standards	43%	50%	7%
Professional Development Planning	28%	72%	0%
Developing School Improvement Plans	21%	71%	7%

*Note.* From Sunrise Middle School CALL®, 2019.

These results confirmed the impact of the PLC teams on “Mapping Curriculum to the Standards”, which was essential for adopting the next-generation standards. Forty-three percent of respondents indicated that they worked collaboratively mapping curriculum to the standards quite a bit to a great deal, and an additional 50% indicated that they did so at least a little with a

total of 93% perceiving that this was the most important function of the PLC teams. These survey responses confirmed what Thomas indicated was the purpose of the PLC teams.

When I presented the findings of the CALL® survey to the principal and assistant principals, they were interested in knowing more deeply about the results and regretted that the return rate (28%, n=18) was not higher. As we did a brief scan of the results, they agreed with the descriptive findings, especially the challenge items having to do with state test scores and student grading needing a better alignment. They also confirmed that the work with the outside consultants was having an impact on the teachers' collaboration with the time in the interdisciplinary teams. Given the mid-year incident, further exploration with the administrators and questions to teachers was curtailed. There was so much left about teacher leadership that was truncated in this story.

**Summary: Strong principal leadership and structures provide for informal teacher leadership**

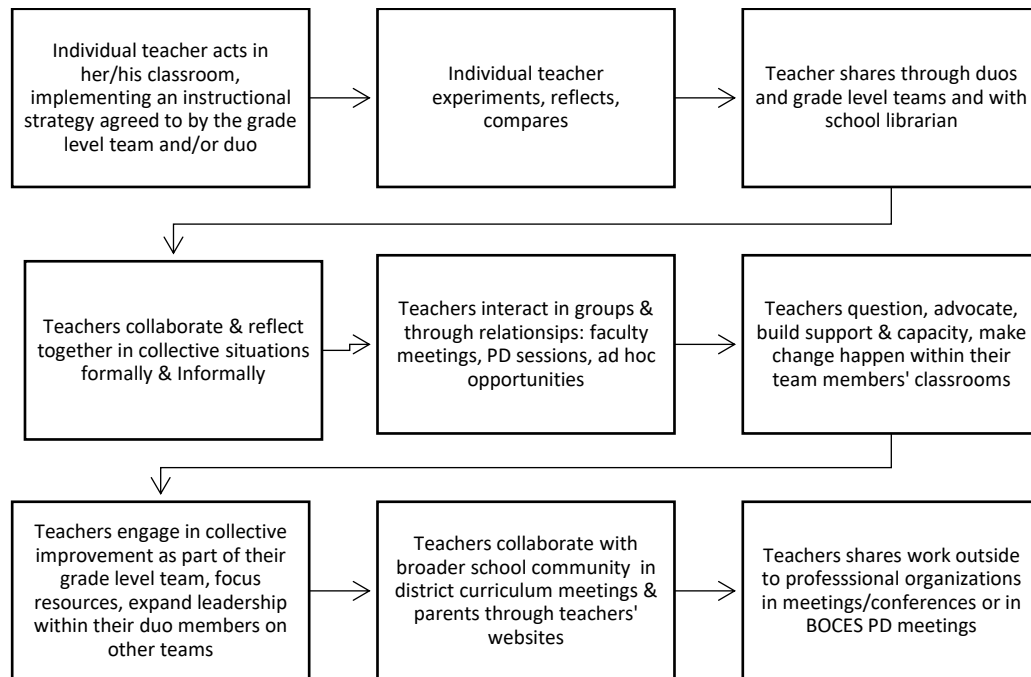
There were limitations to the teacher interview data imposed by my limited access to the teachers compared to the previous cases. However, there was information on teachers playing informal teacher leadership roles with roles structured by the principal who played a more active role than the principals in the rural and suburban schools. I did not have the opportunity to hear about teachers taking initiative and taking on leadership responsibilities themselves except for the school librarian and one content area teacher. Teacher leadership was more directed by the principal.

Fairman and Mackenzie's (2012) *Spheres of Teacher Leadership Action for Learning* model of teacher leadership, illustrated in Figure 10, displays leadership opportunities that

presented themselves within the PCL Teams, the content duos, the school’s leadership team, and interactions with the central office and BOCES.

**Figure 10**

*Sunrise Urban Middle School Teacher Leadership Influence from Classroom to Classroom*



*Note.* Adapted from “Spheres of teacher leadership” by J. C. Fairman & S. V. Mackenzie, 2012, *Professional Development in Education*, 38(2), p. 251. Copyright 2012 by Taylor & Francis Ltd. on behalf of the International Professional Development Association (IPDA). Adapted with permission.

Distributed leadership was evidenced in routine situations when not directed by the administrators (Spillane, 2006). For example, teachers brought their student work to the PLC team meetings and content duos meetings for examination by their teammates serving as critical friends. Leadership in these situations shifted depending upon the discussion’s focus, with teachers taking turns to lead the discussion depending upon their experience and results with the instructional methods or in developing curriculum units. These were all opportunities for

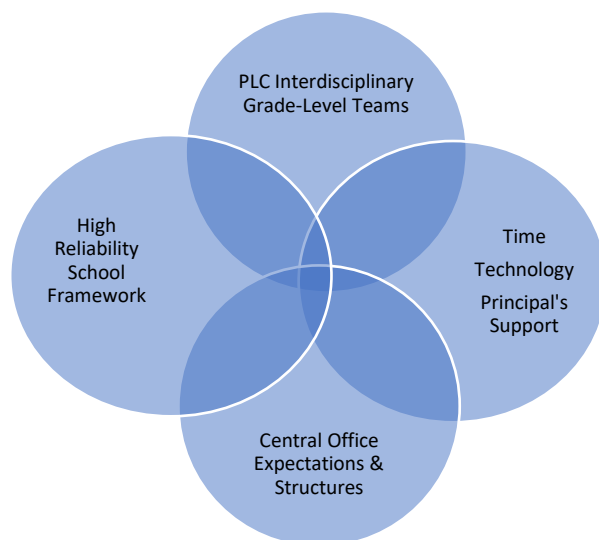
distributed leadership, which does not rely on one individual being appointed to play a leadership role but on leadership functions that are distributed amongst and by team members. Because of limited access to the teachers, it could not be ascertained if this happened within selected teams although the principal expressed this as an aspiration for the teams.

These PLC teams operated by norms established by each team within the framework of the school's time structures for their meetings whose purpose was to fulfill the principal's expectations about instructional goals. All of these were framed by the teachers' agreed-upon instructional beliefs and trust in supporting PLC team routines. Additionally, the only formal teacher leader, the instructional coach was to facilitate teamwork by reviewing school test data and providing engaging instructional strategies to teach higher-level skills. While this was the designated role, I could not confirm that it was performed.

There were varied intersecting factors that supported Sunrise Middle School's formal, semi-formal and informal leadership, which provided for a change in ELA and literacy. Leadership was evidenced in the school created through teachers' and administrators' exchanges in routine situations (the team meetings) and other action-bound situations with leadership distributed by both the formal administrator leaders' direction toward goals and informal leaders sharing within the regular team meetings. See Figure 11 For these intersectional factors.

**Figure 11**

*Sunrise Urban Middle School Factors Related to ELA and Literacy Implementation*



Teacher leadership opportunities were created within the PLC teams and duos, the school's leadership team, and the central office liaison structure. All of these opportunities were connected to supporting literacy instruction. Thomas provided leadership for efforts to increase student ELA achievement. He engaged with an outside consultant agency, with whom he had confidence.

These actions expanded leadership by extending professional leadership learning to teachers from this external group increasing the school's leadership capacity. Informal teacher leadership was also distributed by circumstances with teachers volunteering either to head up extra-curricular offerings for students or the whole district professional development days that involved cross-school work.

Thomas attempted to manage teacher collaboration in the PLC teams and content area duos. It was also his goal to increase literacy among the content areas, not just ELA, through these two structures. In this particular case, not all the teachers' voices were heard, but enough to

know that teachers had opportunities to exhibit leadership given this urban middle school's structural context with the principal's support.

## Chapter 7: Case Comparisons and Results

This study's purpose has been to uncover new understandings of informal teacher leaders and their relationships with formal teacher leaders and principals. I selected three cases in distinct types of New York State middle schools to explore informal teacher leadership while these schools were beginning to address changes in their English language arts (ELA) and literacy curriculums responding to the next-generation state standards.

Understanding informal teacher leadership, the type of leadership most present in the study schools, is important to school curriculum change because teachers are the ones who have to implement curriculum if school change is to be successful. Knowledge of all forms of teacher leadership, from formal to informal, is essential because school professionals recognize, develop, and support teacher leadership and their schools can maximize their full leadership potential, which enhances student learning (Silins & Mulford, 2004).

Informal teacher leadership is complex because it is not easily recognized within the hierarchical structures of school organizations. Informal teacher leadership is distinctive in that it depends on the school culture or norms of how things are done within a particular context or environment and the circumstances and choices of people within those schools (Anderson, 2011; Berg, 2018; Savard & Mizoguchi, 2019).

To examine this teacher leadership phenomenon more fully, three research questions framed the study:

**R-1 What roles do middle school informal teacher leaders play in implementing the Next Generation New York State English Language Arts and Literacy Learning Standards in three types of middle schools: one rural, one suburban, and one urban?**

**R-2 How do the roles of these informal teacher leaders relate to the roles played by principals and formal teacher leaders in implementing the Next Generation New York State English Language Arts and Literacy Standards?**



**R-3 In what ways does the leadership of informal teacher leaders in these three middle schools vary, and what might account for the differences?**

The teacher leadership definition I applied in this study was the teacher leadership definition proposed by York-Barr and Duke in their 2004 seminal teacher leadership study: “teacher leadership is a process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement.” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, pp. 287-288)

Therefore, teacher leaders are those teachers who choose to engage in this process of leadership influence. Formal teacher leaders are those named teacher leaders with specific duties and expectations and are usually fiscally compensated for this role above their teaching salary. Informal teacher leaders are recognized by others or take leadership action by themselves but are not named or designated to a teacher leadership position. The teacher leadership literature speaks about formal and informal teacher leaders but Levenson (2014) discussed semi-formal teacher leadership in her study of new models of teacher leadership and Margolis (2021) asserted that semi-formal teacher leaders may be more acceptable than formal teacher leadership positions.

I expanded this understanding of semi-formal teacher leadership into three categories. The first category of semi-formal teacher leaders applies to those teachers who were chosen by the superintendent, the principal, other teachers, or the teachers themselves volunteering for committees, special projects, or extra-curricular activities with specific leadership duties. These situations are generally created by administrators.

The second category of semi-formal teacher leadership applies to teacher leadership functions that are inherent in a teacher or a specialist’s normal duties, like those of school

librarians, school counselors, special educators, and other specialists with particular certifications in addition to classroom teaching credentials, e.g., reading specialists.

This study did not examine the semi-formal teacher leadership of school counselors, special educators, and other specialists nor semi-formal teacher leaders in a third category. These are classroom teachers who are chosen as leaders by their peers within professional organizations and teacher unions, or in situations such as informal gatherings of teachers outside of school to discuss instruction. These situations may also be formalized by outside groups, such as the National History Day Project.

In this study, the emphasis was within middle schools on informal teacher leadership, actions, and interactions with principals and other teachers who were involved with the changing ELA and literacy curriculums according to new state standards. In answering the research questions three leadership frameworks were applied:

1. Teacher leadership roles provided by researchers Harrison and Killion (2004) and amended by two additional roles (Fairman & Mckenzie, 2014).
2. The teacher leadership spheres of influence by Fairman and Mckenzie (2012).
3. Distributed leadership frames of Gronn (2003), Leithwood et al. (2007), MacBeath et al. (2004), and Spillane (2006).

Teacher leadership does not have a consistent theoretical base. Because informal teacher leadership is complex and depends on the school context in which it occurs, analytical frames were chosen to focus various lenses on the informal teacher leadership phenomena.

### **Teacher Leadership Roles**

The school administrators identified informal teacher leaders in all three middle schools after my request to identify only formal and informal teacher leaders. There was only one formal

teacher leader in the urban middle school and none in the other two schools. The semi-formal teacher leadership role grew from the data on the studied teacher leaders. Some teacher leaders self-identified. The informal teacher leaders did not function in all of Harrison and Killion's (2007) teacher leadership typology of roles with several roles also specific to formal teacher leaders either hybrid teacher leaders who have part-time teaching assignments and part-time formal leadership roles or who are designated as full-time teacher leaders.

Upon examination of Harrison and Killion's nine roles and with more recent research two roles were added, student advocate (Catone et al., 2017) and extra-curricular leader (Fairman and Mackenzie, 2015). The teacher leader roles I identified in the three schools in this study are:

- A. **Resource Provider** shares instructional resources.
- B. **Instructional Specialist** helps implement effective instructional strategies.
- C. **Curriculum Specialist** facilitates teachers' agreement on developing and following an adopted curriculum using the standards, shares effective instructional strategies related to the standards and adopted curriculum, develops and shares assessments, and helps to analyze common assessments.
- D. **Classroom Supporter** collaborates peer-to-peer inside classrooms to implement new instructional ideas, co-teaches, models lessons, provides feedback, or utilizes lesson study.
- E. **Learning Facilitator** enables professional learning opportunities that result in continuing professional adult learning.
- F. **Mentor** provides ongoing support usually to novice teachers' induction and acclimation but also to teachers who may be struggling with curriculum content, instructional practice, school politics, and procedures.

G. **Designated School Leader** is assigned to district/school committees; they may be a department or a grade-level chair or may represent the school to the outside or larger professional community.

H. **Data Coach** facilitates teachers' discussions about state test data, data produced by the district or school assisting teachers in data analysis, and how to utilize data to strengthen instruction.

I. **Catalyst for Change** advocates for larger cultural instructional change, which has an influence on formal policies and procedures.

J. **Student Advocate** identifies situations or policies that need change to benefit a student or group of students' learning such as school environmental change, access and equity, and curriculum adjustments, and gives voice to their agency for change.

K. **Extra-curricular Leader** provides for additional student learning outside the classroom setting and the core curriculum, such as educators for after-school science club.

Table 25 presents the teacher leaders by their school and with their demonstration of the Harrison and Killion (2007) plus roles.

**Table 25***Three Middle Schools' Teacher Leaders' Roles*

<b>Rural Twin Bridges MS Teacher Leaders</b>	<b>Roles</b>	<b>Suburban Osage MS Teacher Leaders</b>	<b>Roles</b>	<b>Urban Sunrise MS Teacher Leaders</b>	<b>Roles</b>
School Librarian*	A B D G K I CDEP Member	School Librarian*	A B D E F G K I Diversity Committee	School Librarian*	A B D E G I Technology Liaison
6 <sup>th</sup> Grade ELA Teacher	A B D E F I	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science Teacher (↔)	A G I	Content Area Teacher	A B G
5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies & Science Teacher	A B E I J	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Science Teacher*	A C D E G I Curriculum Selection Committee	6 PLC Team Leaders* School Leadership Team	B I G other roles undetermined, not interviewed
6 <sup>th</sup> Grade Science & Social Studies Teacher*	A B D E G I Curriculum Council	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade ELA & Social Studies Teacher*	A B D F G K I	Instructional Coach**	A B C D E F G H not interviewed
7 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Science Teacher*	A G I K Curriculum Council			4 Classroom Teachers* School-Core Curriculum Liaisons	A B G other roles undetermined, not interviewed
Academic Intervention Specialist*	A B C D E H I G Curriculum Council				
5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Special Education Teacher	A B D E H				

*Note.* MS = Middle School, \* = Semi-Formal Teacher Leader, \*\* = Formal Teacher Leader

G-Designated school leader indicated, a semi-formal position

Semi-Formal Teacher Leaders may also be Informal Teacher Leaders

There is a pattern of roles for the informal teacher leaders being mainly A resource providers and B instructional specialists along with D classroom supporters. Table 26 provides a sum of the leadership roles in each school.

**Table 26**

*Number of Teacher Leadership Roles by School and Type*

<b>Teacher Leadership Roles</b>	<b>Rural School</b>	<b>Suburban School</b>	<b>Urban School</b>
<b>A-Resource Provider</b>	7	4	4
<b>B-Instructional Specialist</b>	6	2	5
<b>C-Curriculum Specialist</b>	1	1	1
<b>D-Classroom Supporter</b>	5	3	2
<b>E-Learning Facilitator</b>	5	2	2
<b>F-Mentor</b>	1	2	1
<b>G-Designated School Leader</b>	4	3	4
<b>H Data Coach</b>	2	0(a)	1
<b>I Catalyst for Change</b>	7	4	13
<b>J Student Advocate</b>	6	4	2
<b>K Extra-curricular Leader</b>	2	2	Undetermined
	Science Club	Athletic Coach Maker Club	

Note: (a) The three suburban teachers served as data coaches for each other informally. The extra-curricular teacher leaders are not noted outside the teacher leaders interviewed.

The pattern of teacher leadership roles was most diverse in the rural school, with the suburban school and the urban school nearer to each other. These roles were not mutually exclusive and may have been overlapping, they also were not confined to informal teacher leaders as can be seen in Table 27.

### **Teacher Leadership Spheres/Steps of Influence**

Using York-Barr and Duke's (2004) proposed definition of teacher leadership in their teacher leadership research, Fairman and Mackenzie (2012) developed a sphere of influence that illustrated movement from an individual teacher's classroom to outside the classroom influencing others. This teacher leadership influence's ultimate goal is student learning and achievement. Table 27 illustrates this teacher leadership influence process presented as steps of influence comparing these steps in the three schools on selected informal teacher leadership initiatives for each school.

Table 27

*Teacher Leadership Influence Outside the Classroom in Three Middle Schools*

<b>Teacher Leader Actions</b>	<b>Rural School</b>	<b>Suburban School</b>	<b>Urban School</b>
<b>Act together to solve a problem</b>	*Librarian and grade 6 grade ELA teacher change book reports.	*Adopted a new curriculum to provide instructional equity to students.	*Selected new instructional literacy strategy, different for each PLC team.
<b>Experiment, reflect, and compare</b>	*Used guidance from <i>The Book Whisperer</i> by Donalyn Miller.	*Piloted the first unit and compared notes with each other.	*Tried out new strategies with students in individual classrooms.
<b>Share, coach, and consult influencing each other</b>	*Shared back and forth about students' work.	*Continued with second and third units sharing new ideas, assessments, and technology to improve instruction. *Coach each other to improve.	*Met with the PLC teams to tweak instruction and shared in content area dynamic duos. *Presented problems with strategies for group consultation.
<b>Collaborate and reflect together</b>	*Presented the innovation to other teachers, shared and collaborated.	*Made changes in the scripted curriculum to address various student needs.	*Provided information and student evidence to the school principal about the strategies.
<b>Interact with teamwork to change the school culture</b>	*Worked on the CDEP committee to begin to inculcate a new independent reading strategy.	*Shared new strategies with grade-level partners. *Requested time with 7 and 8 grade-level teachers to share new curriculum instruction.	*Prepped for school poster-sharing session.
<b>Question and advocate to build support for change through relationships</b>	*Continued to share with other teachers.	N/A	N/A
<b>Engage in collective improvement, focus resources, distribute leadership</b>	*Collected change data from state tests.	N/A	N/A
<b>Collaborate with the broader school community and with parents</b>	*Shared information within the BOCES school librarians' group.	N/A	N/A
<b>Share work outside the school with other professionals</b>	*Provided professional development through the BOCES to other ELA teachers and school librarians	N/A	N/A



*Note.* Adapted from “Spheres of teacher leadership” by J. C. Fairman & S. V. Mackenzie, 2012, *Professional Development in Education*, 38(2), p. 251. Copyright 2012 by Taylor & Francis Ltd. on behalf of the International Professional Development Association (IPDA). Adapted with permission.

What was intriguing about informal teacher leadership in each of this study’s middle school cases was that it did not fit Fairman and Mackenzie’s (2012) influence pattern. The process was not started by a singular teacher; teachers acted together to address a problem. While they worked on the problem in their individual classrooms, it was their relationships through collaboration to develop problem solutions where they demonstrated leadership. This is reflected in the initial box of influence illustrated in Table 27.

Within the table are illustrations of literacy teaching changes in each school. There are other examples of informal teacher leadership outside the classroom. In the rural school, a science teacher and the school librarian developed a students’ science club. This was an after-school extra-curriculum activity that was not sports-related to meet the needs of students who were not interested in competing athletically. This student choice was emphasized by the librarian and also noted in responses as a need in the CALL® survey. The school librarian provided the literacy research threads integrated within the science activities provided by the science teacher. These teachers initiated and developed this program together.

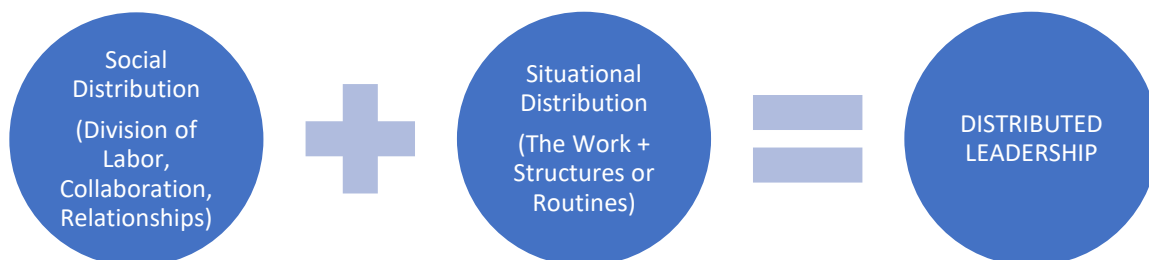
In the suburban school, Table 27 illustrates the leadership of each of the sixth-grade ELA teachers who worked through modifications within the instructional modules and then together implemented them in their classrooms. They also worked in reverse, trying something new in their classrooms individually such as a technology application, sharing this modification, and then all three teachers utilized the modification.

Teachers in the urban school developed uniform literacy instructional strategies in their grade-level teams, strategies such as RAP (Restate the question, Answer the question, and Provide evidence for your answer) for their content areas and then came together to examine student results and adjusted the strategy to be more effective.

### **Distributed Leadership**

Distributed leadership embodies leadership functions applied to an organization's tasks that are distributed through social exchanges by its members. This distribution occurs through collaboration, imposition, or circumstance. Informal teacher leadership depends on distributed leadership through collaboration without leadership by formal authority (Harris, 2013). Leadership is situationally distributed using "tools, routines, or structures" (Spillane, 2006. p. 19), such as schedules, team assignments, curriculum designs, and contracts that either exist or are created within an organization's work.

Distributed leadership functions are expanded across an organization. Both the social distribution and the situational distribution, which work in concert with one another, are influenced by a political dimension within the context of a school's organization formed by its history and culture. Structures and routines are part of this context (Halverson & Kelley, 2017). I have displayed distributed leadership's primary components in Figure 12.

**Figure 12***Distributed Leadership's Primary Components*

While the school principal may be the formally designated leader, every member of the school staff has the potential to assume leadership (Halverson & Kelley, 2017). Understanding how leadership practice was shaped within a school through distribution was important to this study's analysis uncovering nuances of informal teacher leadership. Although the Fairman and Mackenzie (2012) teacher leadership influence model notes that leadership distribution occurs with collective improvement later in the sphere of influence, my study showed that leadership is distributed by the teachers themselves early in the leadership change process. Table 28 provides an illustration of social distribution as conceptualized by Leithwood et al. (2007) especially for with teachers distributing leadership spontaneously.

**Table 28***Social Distributed Leadership within the Three Middle Schools*

<b>Distributed Leadership Frame by Leithwood et al. (2007)</b>	<b>Rural Twin Bridges Middle School</b>	<b>Suburban Osage Middle School</b>	<b>Urban Sunrise Middle School</b>
<b>Planful alignment</b> <i>Following consultation, formal authority leaders assign leadership resources and responsibilities to individuals and/or groups to lead a function or task.</i>	The superintendent and school administrators selected the semi-formal teacher leaders to serve on the district curriculum council.	The new ELA curriculum's first unit was assigned to fifth and sixth-grade ELA pilot teachers who provided support to the other ELA teachers.	The school's leadership team advised administrators on processes and programs. The principal created this team.
<b>Spontaneous alignment</b> <i>Leadership tasks and functions develop in an unplanned way yet there is a decision about who should perform which leadership functions that results in an alignment of functions among different teacher leaders (2)</i>	Teachers on the curriculum council decide which council initiatives they will lead by themselves or in partnership with other council members and how they will take leadership actions.	ELA sixth-grade team members decide, given the instructional strengths of the three members, who will provide leadership in supporting each other.	Content area teachers and the school librarian meet to integrate student literacy research skills as a result of a content unit. They co-teach and lead in their respective curriculum areas integrating literacy skills.

*Note.* Adapted from “Distributed leadership in organizations: A review of theory and research”

by R. Bolden, 2011, *International Journal of Management Review*, 13, p. 258. Copyright 2011

by R. Bolden. Adapted with permission.

(2) “Distributing leadership and organizational change: Reviewing the evidence”, by Harris, A. et al., 2007, *Journal of Educational Change*, 8, pp. 344-345.

**R-1 What roles do middle school informal teacher leaders play in implementing the Next Generation New York State English Language Arts and Literacy Learning Standards in three types of middle schools: one rural, one suburban, and one urban?**

The state's expectation in 2018-2019 was that teachers and administrators were to become aware of the next-generation standards in ELA and literacy. The standards called for an emphasis on the lifelong practices of reading and writing in all subject areas.

**Readers:**

- think, write, speak, and listen to understand
- read often and widely from a range of global and diverse texts
- read for multiple purposes, including for learning and for pleasure
- self-select texts based on interest
- persevere through challenging, complex texts
- enrich personal language, background knowledge, and vocabulary through reading and communicating with others
- monitor comprehension and apply reading strategies flexibly
- make connections (to self, other texts, ideas, cultures, eras, etc.)

**Writers:**

- think, read, speak, and listen to support writing
  - write often and widely in a variety of formats, using print and digital resources and tools
  - write for multiple purposes, including for learning and for pleasure
  - persevere through challenging writing tasks
  - enrich personal language, background knowledge, and vocabulary through writing and communicating with others
  - experiment and play with language
  - analyze mentor texts to enhance writing
  - strengthen writing by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach
- (New York State Education Department, 2018)

Each of the middle school staff in this study dedicated time to building awareness of the ELA and literacy standards' changes. They understood that these changes were to be integrated within and added to the already established Common Core curriculum with the expectation of increasing literacy within the content areas. To appreciate the various roles that the informal teacher leaders played it is necessary to understand the contexts in which these leadership roles were enacted. The analysis found that while each school provided a different middle school situation to address the changing standards there were similarities.

Each of the schools was a stand-alone middle school; a school not combined with prekindergarten through grade-eight configuration or a junior high school. In implementing or preparing to implement the revised ELA and literacy learning standards, team structures and partnerships that emphasized collaboration provided opportunities for informal teacher leadership. All the schools had interdisciplinary grade-level teams illustrated in Table 29.

**Table 29**

*Middle Schools' Grade-Level Interdisciplinary Team Compositions*

<b>Rural Twin Bridges Middle School</b>	<b>Suburban Osage Middle School</b>	<b>Urban Sunrise Middle School</b>
Grades 5 to 8: Four teams with four teachers each: ELA, Mathematics, Science/Social Studies, AIS	Grade 5: Self-contained classrooms Grades 6: Three teams with two teachers each ELA/Mathematics + Science/ Social Studies Grades 7 & 8: No interdisciplinary teams	Grades 6 to 8: Two teams in each grade level with five, teachers each: ELA, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Special Education

Each school had teacher interdisciplinary grade-level core content teams except for Osage where the fifth grade had self-contained classrooms and the seventh and eighth grades were by content area departments similar to a high school arrangement. Table 30 shows the core content grouping comparison.

**Table 30**

*Teacher Core Content Grouping Comparison*

<b>Rural Twin Bridges Middle School</b>	<b>Suburban Osage Middle School</b>	<b>Urban Sunrise Middle School</b>
ELA, Mathematics, and Social Studies: Four teachers in each content area	Grade 6 ELA, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies: Three teachers in each content area	ELA, Mathematics, Science, & Social Studies: Six teachers in each content area
Science: Three teachers in the content area	Grades 7 & 8 ELA, Mathematics, Science, & Social Studies Two teachers in each content area	

All of these content area groupings provided additional opportunities for teacher collaboration and hence opportunities for informal teacher leadership. There were opportunities in each school, for grade-level teams, core content groups, and partnership duos, this last in the urban school.

Within these teams and partnerships, informal teacher leadership was assumed by teachers who shared new instructional methods or solved problems regarding literacy instruction or assessment. This occurred through discourse within the teams, groups, duos, or partners working to achieve a vision of better student learning. Leadership was informal and distributed spontaneously by the teachers through the literacy and content area work to be done (Gronn, 2002). Table 31 illustrates Gronn's conceptions of the distributed leadership process conducted somewhat differently in the three schools. While all the teachers may not have characterized explicitly what they were doing as implementing the literacy learning standards when examined implicitly, everything they were doing was related to the standards.

**Table 31***Applied Distributed Leadership Process in the Three Middle Schools*

<b>Situations with Three-stage Process by Gronn (2002)</b>	<b>Rural Twin Bridges Middle School</b> Adoption of independent reading as a modification of the modules.	<b>Suburban Osage Middle School</b> Implementation of Pear deck® technology use in student literacy projects.	<b>Urban Sunrise Middle School</b> Literacy integration in grade-level content area by a dynamic duo.
<i>Spontaneous Collaboration Individuals with different skills or knowledge and/or capabilities come together to complete a task/project</i>	ELA sixth-grade teacher and school librarian modified the way for students to do book reports through independent reading selection.	The school librarian worked with teachers and their students to utilize a recent technology integrated with literacy instruction.	Two teachers who work as a duo in their content area, one with organizing skills and the other with more creativity, met to change units that integrated the literacy standards.
<i>Intuitive working relationship Two or more individuals develop a close working relationship over time until leadership is obvious in their work together</i>	Both teacher and librarian utilized their skills to develop the independent reading change and shared it throughout the school.	Librarian shared the leadership roles with the teachers for technology integration.	Teachers developed the units using the RAP method agreed to by the interdisciplinary grade-level teams, focusing on literacy.
<i>Institutionalized Practice Enduring organizational structures such as professional learning communities, and teams, within schools.</i>	The district's Comprehensive Educational Plan incorporated the independent reading strategy that all teachers supported and used.	Teachers and students used the recent technology in their classrooms regularly supporting literacy instruction.	The duo continued to use the new literacy method and shared their results with others in their content area department and grade-level teams.

*Note.* Adapted from “Distributed leadership in organizations: A review of theory and research” by R.

Bolden, 2011, *International Journal of Management Review*, 13, p. 258. Copyright 2011 by R.

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### **Informal Teacher Leaders and Semi-formal Teacher Leaders.**



In all three middle schools, administrators identified informal teacher leaders who in the interviews were confirmed by their actions and endorsed by their colleagues. Except for the one designated formal teacher leader who served as an instructional coach in the urban school, the three schools relied on informal or semi-formal teacher leadership. With regard to semi-formal teacher leadership, or assigned or designated leadership, this was present in the three middle schools or districts.

Another common feature of the rural and urban schools was that the grade-level teams included a special education teacher or Academic Intervention Specialist (AIS) teacher. Special education and AIS teachers in the suburban school were assigned to multiple grade levels. All three schools had specialists for students with difficulties: school counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and in the urban school, home-school coordinators. These specialists within their job descriptions or job-embedded understandings were also teacher leaders, although rarely acknowledged as such.

Classroom teachers themselves as leaders advocated for specific students who had special academic or social or emotional needs. The rural school district was redeveloping its RTI program which included social and emotional concerns. The suburban school provided teacher training to recognize such students. At the urban school, there were different specialists, such as special teachers for multi-lingual students with expectations to collaborate and coordinate with others.

In the urban middle school, the teacher leaders were selected by the interdisciplinary grade-level team members, the first category of semi-formal teacher leaders. This leadership role, in addition to being a leader for the grade level team meetings, was to represent their team serving on the school's leadership team.

Additionally in the urban school, teacher liaisons in curricular areas played semi-formal teacher leadership roles connected to central office initiatives. These teacher liaisons were to communicate the district's curriculum and instructional direction to the other teachers within their content areas. Because of my limited access to the urban school's teachers, I could not determine whether and how teachers were influenced by these teacher liaisons or if the teacher liaisons advocated for students in their curriculum deliberations.

The urban school librarian held semi-formal teacher leader roles in both categories. In the first category of semi-formal teacher leader, she was the technology liaison. She applied for and was selected for this role in addition to her school librarian's role to create and present professional learning opportunities and also consult and coach the teachers. This semi-formal teacher leadership role was essential to teachers if they were to use the district's recent technology and its role in implementing the ELA and literacy standards. This school librarian could also be classified within the second category of semi-formal teacher leader because leadership was inherent within her job functions.

In the suburban school, semi-formal teacher leaders served on district committees, such as the diversity committee, and were chosen by the district and school administrators. Middle school athletic coaches, and teacher volunteers, were also endorsed by the district. In the rural school, teachers served on the district's curriculum council and/or other district committees representing their school. The districts played a key role in selecting semi-formal teacher leaders within all the schools.

School librarians in all the schools were teacher leaders recognized as such by the principals and the teachers interviewed. These school librarians chose to develop their leadership practice by providing instructional leadership to students and their colleagues. Contemporary

school librarians accept the newer understandings of their roles that involve instructional leadership and their boundary-spanning capabilities within the schools across content areas and grade levels, within and across schools, and outside the district. As noted in the course catalog of the Information Studies School at Syracuse University and displayed by the school librarians in this study there were several leadership roles that have expanded the “traditional role of school librarians”. These leadership roles were demonstrated in collaboration with the classroom teachers by:

- Linking instruction to national and state standards.
- Integrating literacy instruction across the curriculum.
- Providing instructional leadership, collaboration, and support in the area of information and inquiry skills.
- Promoting print, media, and digital literacy.
- Consulting on curriculum and technology innovation.
- Managing information beyond the walls of the centralized library facility and program management. (Syracuse University Library and Information Science, 2019).

Although not included in this study, school counselors, special educators, and other certified educational specialists have inherent leadership roles within their expected positions. Noting a similarity with teacher leaders, Mason’s (2010) research on school counselor leadership recognized those leadership roles are not just for administrators. The American School Counseling Association adopted a model for school counseling that includes leadership for a comprehensive counseling program with students’ academic development, career development, and social/emotional development (2022). For school counselors to initiate, develop, and

implement a student-developmentally focused program requires leadership in collaboration with others.

Collaboration skills are also essential for special educators who must take a leadership role in advocating for their students and their working conditions, which support students. Billingsley et al. (2020) assert that special educators must demonstrate leadership to serve their students. Their leadership is critical.

One role each informal teacher leader assumed was as a continuous learner, a role also confirmed within the literature on literacy teacher leaders (Ippolito et al., 2016). In order to maintain the expertise needed to provide influence, a teacher leader must continually learn. This continuous learner role is basic not only for teacher leaders but all educators. One of the teacher leaders' attributes recognized by others for their leadership was that those teacher leaders maintained a high level of expertise, knowledge, and skills (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). These teacher leaders were engaged in their own learning while sharing this learning with others.

In this study, the informal teacher leaders participated in professional learning in a variety of ways. Formal learning was provided through the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) contract in the suburban school for the district-adopted ELA curriculum modules. Formal learning was provided to the school librarians through their formal networks; for the suburban and rural school librarians through the BOCES and for the urban school librarian through the district. When provided district support, the rural ELA and AIS teachers also participated in BOCES ELA learning experiences sessions. Teacher leaders, who were chosen from their grade level teams in the urban school, attended the summer education seminar sessions provided by the outside consulting group on the Reliability School® model.

Throughout the school year, unless attending a BOCES, a district-developed professional development experience, or a professional association conference, teacher leaders' professional development occurred informally. The teacher leaders' learning was either through personal technology networking, reading, or learning through social exchanges with colleagues and/or family members mentioned in the interviews. Informal learning also took place through formal networked groups such as the school librarians or technology liaisons. For these teachers, there were no teacher-leader networks (Smith, 2019). None of the teachers indicated that they received formal or informal learning through higher education once they had achieved their current position. Nor were there teacher leader networks established by the colleges and universities in these communities. The school librarians attended statewide conferences when they were geographically nearby.

All the school librarians produced professional learning for their colleagues through formally structured or informal ways. The urban school librarian was the school's technology liaison and presented hours of professional learning on weekends and after school. The suburban school librarian integrated her instruction in scheduled meetings with the sixth-grade ELA teachers and classes with their students. Similarly, the rural school librarian provided instruction through her formal meetings with the sixth-grade class and through the extra-curricular science club sessions she co-coordinated with the science teacher, teaching him through examples with the students, and in return, he did likewise with his expertise in science. All of the school librarians collaborated with teachers on their instructional methods especially regarding research and technology integration as part of literacy instruction if the classroom teachers chose to collaborate.

The suburban middle school ELA curriculum pilot teacher for the first module presented her learning with the other ELA teachers after her summer professional learning session. The two grade five and six teachers who promoted the *Writing Revolution* summer book study provided their work to their colleagues who attended this session and continued their collaboration with a small group of teachers. The urban grade-level teams planned to demonstrate their literacy instructional methods to each other at a faculty display meeting and teach their colleagues their new successful teaching strategies.

All but three of these informal teacher leaders had a known semi-formal function or assignment in addition to their classroom teaching roles. These roles were initially volunteer roles such as athletic coaching but others were administratively designated such as serving on the district's curriculum advisory committee. Table 32 provides known semi-formal teacher leadership roles.

**Table 32**

*Teachers' Semi-formal Teacher Leadership Roles in Each Middle School*

<b>Rural Twin Bridges Middle School</b>	<b>Suburban Osage Middle School</b>	<b>Urban Sunrise Middle School</b>
*Librarian-Comprehensive District Plan Committee *District Curriculum Council: Grade 5 Science /Social Studies Teacher Grade 6 AIS Teacher Grade 7/8 Science Teacher	*Librarian-District Diversity Committee *Grade 6 ELA Teacher-MS Athletic Coach	*Librarian-District Technology Liaison * School Grade Level Team Leaders-6 teachers *District Core Content Area Liaisons-4 teachers

Other semi-formal roles may be within the schools or district such as extra-curricular leadership, e.g., extra-curricular leadership such as the video-producing club of the suburban librarian.

Distributed leadership examples also provide a way of understanding informal teacher leadership roles. Table 33 illustrates comparisons of the types of distributed leadership in the three middle schools applying Spillane's (2006) classifications.

**Table 33***Distributed Leadership Types*

<b>Distributed Leadership Types Spillane (2006)</b>	<b>Rural Twin Bridges Middle School</b>	<b>Suburban Osage Middle School</b>	<b>Urban Sunrise Middle School</b>
<b><i>Collaborated</i></b> <i>Two or more individuals work together in a time and place to execute the same leadership routine.</i>	Sixth-grade ELA, AIS, and the 6 <sup>th</sup> Grade special education teachers coordinated their separate leadership actions for working with students to reach their reading goals.	Teachers collaborated with the formal school leaders to select the fifth and sixth- grade ELA curriculum.	Teachers in the same content areas and grade levels worked together during their joint planning time to develop curriculum units and assess instructional strategies.
<b><i>Collective</i></b> <i>Two or more individuals work separately but interdependently to enact a leadership routine.</i>	Sixth-grade ELA teacher and special ed. teacher, and school librarian conferenced with students on their independent reading. Each of them focused on different skill aspects depending upon the student's ability and to increase each student's reading skills and amount of reading.	Sixth-grade ELA teacher and the AIS teacher worked with parents and in their classrooms with the same students who needed extra help.	Grade-level team members agreed to implement new instructional literacy strategies and test viability.
<b><i>Coordinated</i></b> <i>Two or more individuals work in sequence to complete a leadership routine.</i>	Fifth and sixth-grade social studies/science teachers developed instruction in their separate classrooms and promoted <i>The Writing Revolution</i> .	The school librarian collaborated with individual ELA teachers to implement the same research sequence for their classrooms.	Teachers in grade-level teams applied agreed-upon instructional strategies and collected student data to assess the strategies' effectiveness.

*Note.* Adapted from “Distributed leadership in organizations: A review of theory and research” by R. Bolden, 2011, *International Journal of Management Review*, 13, p. 258. Copyright 2011 by R. Bolden. Adapted with permission.

These concepts illustrate how to identify distributed leadership within collaborative situations and are useful in identifying informal teacher leadership.



Table 34 illustrates teacher leadership based on the distributed leadership frames of MacBeath. The first two frames illustrate leadership distribution from administrative leaders and the last four through teacher collaboration.

**Table 34**

*Semi-formal and Informal Teacher Leadership Roles Distributed by Others*

<b>Types of Distributed Leadership (MacBeath et al., 2004)</b>	<b>Rural Twin Bridges Middle School</b>	<b>Suburban Osage Middle School</b>	<b>Urban Sunrise Middle School</b>
<b>Formal</b> <i>Formal authority leaders delegate leadership roles and responsibilities.</i>	Superintendent chose teacher members for the <b>curriculum council</b> to provide suggestions and feedback from colleagues on selected administrators' priorities.	The principal chose the middle school librarian to serve as the school's delegate to the <b>district diversity committee</b> .	The district technology director selected the school librarian as the <b>technology liaison</b> . Other district content area directors selected <b>curriculum content liaisons</b> , e.g., ELA.
<b>Strategic</b> <i>New people, with skills, knowledge, and or access to resources, come in to meet a leadership need.</i>	<b>BOCES Curriculum Coordinator</b> coordinated the District RTI process.	The district contracted with BOCES for external <b>ELA consultants</b> who provided professional learning to the ELA teams.	The principal selected <b>Marzano Group</b> for a contract to develop and teach an instructional organizational model that teacher leaders agreed to.
<b>Pragmatic</b> <i>Leaders negotiate and divide leadership roles and responsibilities between different actors.</i>	Sixth-grade core content team teachers (ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies) met to determine who would provide leadership to <b>address struggling students</b> within their content areas.	Sixth-grade ELA curriculum team teachers shifted roles depending upon their <b>teaching within the modules</b> , technology, supplemental materials, and extended instructional strategies.	Grade-level team chairs were selected by the team and represented them on the <b>school's leadership team</b> .
<b>Incremental</b> <i>People acquire leadership responsibilities progressively through experience.</i>	Sixth-grade ELA and social studies/science teacher influenced their peers and others <b>over time</b> to adopt independent reading.	Sixth-grade ELA teachers through their collaboration and coaching of one another increased their leadership capacity <b>over time</b> to modify the ELA modules in response to students' learning needs.	<b>Experienced teachers</b> became curriculum liaisons with the central office directors, e.g., ELA liaisons.

Table 34 continued

<b>Types of Distributed Leadership (MacBeath et al., 2004)</b>	<b>Rural Twin Bridges Middle School</b>	<b>Suburban Osage Middle School</b>	<b>Urban Sunrise Middle School</b>
<b>Opportunistic</b> <i>People willingly take on additional responsibilities over and above those typically required for their job in an ad hoc manner.</i>	Fifth-grade social studies/science teacher advocated <b>for after-school student help sessions</b> and provided staffing (herself).	Teachers <b>wrote grants</b> for new instructional ideas that supplemented their curriculum resources.	Individual teachers <b>worked together in content areas and grade level teams</b> , e.g., the core content teacher and music teacher developed a joint unit plan.
<b>Cultural</b> <i>Members of an organization or group assume leadership</i>	Science/social studies teachers <b>provided leadership to support groups, which</b> included elementary teachers in teaching writing.	Sixth-grade ELA curriculum team teachers <b>coached each other with new instructional and assessment strategies.</b>	More experienced teachers at the school are selected as PLC team leaders.

*Note.* Adapted from “Distributed leadership in organizations: A review of theory and research” by R. Bolden, 2011, *International Journal of Management Review*, 13, p. 258. Copyright 2011 by R. Bolden. Adapted with permission.

These conceptions of distributed leadership proposed by MacBeath et al. (2004) include semi-formal teacher leadership roles and informal teacher leadership roles distributed by the teachers themselves or in the example the urban school a semi-formal leadership role designated by other teachers.

## **R-2 How do the roles of these middle school informal teacher leaders relate to the roles played by principals and formal teacher leaders in implementing the Next Generation New York State English Language Arts and Literacy Standards?**

Because there was only one formal teacher leader in any of the schools studied (in the urban middle school), this analysis focused on the principals’ roles and their inter-relationships with informal and semi-formal teacher leaders. In each case, the informal teacher leaders and the school librarians, who were semi-formal teacher leaders by virtue of their job functions, recognized their principals’ support. The principals encouraged the teachers’ and librarians’

actions and provided continuing support for them and their teams through time, response to the need for extra assistance, and professional development through consultation or BOCES offerings and they supported teachers' instructional strategies' change.

In each of the schools, there were teachers and school librarians who expanded leadership through instructional change. Within the contract or implicitly through district norms each district and the middle school provided semi-formal teacher leadership opportunities. These teacher leadership functions received additional compensation through stipends that were flexible and controlled by the school principal and/or the superintendent such as curriculum council members in the rural district, extra-curricular leadership positions in the suburban school, and a technology liaison in the urban district. However, additional leadership functions and roles not defined in contracts for stipends or a function of a particular job were opportunities for informal teacher leadership. These leadership initiatives were developed through relationships and encouraged by the school's organizational structures.

### **Principals' Interactions and Support**

It is important to understand how the principals, the formal administrative leaders, interacted with their school's informal teacher leaders to facilitate and support (or sometimes restrain or direct) their teachers' leadership. Distributed leadership concerning decision-making leadership functions, such as budgeting or scheduling, was more likely confined to administrative leaders. Leadership distribution was limited to instructional practice except in the urban middle school where there was a leadership team, which included teachers, who addressed school policies such as student discipline and curriculum.

Teachers provided curriculum, instruction, and formative assessment leadership collaboratively within their own spheres of influence as it related to student needs. The principals

took action in support of these teacher leaders but fell short in developing informal teacher leaders' broader leadership skills. There were no school leadership teams in the rural and suburban middle schools where this skill development could be expanded. Through the Marzano training, the urban principal provided teachers who attended the summer summits with leadership training.

In all the schools, there were limits on the principals' time to provide instructional leadership. The principal in the rural school was a novice principal with various responsibilities. However, on a weekly basis, she took time to meet and discuss relevant issues with the grade-level groupings of teachers. The suburban middle school principal encouraged and supported the ELA teachers' collaboration to modify the tight curriculum modules depending on their students' learning needs rather than adhering to the scripts and timing. This principal cited a lack of time to be a "direct" instructional leader and did not formally distribute leadership functions, such as teacher evaluation, as there was no explicit mechanism to do so. The urban middle school principal met with the interdisciplinary grade-level teams every six days encouraging critical reviews of instructional strategies and was attempting to find time to meet with the ELA duos. This urban principal promoted and supported the teams to engage in an action research model examining new instructional strategies.

Informal teacher leadership on the standards was allowed to flourish given individual teachers' agency and the principals' time crunch. In the rural school, the ELA teacher and school librarian modified the state modules to encourage independent reading. The social studies/science teachers adopted new methods for teaching writing within their content areas and were able to select their own texts without a formal committee. And the science teacher adopted new applied instructional methods that included applying the literacy standards within the

science content. Already mentioned was the support given to the suburban ELA teachers when modifying the structured lessons to increase student engagement and success and the urban school principal applauded teachers for becoming critical friends within the PLC process offered by the grade-level teams.

There were similarities and differences in how the three principals interacted with their school librarians. Each of these librarians was supported in their boundary-spanning role between their school and other schools and the community (Halverson & Kelley, 2017). In each of the middle schools, administrators recognized the school librarians as instructional leaders with their leadership functions; however, none of the principals seemed to consider how their librarian's leadership could be developed or expanded.

In the rural middle school, the librarian had almost no communication with the school principal but indirectly received feedback from the teachers. The school library was also the farthest away from the school's office. This was not the situation in the suburban school where the library was next door to the school's office and this school librarian set up annual goals with the school principal and took the initiative to report progress on those goals. The school librarian was seen as part of the leadership team in the urban school and as such, collaborated with the formal teacher leader to solve a problem on scheduling half-day programming, which the principal endorsed. She also was designated as an instructional leader by the district office to provide instruction and coaching to her teacher colleagues on technology integration within curriculum instruction.

In each of these cases, the actions of the informal teacher leaders were occurring with the principals' support. The principals implicitly recognized teacher leaders who exhibited both informal and semi-formal teacher leadership including the school librarians as instructional

leaders. However, when teacher leadership efforts were informal there was no mechanism for accountability and no plans for formal recognition of teachers who provided leadership and added value to students' learning with the teacher leaders' influence. While each of the principals received the result of the CALL® survey and the opportunity to increase their information about distributing leadership for learning, two of the principals left before this study was completed and the third did not appear to have the time to pursue an interest.

**R-3 In what ways does the leadership of informal teacher leaders in these three middle schools vary, and what might account for the differences?**

Influence on informal teacher leadership differences between the middle schools was impacted by the districts' relationships with the Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES), the schools' approach to the changing curriculum in response to the standards, and the coupling to the district's central office on curriculum. I compared each middle school to these factors.

Because BOCES is a New York State phenomenon, it has a strong role in standards implementation. The various BOCES websites highlight their services with regard to curriculum. Each of these districts purchased services from a different BOCES. School administrators and the school superintendents made decisions about BOCES-purchased services and then districts paid for the services, not the individual schools.

Each individual school's approach to the next generation ELA and literacy standards were different. Each middle school had a different focus and a different concern when beginning to implement the revised standards. Their approaches depended upon the district central office's expectations, their stance on standards change and implementation, and the school's antecedent actions taken with regard to the standards. For each of the middle schools, the district played a centralizing role because of their accountability to New York State through the testing program.

Informal teacher leaders wove their curricular change actions through connections with the central office or district through their school principal, who was supportive of their actions. Depending on the school's context shaped by the district's structures and interactions, teacher leaders demonstrated leadership in a variety of ways (Crowther et al., 2002; Berg, 2018; Harris, 2008). These informal teacher leaders functioned in multiple roles, semi-formally and informally.

One way to describe the connections between the district office and the schools' curricular implementation is to use the theoretical idea of couplings. As explained by Weick (1976) a loosely coupled system is one in which the "elements are responsive [to each other] but retain evidence of separateness and identity" (p. 3). The coupling mechanism is not uniform for all situations. Elmore (2000) purports that schools with tight couplings, where the formal school administration has more control over instruction, reduced individual classrooms' isolation.

In each of the cases, there was an initial tight coupling with the district requiring the use of strict instructional modules. This tight coupling was loosened by teachers acting together in response to students' needs. For certain actions, couplings may loosen depending upon priorities given by administrators (Weick, 1982). The tightness or looseness of couplings is usually attributed to what administrative leaders do (Spillane, Parise, & Sherer, 2011). However, it can be seen in this study that teachers also have an influence on organizational couplings with teachers' concern for their students. The teacher leaders themselves controlled the couplings based on their perceptions and assessments of their various students learning needs. This larger view of control challenges the notion that administrators control the couplings.

### **BOCES Connections**

*Twin Bridges Rural Central School District and Middle School.*

From its regional BOCES, which emphasized instructional support services in ELA, mathematics, and science, the Twin Bridges Central School District purchased shared services that included: special education provided by BOCES special education teachers and BOCES supervision services, technology hardware services, and one-day-per-week instructional support service. Formerly this district shared a curriculum coordinator with another district.

In this rural district, the BOCES instructional support services were directed toward the superintendent's curriculum council. The BOCES specialist was clear that her time with the district had been reduced from the prior year and was focused on the curriculum council and their work for the resuscitated Response to Intervention (RTI) system. The middle school principal, who had a prior professional relationship with the curriculum specialist when she was in a former district, expected instructional support services to address the next-generation standards. This did not occur. However, teachers and administrators could choose to participate in the stand-alone "pay as you go" workshops that the BOCES developed on specific topics such as the summer Comprehensive District Educational Plan (CDEP) session or the ELA Standards for particular grade levels. The school librarian participated in the BOCES school library coordinator's regional meetings, another shared service that discussed the standards and their integration with the school librarian's work.

There was a general statement on implementing the standards in the CDEP but the focus of the curriculum council was on other issues: RTI revitalization and revision, consistent grading and reporting processes across the district, and a multifaceted special education plan. The teachers provided semi-formal teacher leadership as members of the council and met with their colleagues to report on the council's actions and to solicit feedback for future council



discussions. However, while the curriculum council members discussed policy the final decision-making was clearly communicated to be the administrators' charge.

The district implicitly left the implementation of the state standards to the schools, given the lack of attention to this by the curriculum council. The middle school principal collaborated directly with teachers on the standards and indicated that she understood the need to prepare for the adoption of the standards, but she was also mindful that this was to be an awareness year, and that her teachers were in varying places about their knowledge and implementation of the standards. The middle school administrative focus on the standards changed to student discipline when the principal left this position mid-year. Teachers continued to focus on students' instructional needs.

In curriculum, the rural district initially required a tight coupling of instruction to implement the standards. This was judged to be the adoption of the state's instructional modules when the rural school was on the state support list. The instructional coupling loosened after the district got off the list. Teachers moved away from or modified the strict modules. The influence of the informal teacher leaders was such that the teachers were able to innovate such as incorporating independent reading within ELA instruction, adopting new instructional strategies to teach writing, and the science teacher teaching literacy within active project-based lessons rather than teaching science in a traditional lecture and laboratory format.

Another supporting influence in this district for informal teacher leadership was the administrative churn in both the middle school and the district. These teachers were the individuals who built on their successes and expertise in their content areas and working with students. They were the "keepers" of the instructional focus, which by crisis and circumstance distributed leadership to them.

***Eastern Foothills Suburban Central School District and Osage Middle School.***

The Eastern Foothills Central School District purchased a packaged ELA curriculum from their BOCES along with consultant services from an outside provider. This BOCES was regularly active in all areas of curriculum and instruction. In this suburban district, the BOCES-to-school relationship was developed through the assistant superintendent whose responsibility was curriculum and instruction. The district was directive in its implementation of the next-generation standards with a central office administrator whose role was to assure implementation of this BOCES-endorsed curriculum aligned with the state's literacy standards and the board of education's priority on project-based learning district-wide. Teacher leaders did, however, have an influence on the curriculum purchase when the middle school ELA teachers previously advocated for curriculum change and within a committee representing the other teachers established conditions for this BOCES purchase.

The suburban district was explicit about its commitment to the next-generation standards changes through the adoption and implementation of the purchased BOCES shared services curricula, in ELA, mathematics, and science. Central office administration played a weighty role with the assistant superintendent monitoring the district's roadmap for the implementation of the new standards and providing curriculum coordination herself, especially ELA, with the teachers involved. The middle school principal agreed with the district's mode of adopting the standards. He utilized the state's roadmap for standards adoption and agreed with the ELA curriculum that provided new scripted instructional methods. He also provided strong support to the teacher leaders who were implementing the new ELA curriculum.

This was an example of tight coupling, district-to-school and school-to-classroom with scripted instruction. First, the teachers implemented the purchased curriculum modules close to

fidelity. The sixth-grade ELA informal teacher leaders worked in collaboration; leading each other and other teachers who were their other core content areas partners with the new instructional formats and strategies.

Later, the teachers gradually loosened the coupling when student needs took precedence and this was not discouraged by the school principal. They loosened the coupling by asserting their professional agency in responding to particular student needs, such as more time to complete the work, integrating students' interests, and supplementing the instructional materials to be more engaging while demonstrating fidelity to the district's curriculum goals. They illustrated how their collaborative efforts could influence instructional change and asserted their concern for students by voicing their support to continue the new instructional methods beyond their assigned grade level.

***River City Urban School District and Sunrise Middle School.***

The River City School District was a component district of a third BOCES, which encouraged districts to choose professional learning through outside consultants supported by this BOCES. The middle school administrators were not involved in the district's purchasing choice of the Reader/Writing Workshop® instructional strategy. In this urban district, the BOCES relationship was through district curriculum directors and although the middle school principal disagreed with the curriculum and instruction program, it was adopted by the district and the principal worked to maintain his relationship with the ELA Curriculum Coordinator, who also left the district after this study year.

The district's role was to develop each curriculum area separately with department chairpersons and school-level teacher liaisons under the direction of the curriculum directors. It

was not clear how directives from the central office were to be integrated except through content department-level meetings.

Because the urban principal was on a path that emphasized instructional strategies, which worked for his student population, there was a conflict with the central office's demands for adopting the new ELA instructional strategies. The urban middle school principal focused his instructional leadership efforts on teachers' instruction for his students rather than on the changing standards. He attempted to work within the school's structures established before his time at the school and to change the school culture expecting increased student learning through new instructional strategies within teams and duo collaborations. While accommodating central office demands by individual teachers attending the district-supported BOCES-run training, he and the teachers made use of an external expert's framework and consultation for instruction and formative assessment.

Grade-level teams were forging their own instructional leadership through new instructional strategies for planning and integrating literacy within the content. The teams were engaged in action research using their new instructional strategies. Action research supports and strengthens teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

The urban school had an intermittent coupling with the district between using the new *Reader/Writer Workshop*® from the central office and the demands of the principal for teachers to develop their own interdisciplinary instructional strategies. Because I was unable to discuss the district-supported curriculum with the teachers, I could not ascertain the influence this had on their instruction and implementation of the standards.

However, the novice teacher who did participate in the study experienced both a tight and loose coupling in implementing the standards. He understood the usefulness of the standards

from the content area liaison but was able to be creative with instructional strategies supported by working with his grade-level duo content area partner. Teacher duos exercised informal leadership in crafting and implementing new instructional units of study that integrated literacy learning within the lessons.

### **Summary**

In each school, outside demands for school improvement and educational reform provided a major impetus for teachers to take on responsibilities beyond their classrooms. Informal teacher leaders examined their work with other teachers collaborating for change. These teacher leaders changed instruction in the content areas that they shared, which influenced other teachers. Additionally, semi-formal teacher leadership assignments provided needed support for instructional and institutional change (Levenson, 2014; Smith 2019). Their leadership was also recognized by principals and other school administrators because the leadership work for instructional change could not be accomplished by one person's initiative, especially by those who did not have responsibility for classroom teaching (Fullan, 2001). Many practitioners and various researchers see distributing leadership as a process of administrators delegating their administrative roles to teachers (Levenson, 2014). Others view distributing leadership as a process of administrators and teachers interacting with each other, with each party taking the initiative on certain issues and supporting or deferring to the other on other issues (Spillane, 2006). The latter is a more accurate description of some situations ~~what~~ observed in the three schools.

While the issues the parties dealt with varied from one school to another, depending upon specific relationships, structures, and circumstances, including their superintendents' and principals' priorities, most teacher leadership in all three cases was not distributed by the

administrators but by the teachers themselves. They acted in collaboration with others rather than individually. They assumed leadership, usually prompted by what they perceived to be the needs of their specific students. This was so, even in those situations where teachers played semi-formal leadership roles over which administrators had authority and discretion. These characteristics may prove to be the most distinguishing characteristics of informal teacher leadership.

My use of different dimensions to draw on the perspectives of teacher leadership and distributed leadership illustrated how teacher leadership varied by context. Within each of these dimensions, examples were presented as features that all of these schools had in common. The schools were also alike as middle schools separate from their districts' high schools and elementary schools, collaborative grade-level teams, and content partnerships. One additional similarity between these particular three schools was the caring, focus, and attention given to student learning by the interviewed informal teacher leaders and the schools' principals. In each situation, teachers made curriculum adjustments, advocated for student learners, and were supported by their principals.

## Chapter 8: Findings, Recommendations, Limitations, Implications

This research was an exploration into educational leadership in three different middle schools: what informal teacher leaders did when they were beginning to implement new external state requirements, the New York Literacy Learning Standards; what the extant conditions were for teacher leadership; how the identified teacher leaders related to the school principals; how distributed leadership developed in these different school contexts; and, what new knowledge was revealed about teacher leadership generally and informal teacher leadership specifically.

Three major points were determined from this study.

1. In each studied middle school, informal teacher leadership existed and was recognized and supported in various ways by school administrators and teachers depending on the school's context with its focus on literacy.
2. Semi-formal teacher leadership existed and semi-formal teacher leadership can be differentiated by one of three factors: job-embedded structure, administrative establishment, or teacher peer approval.
3. Middle schools' philosophy and structure supported informal teacher leadership and semi-formal teacher leadership added to the schools' leadership capacity, which has an impact on students and schools.

This study was developed to expand our knowledge of informal teacher leadership that positively affects student learning and to provide recommendations that school personnel and policymakers can use to encourage and increase a school's leadership capacity. The study applies the teacher leadership definition proposed by researchers York-Barr and Duke Teacher (2004). According to their definition "teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually and collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school

communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (p. 287-288).

The research results drew upon middle school teacher leaders’ and principals’ stories in three central New York stand-alone middle schools, rural, suburban, and urban. The data were drawn from interviews, survey responses, documents, and field notes that were collected as antecedents to and during the first phase of implementing the Next Generation New York State English Language Arts (ELA) and Literacy Standards, the awareness, and the beginning implementation phase.

Three research questions informed my case studies and their analysis:

**R-1 What roles do middle school informal teacher leaders play in implementing the Next Generation New York State English Language Arts and Literacy Learning Standards in three types of middle schools: rural, suburban, and urban?**

**R-2 How do the roles of these informal teacher leaders relate to the roles played by principals and formal teacher leaders in implementing the Next Generation New York State English Language Arts and Literacy Standards?**

**R-3 In what ways does the leadership of informal teacher leaders in these three middle schools vary, and what might account for the differences?**

Informal teacher leadership goes beyond the formal, designated leadership in schools that are hierarchically designated and assigned, such as school principals, assistant principals, and formal teacher leaders. While school leadership overall impacts student learning, recognizing and supporting an inherent form of leadership not defined as leadership maximizes a resource for schools in rapidly changing school environments in response to external requirements.

## **Findings**

The participant teachers in this study were identified as informal teacher leaders by their principals, by other teachers, and in some instances, by themselves. From the depth of their



interview information and personal beliefs shared, all of the teachers interviewed provided rich data on their work. They were all teacher leaders.

School administrators recognized that teacher leadership was essential for educational reform because unlike school administration must occur in classrooms where teachers demonstrate their teaching expertise. Teachers collaborate with other teachers to influence each other for instructional change. External demands for school improvement and educational reform have provided a major impetus for teachers to take on responsibilities beyond their classrooms. However, it was not just the external change demands that prompted informal teacher leaders' response but these teachers' concern and advocacy for their students' learning.

Instead of just remaining in their classrooms and changing their own instruction, these informal teacher leaders collaborated with other teachers to increase student literacy learning. This collaboration required teachers to demonstrate leadership within their middle school teams, across the school, and beyond the school. Collaboration and leadership were intertwined spawning informal teacher leadership in each school.

Informal teacher leadership was expressed in various ways: advocacy, resource provision, mutual support between teachers, teacher to teacher coaching in schools, all of which provided professional development from one teacher to another. These were part of distributing leadership through the various domains highlighted by the CALL® survey, the most important being the focus on learning.

Informal teacher leadership was encouraged by the attention on literacy because literacy is part of every core content area. This provided opportunities for collaboration. Other supporting structures for collaboration were the organizational structures associated with middle schools, grade-level, and core-content area teams, and a schedule that gave teams time to collaborate.

Additionally, physical space supported teacher leadership. In the rural and suburban schools, there was classroom proximity for ease of collaboration; in the urban school, there were shared team spaces for working together. Relationships were built over time through these middle school teams and partnerships that created trust, a vital factor that strengthened teachers' bonds as learning communities.

A supportive school culture provided for informal teacher leadership that extended beyond the boundaries of a particular collaboration, such as the teachers in the rural school who moved the independent reading from one ELA classroom to the entire school. These informal teacher leaders changed instruction in the content areas they shared, influencing other teachers within and outside their teams.

The instructional change was demonstrated in different ways depending on the school's context—the circumstances, cultural norms, and participants. Additionally, the analysis used a variety of distributed leadership dimensions to draw on teacher leadership roles and perspectives. Features of these dimensions could be found in all of the schools but expressed in various ways depending upon the different schools and the examples the participants shared. In all three cases, however, teachers made their curricular, instructional, and formative assessment decisions based on their concerns about student learning and what they understood to be their students' learning needs:

- Helping students learn how to read critically and write.
- Increasing students' interest in reading.
- Providing students with experiences using content learning to exhibit their reading, writing, and oral presentation skills.
- Making sure that assessments actually measured students' skill levels.

- Engaging students using different modes of teaching strategies as modifications to scripted or prescribed instruction.

These informal teacher leaders, even the novices, demonstrated expertise in teaching. They were engaged in their own professional development, both alone and with their colleagues. They modified teaching scripts with understanding and with a larger teaching repertoire.

Principals were key in supporting these teachers and their collaborations for student learning that resulted in informal teacher leadership through substitute time, encouragement, and providing teachers professional flexibility to make instructional decisions within institutional curriculum frameworks heavily influenced by central district decision-makers. This leadership recognition and support were provided explicitly and implicitly by principals and assistant principals.

Informal teacher leadership existed in mutually understood situations between the teachers and the school administrative leaders. Principals understood that they needed teachers to play informal leadership roles to meet the challenges of changing standards, changing student populations, and pressures to enhance all students' learning.

The role of semi-formal teacher leaders has received limited attention in the research. This role is mixed in with formal and informal teacher leadership. Semi-formal teacher leadership was an important distinction in exploring teacher leadership roles in the different middle schools and their school districts. These roles provide a venue for influence and change with expanded teacher leadership collaboration opportunities. Semi-formal teacher leadership roles also provide opportunities for teacher leaders' professional learning. These teacher leadership assignments were found to be present in two categories plus one that was not explored in this current study, semi-formal teacher leaders whose actual jobs embodied leadership

functions: the school librarian, school counselors, and others and semi-formal teacher leaders assigned or selected to serve on leadership teams, school/district committees, administrative councils, and other structures that were determined by the school and/or district administrators serving the organization's instructional-based goals and objectives. This includes teachers who either choose those who would be in the leadership positions, e.g., in the urban school's grade-level interdisciplinary professional learning communities, or who decide what leadership roles they would play, e.g., in the rural school's curriculum council.

The third category of semi-formal teacher leadership roles involves active classroom teachers who are chosen by their peers to serve as officers in professional organizations or to represent them within local units of New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), the state's teachers' organization, as bargaining agents or teachers who informally developed professional learning communities. I did not examine teacher leaders in this last semi-formal teacher leadership category.

In this current study, almost all of the informal teacher leaders also held roles as semi-formal teacher leaders. The semi-formal leadership role provided a safeguard for the informal teacher leaders when taking on additional informal leadership roles.

Distributed leadership was exhibited in all three case studies, both in the informal teacher leadership circumstances and within the semi-formal teacher leadership roles. Teachers acted in collaboration. In all three cases, informal teacher leadership was not distributed by administrators but by the teachers themselves with their perceptions based on their students' individual and group learning needs. These teachers loosened the tight couplings of the district requirements--coordinating among themselves without anyone ordering them to do so. They relaxed and

modified the instructional scripts and created innovative instructional strategies to engage students while meeting the expectations of the literacy learning standards.

The three principals recognized their schools' tight couplings with the central office on the curriculum but were developing their own skills and intuitions that supported teachers' judgments and professional decisions to benefit students' learning by meeting different goals. They were exhibiting support without hampering teachers with insistence on strict fidelity to district directives.

These teachers had fidelity to the literacy goals and standards and the principals understood that the teachers supported those goals and standards by implementing them with instruction that was best for their students. They understood that teachers were implementing new instructional strategies to meet their students' learning needs but not strictly to a timetable or with an exact execution of a script.

Teachers were beginning to implement the new literacy standards, with scripted curricula, new instructional strategies, and new materials for reading and writing, and crafting their own ideas based on their content knowledge and knowing their students. The teachers wanted to engage their students in the learning experiences, provide more consistent learning opportunities with common assessments, and especially meet individual students' needs through curriculum modification, adaptation, and enhancement depending upon the students. The principals were attuned to their schools and teachers with an understanding of the teachers' actions, actually deferring instructional decision-making to the teachers.

The rural school principal collaborated with teachers for them to understand and begin applying the learning standards. The suburban school principal supported the English Language Arts (ELA) teachers' choices for modifying the strict instructional modules. The urban school

principal refused to dictate that all the interdisciplinary grade-level PLC teams use and investigate the same instructional strategy. In each case, they allowed a broader response to the learning standards with regard to the curriculum, instruction, and assessment issues. The principals had the fortitude to understand that they stood together with their teachers for learning in their school.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Although it was clear that informal teacher leaders play essential leadership roles, it is not acknowledged by the profession that leadership provided by teachers without formal leadership assignments is authentic leadership. The thinking still exists by many that leaders are only those who play formally assigned administrative roles. There is a continuing tension in understanding and agreeing that leadership is provided by more than a few formally appointed or designated individuals.

Teachers are professionals and leaders not just when they instruct students but also when they exercise influence outside their classrooms. Positive informal teacher leadership is present in all schools and should be recognized, developed, and nurtured, starting with professional learning in pre-service organizations. General leadership knowledge is usually reserved for those who choose to become formal school administrators. This knowledge should be part of a pre-service teacher's instruction and learning, as it is for other semi-formal educational leaders such as school librarians.

This knowledge and experiences should include:

- Learning about the environmental factors of a school as a system.
- Identifying the structural supports for teachers and students and how they support collaboration.

- Engaging in human relations within the school and with parents and the community and building trust in those relationships.
- Understanding political processes for forging student learning support and understanding how politics operate within a school system for school improvement.
- Identifying the symbolic understandings of a school and its community.

This leadership knowledge and skill development should continue within teachers' individual professional development plans to develop their team-building skills, facilitation skills, and communication skills, with their application toward the aim of school improvement and advancing student learning. Teachers are requesting this knowledge (Personal communication, Catskill Regional Teacher Center request for professional development, 2021).

While it might appear ironic to suggest that there is a need to provide preparation for leadership that is unplanned, unstructured, and spontaneous, teachers can play leadership roles outside their classrooms. Teachers who decide to become informal teacher leaders would be better prepared to assume these leadership roles and be more successful leaders. Having these skills would also provide confidence for more teachers when and if they decide on informal leadership and/or semi-formal leadership roles. As teachers more and more need to collaborate more, collaboration provides opportunities for teachers to use their leadership skills.

### **Recommendations for Formal School Leaders**

As the teacher center requested, the New York State Professional Standards and Practices Board for Teaching has acknowledged (2017), and more recently a national survey (Merrimack College, 2022) has shown, teachers, want to be recognized for their knowledge and efforts as professionals to advance student learning. Although they would like this recognition from the

public, it starts in the school building with the formal administrators' meaningful actions following teachers' efforts.

Recognizing that teachers can exhibit leadership through collaboration, opportunities to advance teachers' leadership knowledge and skill development could also be developed within semi-formal assignments. This recognition and support with opportunities to advance knowledge and skill would strengthen the organization's work to achieve learning goals and support the school and school district as a learning organization, which has been shown to impact student learning positively (Senge, 2000).

While full-time formal teacher leadership roles may not be affordable, districts could explore crafting formal hybrid teacher leadership roles to build on teachers' instructional and leadership expertise. The *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* (2013) found that 51% of teachers said they were "extremely interested or somewhat interested" in combining their teaching roles with other leadership roles outside their classrooms (p. 50).

Hybrid part-time teacher leadership roles support teachers who teach in classrooms but also provide time for leadership assignments. These roles may include developing teachers' professional learning experiences, coordinating curriculum and instructional changes, coaching, mentoring, and other leadership functions. Systems for this type of teacher leadership could be cyclical, building teacher leadership skill levels throughout a school or district. Regular fiscal support would need to be innovatively crafted to support this possibility as part of the school budget rather than relying on intermittent grant funding.

Teachers, like all individuals, need encouragement, support, and flexibility in choosing various roles that become part of their teaching, especially outside their classrooms, as classrooms are where they develop their identities as teachers. Today, attracting new teachers and



holding on to them is a dominant challenge for schools. In addition to reasonable fiscal compensation, teachers who feel supported and have a strong sense of purpose and commitment to a school, continue to teach and prefer to teach, rather than take an administrative position (Heubeck, 2022).

Although it is easier to recommend ways to support formal and semi-formal teacher leaders because their roles and responsibilities are formalized, school and district administrators also need to support informal teacher leaders throughout their organization. The first step is recognizing that informal teacher leadership exists. Primarily this is done by developing and supporting a culture of teacher leadership (Berg, 2018; Crowther et al., 2002; Danielson, 2006; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009, Lambert, 2003). This is a culture that supports teachers connecting with one another through both time and space arrangements, similar to all the middle schools in this study. When teachers can connect easily they can influence each other with their ideas and experience.

Berg (2018) identified general conditions and aligned sample strategies to support a teacher leadership culture. Administrators can adopt these strategies and develop others that apply to their context. I found the following conditions agreed with my own analysis:

- teaming for collaboration with supportive time and space arrangements
- time for working or visiting in each other's classrooms to share ideas and materials
- professional development with teacher-developed goals for shared learning
- communication structures (especially with technology) designed for teachers' instructional support
- easy access to professional knowledge for best practices and teaching questions

- psychological safety for innovation and reflective actions, especially from staff members who may be unkind and lack understanding and empathy (p.68-69).

The administrators I studied had the wisdom to accept the teacher-initiated changes to benefit students even when they learned about what teachers had done after the fact, and they supported the wider dissemination of these teachers' efforts. The principals' persistence in supporting and respecting the informal teacher leaders may have been more important than anything else they could do to support teacher leadership.

Other authors, Crowther et al. (2002), Danielson (2006), Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001), and Portner, H. & Collins, W. E. (2014) provide additional recommendations for cultivating positive informal teacher leadership to build and support a school's leadership capacity for learning. However, there are administrators who feel threatened by informal teacher leaders' ideas initiated by the teachers themselves that were not initiated or delegated or authorized by the administrators.

### **Recommendations for Policy Makers**

The teaching profession is at a critical juncture, with teacher morale at a precipitous low mark, 2015-16 data from the latest National Teacher Principal Survey indicated that 44% of teachers leave within their first five years of teaching. Will teaching be recognized as an essential profession to support learning and the development of our democratic society or be written off as irrelevant? Or will teaching not be a profession and a career at all, but a job that anyone can fulfill by reading a manual, taking a three to six-month certification course, or having students work through artificial intelligence-designed and delivered courses?

Informal teacher leaders in this research illuminated the nuances of leadership in all of the selected schools. There was evidence of all the teacher participants talking about the

importance of literacy and recognizing that it is necessary to teach even in the content areas. Teachers themselves recognized the need for coherence in the use of the same vocabulary, working together for all their students, engaging all their students, and pushing all students to have the knowledge to become successful through recognizing student differences and providing differentiated instruction.

How does support for all of these actions translate into policy? National, state, and local policymakers need to take action on the following:

- Recognize that teachers are leaders with essential expertise and include them in crafting policies and regulations because they can offer advice about the impact on students and classrooms.
- Consider the unintended consequences of policies and their impact on teaching and learning if teachers are not included in their development.
- Allow change leadership to come from teacher ownership, rather than an insistence on adhering to a strict formula.

If policymakers collaborate inclusively with teachers to solve schooling, teaching, and learning problems, teachers will agree to work creatively toward new ideas in partnership. Teachers are creative workers who with top-down collaboration can develop bottom-up solutions. When raising standards or crafting directives for all students, allow for the differentiation that teachers provide for their various students in time and place. Allow fidelity to the goals, not strict adherence to processes or discourse. Teachers understand that student learning is their work's purpose. Providing learning measures and assessments that are based on knowledge of learning, together with teachers, builds a system of change and improvement that can be realistically developed.

Lastly, treat teachers with respect and build communities of learning working toward program coherence within and across schools through collaborative opportunities. Build real collaboration into policy, not contrived collaboration, such as advisory groups for specific Board of Education policies, open policy discussions that include teachers, and requests to teachers for identifying problems and suggestions.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research**

The study's purpose was to uncover new understandings of informal teacher leaders and their relationships with formal teacher leaders and principals concerning adopting the state standards in ELA and literacy. A "titled" formal teacher leader only existed in the urban middle school; however, the research uncovered a different thread that illuminated semi-formal teacher leadership roles. In this first category of semi-formal teachers, leaders are school librarians, who have not been considered teacher leaders.

However, they are teachers through their work in literacy. As librarians, they have specific leadership roles inherent within their positions. The leadership roles that librarians play include integrating literacy across all content areas, working with literacy not just in print but media and digital literacy, focusing on information and research skills, encouraging the use of materials that present different points of view, providing materials that emphasize neglected important areas so that students can understand their own development and development of our nation, and advocating for freedom of information against censorship.

Other semi-formal teacher leaders in this first category are special educators including academic intervention specialists and school counselors. It is interesting to note that both of these positions, school counselors and special educators, share the philosophical stance of middle

school educators. They are all concerned with students' developmental levels and potential and require collaboration to achieve student learning.

In the second semi-formal teacher leadership categories are teachers who are chosen or who volunteer for administrator-created roles, i.e., the curriculum council in the rural school, the diversity committee in the suburban district, and the leadership team in the urban school.

Informal teacher leaders also assume these roles. More research on the semi-formal teacher leadership role should be continued and the relationships between informal teacher leadership and semiformal teacher leadership need further study.

My original intent of the study was to interview only school administrators and sixth and seventh-grade ELA teachers. In instances in all schools, teachers and one administrator whom I hoped would participate declined to be interviewed: the rural school's seventh-grade ELA teacher and sixth-grade special education teacher; the suburban school's seventh-grade ELA teacher and assistant superintendent; and the urban school's formal teacher leader and sixth and seventh-grade ELA teachers. I reached out to all these individuals with letters, and emails, and had some of the other participants encourage the others to be involved.

Time is one issue, giving up time for no monetary receipt to an outside researcher. In addition, there are challenges in gaining access for case studies because it is difficult for people to recognize that the stories that they like to tell are important. These stories also expose them to their thinking and feelings. They themselves don't recognize their stories' importance. I determined to request at least two interviews with each individual because the first interview allowed for trust building to engage with the second interview. Trust building is very delicate in connecting with someone whom you don't know and is key to this work.

Not accessing all of whom I planned for changed the study's focus, and the interview invitation was expanded to all middle school teachers who taught literacy in their content areas and to school librarians because of their roles in teaching literacy. While alternative views would undoubtedly have been illuminated if the proposed ELA teacher participants had volunteered, the study provides a broader and richer view of literacy leadership, especially within the content areas. Since the reading and writing standards apply to all content areas, more research on leadership in other core content areas is needed.

Participants' interview narratives addressed collaborative actions about the learning standards and instruction, their expectations, how their roles interacted, and how they worked together. More teachers participated as part of the group that responded to the survey than in the interviews that provided more general views of distributed leadership within the schools.

Professional learning communities (PLCs), which are developed by the teachers themselves without an administrative agenda, offer opportunities for teacher leadership. I did not pursue this theme as a teacher leadership opportunity because I view it as part of the third category of semi-formal teacher leadership. This is one where teachers through professional organizations or informal organizations, such as the group in the rural school before and after the book study, determine the leadership. This includes teachers' unions. Another study should ensue about this third category of semi-formal teacher leadership.

The breadth of the study was large, but it did not include direct observations for a wider view of informal teacher leadership. Observations were not included in the research design. Also, the research was conducted in only three New York State upstate schools, which were not randomly selected. Therefore, these schools are not necessarily representative of schools in their respective areas, much less of schools in other regions of the state, nor with schools with

different and/or larger student and teacher populations, or in other states. Therefore, case studies are needed on more types of schools such as the New York State “Middle-Level Schools to Watch” and different school levels or with larger student populations and with a wider number of schools. Including observations in the research methods and design and using mixed-methods research that includes survey research would also help make findings from future studies more generalizable.

Additionally, although it was not part of the selection criteria, all three principals of the schools studied were supportive of informal teacher leadership, which may have been why they were willing to cooperate in this study. While it might be challenging to identify and secure cooperation from schools whose principals are skeptical or unsupportive of informal teacher leadership, we cannot develop a robust understanding of informal leadership without including such principals and their schools in future studies.

There were serious incidents in two middle schools mid-year, which resulted in both principals leaving the district at the end of the school year. Because neither incident concerned teacher leadership or literacy instruction, I chose not to focus on these incidents and only peripherally discussed them with the teachers I interviewed, who seemingly professed not to know much about what happened. Nevertheless, these crises cut short the employment of principals who supported informal teacher leaders and were committed to school change. A future study that followed the impact of these crises on teachers and the new principals of these schools would provide additional knowledge about how disruptive incidents affect teacher leadership.

This study was conducted when the schools were in the awareness stage of implementing New York’s literacy standards. Another study should focus on the full implementation of the new

state tests looming when some administrators might not be as comfortable as those in this study who were supporting teachers to develop innovations of their own. Also, this study took place a year earlier than the New York State schools' coronavirus shutdown. Another study following that year and subsequent virtual teaching and learning that occurred in these schools would be informative. A question to address would be, "What would the actions of the informal teacher leaders be at this stage of school change?"

Furthermore, the design of this study enhanced the likelihood that it would reveal examples of teacher collaboration and leadership in three ways: it focuses on middle schools with their emphasis on collaborative structures, it emphasizes literacy that is relevant to all curriculum areas, and it emphasizes implementing standards that are similar across all subjects. Other curriculum subjects should be examined to see what would have been different in these other subjects. The findings may not generalize across all content areas or apply to particular areas; therefore, informal teacher leadership research on other content areas should be expanded.

### **Further Implications**

Why is informal teacher leadership important now? The standards call for developing literacy skills that cut across all subjects. Inquiry-based learning is also an essential requirement of the learning standards in all subjects. Therefore, meeting the standards with the development of these skills demands raising the achievement of all students. Another factor of students' instructional success was consistency as demonstrated by the suburban teachers who were providing common assessments within their content areas.

Democracy involves striving for all citizens to reach their highest potential so that they can all participate. The development of learning standards undergirds these goals. The teachers in this study were engaged in leadership for the learning of all their students, which makes the



research findings especially valuable. They were providing leadership to each other and to their schools. They recognized that to build strength in our citizenry all students must be given opportunities to learn and that literacy is a core feature of that learning.

These demands for consistency and coherence in holding all students to high standards require close coordination among teachers. But they also require that individual teachers have the flexibility to differentiate their instruction to adapt to the needs and abilities of individual students and different groups of students so that all students can succeed. The need for flexibility and differentiation for students within a grade level must be understood by all the teachers and respected by administrators. The needs for coordination and flexibility, then, are equally compelling, but the need for them both creates tension that can only be resolved by teachers collaborating with each other, as the teachers in both the rural and suburban schools in this study did when they developed routines to encourage independent reading. Only teachers can provide this balance.

Informal teacher leadership woven into the fabric of a school's context and climate can be restrained or encouraged. Informal teacher leadership relies on relationships for its influence with alliances between colleagues who collaborate on the work. These relationships rely on trust grounded in respect for teachers' instructional expertise. This school leadership can be supported or thwarted by elements: formally appointed leaders, the school's culture regarding collaboration, the normative context, and other teachers. There is also a role for the teachers' union in allowing for flexibility and supporting individual teachers' leadership choices regarding teacher leadership in many forms, and for educating other teachers about leadership. This area is open for more study.

Teachers have not been provided the opportunity for leadership skill development and knowledge about its relationship to students' success. They may not understand leadership as a group or collaborative endeavor. Also, there are formal leaders who do not embrace and explicitly support teacher leadership because of outmoded conventions and because the new paradigm of leadership threatens them.

Regarding distributed leadership, the teachers in this study themselves distributed leadership rather than administrators. The teachers did so in collaborative situations, primarily in teams, where the leadership was not distributed to a single individual but was shared among the participants who took on these leadership roles based on their understanding of their student's learning needs. Teachers' collaboration affirmed teacher leadership for students and the teachers, who influenced each other, the school, and the district.

Although initially, each school had a tight coupling with their district office and the BOCES guidance, the teachers in each school began to implement the changed standards differently. Connections established by the trust from working together and developing mutual respect for teaching knowledge between the teachers played the most important part in how the teachers' actions evolved.

Finally, informal teacher leadership roles appeared unrelated to whether that school was rural, suburban, or urban. However, in each school the context was different: the school's student population, number of teachers, the longevity of the administrators, the school norms, and how the teachers were organized to collaborate with opportunities for teacher leadership but again the motivating factor for assuming teacher leadership was students' learning needs that compelled teachers to take actions for change.

Two other factors influenced informal teacher leadership: the configuration of middle school structures, the teams, the partnerships, and teaching the same student cadres produced a coherence for instruction and literacy as a topic for curriculum, instruction, and assessment that cut across all content areas. Questions remain as to how we bring this informal teacher leadership knowledge to scale for a theory of informal teacher leadership.

In their optimism and caring for learning, teachers continue to show that they lead in any way they can for their students. As I write these final words of my dissertation during a difficult time for education, I am heartened by the teachers and their principals that I studied and the caring and goodness I found reflected in their educational leadership.

### Appendix 1: Teacher Leadership Reviews of Research 1983 to 2018

<b>Review Factors</b>	<b>York-Barr &amp; Duke (2004)</b>	<b>Wenner &amp; Campbell (2017)</b>	<b>Nguyen et al. (2019)</b>	<b>Schott et al. (2020)</b>
<i>Teacher Leadership Review Purpose</i>	*Summarize findings and developed a conceptual framework to guide practice & research	*Continue York-Barr & Duke's research: -Quest for a robust TL theory -Content level TL -TL for social justice & equity	*Quest for: -Contextual differences -TL methods -TL patterns	*Rate TL research quality based on standards
<i>Teacher Leadership Definition used by Reviewers</i>	*Teachers who influence others for improved student learning.	*Involved in school decision-making for improved student learning. *Involved in whole school change. *A peer teacher who maintains K-12 teaching responsibilities while assuming leadership outside the classroom.	*Katzenmeyer & Moller's (2001) definition (p. 5): -TLs lead within and beyond the classroom -Identify with teachers -Contribute to teachers as learners and leaders -Influence others toward improved practice *Community-oriented *Accept responsibility for achieving leadership outcomes.	*Teachers with classroom responsibilities who influence others to improve education.
<i>Other Teacher Leadership Conceptions</i>	*Participative leadership *Distributed leadership *Parallel leadership		*Found 17 TL definitions with themes: -change agent -innovator -actions beyond the classroom -peer collaborations based on mutual benefit, respect, and trust	*No clear TL definition. *Definitions depend on the context *Major theme is teachers influencing others to improve schools' or educational practices. *Definitions include many process factors.
<i>Teacher Leaders' Work</i>	*Coordinate school or district curriculum development. *Professional development for colleagues. *Participate in school improvement.		*York-Barr and Duke *Action research *Promote social justice.	*Curriculum development. *Initiate school change in instruction. *Support colleagues through teacher networks and PLCs.

Appendix 1  
continued

<b>Review Factors</b>	<b>York-Barr &amp; Duke (2004)</b>	<b>Wenner &amp; Campbell (2017)</b>	<b>Nguyen et al. (2019)</b>	<b>Schott et al. (2020)</b>
<i>Teacher Leaders' Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Involved with parents and community.</li> <li>*Contribute to the profession.</li> <li>*Provided preservice teacher education support.</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Connect with parents who need help.</li> <li>*Professional development.</li> </ul>
<i>Teacher Leaders' Influence Source</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Collaboration</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Human capital (expertise &amp; experience).</li> <li>*Social capital (positive relationship w/ peers through social networks)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Expertise</li> <li>*Age/experience</li> <li>*Professional capital</li> <li>*Socially strong</li> <li>*Leadership skills</li> <li>*Blogging</li> <li>*Personal resources</li> <li>*Educational level</li> <li>*Attitude</li> <li>*Relationship with principals</li> </ul>
<i>Teacher Leaders' Methods of Influence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Advocacy for teaching</li> <li>*Act fairly</li> <li>*Enable others to succeed</li> <li>*Professionalism</li> <li>*Trusting relationships</li> <li>*Innovations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Professional development support</li> <li>*Influence policy and decision-making</li> <li>*Target student learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Develop trusting relationships</li> <li>*Establish professional collaborations</li> <li>*Support others</li> <li>*Share resources and innovative ideas</li> <li>*Model new practices</li> <li>*Encourage colleagues</li> </ul>	Not delineated
<i>Teacher Leadership Contexts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Diverse role expectations and structures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Must teach students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Early childhood (3)</li> <li>*K-12(122)</li> <li>*Higher education (23 *Mixed(2)</li> <li>*Primarily in, U.S. &amp; other western English-speaking countries.</li> <li>*Two cross-national.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*U. S. plus 28 other countries, more Asian,</li> <li>*All K-12 plus vocational education</li> </ul>
<i>Teacher Leadership Supports</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*School culture</li> <li>*Roles and relationships</li> <li>*School Structures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*External training</li> <li>*Administrative support, especially the principal</li> <li>*Structures:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Time</li> <li>-Role clarity</li> <li>-Recognition</li> <li>-School norms</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Positive school culture:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaborative</li> <li>- Transparent, flexible structures for innovation</li> <li>- Mutually supportive peer relationships</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*School culture</li> <li>*School structures</li> <li>*Training outside the school</li> <li>*TL certification</li> <li>*School audits that addressed TL</li> <li>*TL networks</li> <li>*Professional associations and union support</li> </ul>

Appendix 1  
continued

<b>Review Factors</b>	<b>York-Barr &amp; Duke (2004)</b>	<b>Wenner &amp; Campbell (2017)</b>	<b>Nguyen et al. (2019)</b>	<b>Schott et al. (2020)</b>
<i>Teacher Leadership Supports</i>			*TL's competencies: -psychological disposition related to instructional change -commitment -motivation -self-efficacy -growth mindset	*Peers as role models *Skill training Facilitating TL with school decision-making
<i>Teacher Leaders' Professional Learning</i>	*Most informal *Higher ed mentoring	*Conferences *Local district PD *University classes		
<i>Teacher Leaders' Constraints</i>	*Collegial but not collaborative culture *Conflict with egalitarian culture especially for FTLs *Principals': -resistance: -lack of TL knowledge and experience, -non-democratic style -traditional top-down leadership *Lack of time, space, and access to peers	*Negative culture and structures *Lack of time *Resistance by administrators and teachers *Self-limiting attributes	*Agreement with Wenner and Campbell. *Disconnected, non-caring culture *Top-down, rigid, opaque structures. *Lack of balance related to time and non-support created stress. *Teachers' egalitarian beliefs	*Stress
<i>Positive Effects on Teacher Leaders</i>	*Learning opportunity *Improved instruction *Teacher retention *Reduced isolation	*Empowerment *Professional growth *Professionalism *Work satisfaction	*Leadership knowledge *Skills growth. *Positive instructional changes. *Increased commitment and motivation. *Enhanced intellectual stimulation and self-efficacy. *Increased professional and leadership identity and growth.	*Increased investment in PD. *Developed better problem-solving skills. *Different roles provided flexibility. *Job satisfaction. *Stayed in the profession.
<i>Positive Effects on Teachers</i>		*Increased collaboration *Shared best practices *Professional learning	Developed teacher-to-peer influence. Increased collective efficacy. Increased quality of peer relationship	Better teaching and learning practices. Intensified support for teachers.

Appendix 1  
continued

<b>Review Factors</b>	<b>York-Barr &amp; Duke (2004)</b>	<b>Wenner &amp; Campbell (2017)</b>	<b>Nguyen et al. (2019)</b>	<b>Schott et al. (2020)</b>
<i>Positive Effects on Teachers</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Assisted with student differentiation</li> <li>*Helped with content issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Motivated others.</li> <li>*Increased teachers' instructional capacity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Increased involvement in professional organizations and external PLCs.</li> <li>*Created leaders in the profession.</li> <li>*Influenced policy.</li> <li>*Increased voicing of opinions, less hesitancy.</li> </ul>
<i>Negative Effects on Other Teachers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Challenged teachers' egalitarian norms.</li> <li>*Negative shift in relationships.</li> <li>*Some roles were hierarchical.</li> <li>*Diminished desire to lead.</li> <li>*Peer-to-peer conflict.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Stress from a lack of time and role balance.</li> <li>*Disrupted egalitarian norms.</li> <li>*Negative collegiality</li> <li>*Lack of role clarity resulted in misuse underuse and inefficiencies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Uncomfortable peer relationships.</li> <li>*Work unbalanced between teaching and leadership.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Stress</li> </ul>
<i>Other Effects</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Positive TL influence through trust and collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*More collaborations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Collaborative culture developed</li> <li>*PLCs initiated changes</li> <li>*Curriculum reformed</li> <li>*School developed as a learning organization</li> <li>*Increased total leadership</li> <li>*Indirect but increased student learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Positively mediated relationships between principal and teachers</li> <li>*Refined the learning climate</li> <li>*School reform change was effective</li> <li>*Teaching and learning culture improved</li> <li>*Curriculum development improved</li> <li>*More focus on educational equity</li> <li>*Increased teacher-parent trust</li> <li>*Increased parent involvement</li> <li>*Enabled parents to overcome feeling helpless</li> <li>*Increased growth in student levels of learning</li> <li>* Increased. inquiry-based learning &amp; technology literacy</li> </ul>

Appendix 1  
continued

<b>Review Factors</b>	<b>York-Barr &amp; Duke (2004)</b>	<b>Wenner &amp; Campbell (2017)</b>	<b>Nguyen et al. (2019)</b>	<b>Schott et al. (2020)</b>
<i>Studies Screened</i>	*Key terms searched: teacher leadership, shared decision-making, and teacher professionalism. *peer-reviewed & non-peer-reviewed work: books, book chapters, reports, scholarly reviews, conference presentations, one newspaper	*Only peer-reviewed studies & dissertations *TL's central to study, must teach *Triangulated data methods *Sample size equal to or greater than five	* Single data source studies & those with samples less than five *TL was not the central focus of all studies, some included principal studies with TL. *English only studies.	*Books, theoretical articles, two databases, four journals, *Citations from York-Barr & Duke, Wenner & Campbell Plus six international experts for additional studies *Symposia and introductions excluded
<i>Research Methods of Studies Reviewed</i>	*Primarily qualitative case studies *Convenience samples *Self-report interview data	*Mostly qualitative.	*Qualitative (71%) Quantitative (16%) Mixed (13%) 53% used only one data source	
<i>Participants</i>	*Primarily FTLs	*Teachers with teaching responsibilities and TL roles	Teachers who lead within and beyond the classroom.	Teachers with classroom responsibilities: K-12 & vocational teachers
<i>Timeframe and Number of Works Reviewed</i>	1980 to 2003 141 studies 100 cited	2004 to 2013 54 studies	2003-2017 150 published works journal articles, 25 overlapped with Wenner & Campbell's review	2014 to 2018 93 studies
<i>Research Theories Considered</i>	*Few theoretical. *Most descriptive	*Few theories *Those used: -Distributed Leadership, most-often -Dimensions of Practice -Instructional Leadership -Organizational Leadership -Parallel Leadership -Transformational Leadership -Transactional Leadership	*Lack of theoretical core for teacher leadership research.	Not addressed



Appendix 1  
continued

<b>Review Factors</b>	<b>York-Barr &amp; Duke (2004)</b>	<b>Wenner &amp; Campbell (2017)</b>	<b>Nguyen et al. (2019)</b>	<b>Schott et al. (2020)</b>
<i>Research Reviewers' Concerns about Teacher Leadership Research</i>	*Few studies related to theory or student learning	*Few studies addressed equity and social justice or content area TLs	*Lack of coherent, consistent TL operational definition. *Lack of agreement on theoretical dimensions.	*Personal, contextual, or methods impact on the data not made explicit *Confounding variables and estimates for variance not reported in quantitative studies
<i>Research Reviewers Recommend</i>	*Prepare prospective administrators for TL collaboration and interactive leadership *Redefine the role of a principal *Prepare schools for TL *Train teachers—3 Frameworks proposed	*More TL studies to focus on equity and social justice *TL in different content areas *All teachers have leadership capacity *More empirically sound, peer-reviewed studies *More theoretical grounding than earlier studies	*Use a consistent TL definition *Focus on theoretical dimensions *Much more TL research needed *Explore the influence process and effects *Seek causality on student learning and other *Integrate TL with other leadership models *Research in other contexts, PK, post-secondary, non-western countries, societies, cultures *Provide in-depth accounts of TL enactment, effects, impact *Report TL's negative effects	*Use York-Barr & Duke's definition to focus knowledge *Research ITL *Research to develop a conceptual model *Provide transparency with data collection, analysis, and open access *Report TL's negative effects on teachers, students, & schools

*Notes.* TL = Teacher Leadership, FTL = formal teacher leadership, ITL = informal teacher leadership, PLC = Professional Learning Communities, PK = pre-kindergarten or early childhood

From: "What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship", by J. York-Barr & K. Duke 2004, *Review of Educational Research*, 74(3), pp. 255-316.

“The theoretical and empirical basis of teacher leadership: A review of the literature” by J. A. Wenner & T. Campbell, 2017, *Review of Educational Research*, 87(1), pp. 134-171.

“A review of the empirical research on teacher leadership: Evidence, patterns, and implications”, by D. Nguyen et al., 2019, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 58(1), pp. 60-80.

“Teacher leadership: A systemic review, methodological quality assessment, and conceptual framework”, by C. Schott et al., 2020, *Educational Research Review*, 31, pp. 1-41.

## Appendix 2: Superintendents' District Letter of Agreement

### School Letterhead

[Date]

Office of Research Integrity and Protections  
Syracuse University  
121 Bowne Hall  
Syracuse, NY 13244

To Whom It May Concern:

Mary Ann Luciano, Doctoral Graduate Student at Syracuse University has requested permission to collect research data from middle school teachers, the middle school principal, and other middle school professionals through a project entitled *Patterns of Leadership in Middle Schools: Informal Teacher Leaders*. I have been informed of the purposes of the study and the nature of the research procedures. I have also been given an opportunity to ask questions of the researcher.

The [Name of District] has policies in conjunction with parents and the US Department of Education regarding the following:

- A. The right of parents to inspect, upon request a survey created by a third party before the survey is administered or distributed by a school to students.
- B. Arrangements to protect student privacy in the event of the administration of a survey to students, including the right of parents to inspect, upon request, the survey, if the survey contains one or more of the same eight items of information.
- C. The right of parents to inspect, upon request, any instructional materials used as part of the educational curriculum for students.

- D. The administration of physical examinations or screenings that the school may administer to students.

As a representative of the [Name of District], I am authorized to grant permission to have the researcher recruit research participants from our Middle School. *Mary Ann Luciano* is also permitted to collect research data during school hours when research participants agree, before and after school hours, during school holidays as permitted by the research participants, and by phone with the agreement of the research participants. When in the school building, Mary Ann Luciano will check in and check out at the main office.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [Superintendent's Office Phone Number]

Sincerely,

[Signature of Superintendent]

Superintendent

### Appendix 3. Recruitment Letter to School Principals with Enclosure



DEPARTMENT OF TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP

150 HUNTINGTON HALL

SYRACUSE, NEW YORK 13244-2340

315-443-2685

NAME AND ADDRESS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

*RE: Patterns of Educational Leadership in Middle Schools: Roles of Teacher Leaders Research*

*Dear (Middle School Principal):*

My name is Mary Ann Luciano, I am a doctoral graduate student and Dr. Joseph Shedd is my faculty advisor and Coordinator of the Leadership Program in the School of Education's Teaching and Leadership Department. I am requesting that you and your school staff participate in a research study to understand how middle school administrators and teachers respond to an external mandate. We would like you to share your experiences in working with teachers in applying the New York State English language arts and literacy standards. The purpose of the study is not to evaluate individuals or the process of applying the standards but how principals and teachers share leadership responsibilities collectively when applying the standards.

There are two parts to the data collection: one-to-one interviews with you and several teachers who play leadership roles in your school, and an online survey that I will request all professional education staff in your school to complete. Participation is voluntary.

All interviews would be conducted by me; two interviews for 45 minutes each and a third if you and I agree a third is necessary. The interviews provide an opportunity for you to tell about your experience in applying the New York State English language arts and literacy standards. The questions I will ask would be about your story of how the professional staff works together and with you.

I will need a place in the school where you and I can talk confidentially, and hopefully without interruption. I will also need a place for the teacher interviews. With your permission, I will audio record our interviews and have them transcribed by a confidential professional secretary. I will secure the recordings and printed transcriptions in my home-locked office. I will destroy the recordings after the research is complete. Before the first interview, I would need you to sign a consent form that contains all the required information needed for you to participate.

During the first interview, I will ask for the names and contact information of formal teacher leaders, those you or the district have assigned to work in English language arts and literacy with the staff in your school. I will contact the formal teacher leaders by email to recruit them for interviews about their experiences.

Following the formal teacher leaders' interviews, I will solicit nominations of informal teacher leaders, those without formal leadership roles but whom you, the teachers, and teaching assistants go to for consultation on English language arts and literacy. These may be teachers who volunteer to do this work outside their classrooms with other teachers. From the email-solicited group, I will select informal teacher leaders and recruit them by email for interviews about their experiences.

After I complete the individual interviews, I will invite you, all your teachers, and other school professionals in the middle school to respond to an online survey available through a secure portal set up by the University of Wisconsin. This survey is the Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning® or CALL. The CALL survey report provides a map of how leadership responsibilities are shared between school staff on various decision-making aspects. The survey takes about 40 minutes to complete through an online portal established specifically for your school. Individuals can respond to the survey at any time during a two-week response time that you and I can decide. I have attached more information on the CALL.

Confidential for the research means that we will not have the names of individuals or your school or district appear in the dissertation or subsequent publications. We will use pseudonyms making sure not to link specific information to actual names. I will assign a number to the responses. Only Dr. Shedd and I will have the key to indicate which number belongs to each participant. In any articles I write or any presentations I make, I will use made-up names. I will change details about the district, the school, and individuals, such as school location and evident descriptors. Nevertheless, persons close to the school may be able to identify some of the information.

Involvement in the study is voluntary and you may decline to participate or decline to answer some questions or may decide to withdraw from the interview once we start without prejudice or penalty. I hope as the school principal that you choose to participate and would let me invite other faculty members to do so on a voluntary basis. You and your middle school staff will be helping the educational leadership field to understand middle school shared leadership in adopting new standards and the roles that the various professionals play. There may be benefits to you on reflection during the interviews or with the CALL Survey.

Please feel free to ask me questions about the research. I will be happy to explain anything in detail as you wish in a follow-up meeting or phone call with you. I will contact you to set up the meeting at your convenience. My email address is [malucian@syr.edu](mailto:malucian@syr.edu) Telephone number for my home office is 607-336-2728; my cell phone number is 607-226-0912.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, contact Dr. Joseph Shedd at 150 Huntington Hall, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244-2340, phone 315-443-3808, [jbshedd@syr.edu](mailto:jbshedd@syr.edu)

I appreciate your consideration, welcome your questions, and look forward to our meeting.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Luciano

[malucian@syr.edu](mailto:malucian@syr.edu)

Home office: 607-336-2728 Mobile phone: 607-226-0912

## **Enclosure for Principal's Letter**

### **Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning®(CALL) Survey System**

**What is CALL?** The Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning® is an online schoolwide leadership system accessed through a secure school portal from the University of Wisconsin. The purpose is to describe a school's collective leadership, not just one person.

**Development of CALL:** University of Wisconsin-Madison educational researchers developed the CALL through a four-year grant funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S.

Department of Education. The CALL researchers based the CALL on extensive research of effective school leadership practices. Teachers and principals vetted the survey items throughout the development process. The CALL researchers validated the instrument with over 200 schools by correlating CALL data against student learning data, school leadership effectiveness data, and school culture data.

### **How does this work?**

There are three parts to the CALL system. 1) A comprehensive survey of a school's educational professionals. This survey asks questions about core leadership practices, which are shared across the school. Participants access the survey through an email with a connection set up by the University of Wisconsin specifically for this middle school. I will work with you and the technology staff to set up this secure portal and to designate a two-week period to be available for answering the CALL survey. Participating in the survey is voluntary.

Participants complete the survey during the designated two-week period. The survey takes about 40 minutes to answer. They may return to the survey at any time online during these two weeks to complete the survey. Participants may choose not to answer some questions or choose not to complete the survey once they start it without prejudice or penalty.



2) After the designated two-week period, the researcher will collect the feedback. The purpose is for the description only; it is not to evaluate the school. The CALL feedback map focuses on shared or distributed leadership practices across five domains: 1. Focus on Learning, 2. Monitoring Teaching and Learning, 3. Building Professional Community, 4. Acquiring and Allocating Resources, 5. Maintaining a Safe and Effective Learning Environment. Within each of these five core domains, there are three to five subdomains.

Researchers have determined that these domains are related to student achievement. The map does not portray an individual leader but collective school leadership. For the study, I will utilize this first map as descriptive data. I will keep all the data from your school's map confidential.

3) The CALL system provides targeted suggestions and strategies to support professional planning and change within the leadership practices of the domains. The CALL will be available to your school for a free period of one year, through a grant to the researcher. You and the school staff may use the portal and the accompanying resources for your own school's planning and professional development and the staff may complete the survey again. The school may also determine not to continue with the CALL system without penalty.

More detailed information on the CALL is available at <http://www.leadershipforlearning.org>

## Appendix 4. Recruitment Letter/Email to Teachers



DEPARTMENT OF TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP

150 HUNTINGTON HALL

SYRACUSE, NEW YORK 13244-2340

315-443-2685

(NAME OF TEACHER), TEACHER

NAME OF SCHOOL AND ADDRESS

***RE: Research on Patterns of Educational Leadership in Middle Schools: Roles of Teacher***

***Leaders***

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

My name is Mary Ann Luciano, I am a doctoral graduate student at Syracuse University. Dr. Joseph Shedd, my faculty advisor, and principal investigator is the Coordinator of the Leadership Program in the School of Education's Teaching and Leadership Department. I invite you to participate in a research study to understand how middle school administrators and teachers respond to an external mandate. We would like you to share your experiences in working with others in applying the New York State English language arts standards. The purpose of the study is not to evaluate individuals or the process of applying the standards but how school principals and teachers share leadership responsibilities when applying the standards.

There are two parts to the research data collection: one-to-one interviews with teachers and the school principal about their experiences working with others to apply the New York State English language arts and literacy standards, and an online survey for all professional educators in your school. Your school principal/colleague (name) identified you as someone who has worked in applying the grades 6 and 7 New York State English language arts and literacy standards. I invite you to participate in the interviews.

All interviews would be conducted by me; two interviews for 45 minutes each and a third if you and I agree a third is necessary. They provide an opportunity for you to tell about your experience in working with others in applying the New York State English language arts and literacy standards. The questions I will ask would be about your story of applying the standards.

We will be provided a place in the school where you and I can talk confidentially without interruption. With your permission, I will audio record our interviews and have them transcribed by a confidential professional secretary. I will arrange with you interview time before or after school, during a school break, or at other times at your convenience.

Confidential for the research means that we will not have the names of individuals or your school or district appear in my dissertation or subsequent publications. We will use pseudonyms making sure not to link specific information to actual names. I will assign a number to responses, and only Dr. Shedd and I will have the key to indicate which number belongs to each participant. In any articles written or any presentations made, we will use made-up names. We will change details about the district, the school, and individuals, such as school location and evident descriptors. Nevertheless, persons close to the school may be able to identify some of the information.

I hope that you decide to participate in the interviews. Involvement in the study is voluntary and you may decline to participate or decline to answer some questions in the interviews or may decide to withdraw from the interviews once we start without prejudice or penalty.

You will be helping the educational leadership field to understand middle school shared leadership in adopting new standards and the roles that the various professionals play. There may be benefits to you on reflection during the interviews. Before the first interview, I need you to sign a consent form that will contain all the required information needed for you to participate.

Please feel free to ask me questions about the research. I will be happy to explain anything in detail as you wish in a follow-up meeting or phone call with you and will contact you in about a week. If you would like to contact me before then, my email address is [malucian@syr.edu](mailto:malucian@syr.edu) Telephone number for my home office is 607-336-2728; my cell phone number is 607-226-0912. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, contact Dr. Joseph Shedd at 150 Huntington Hall, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244-2340, phone 315-443-3808, [jbshedd@syr.edu](mailto:jbshedd@syr.edu)

I appreciate your consideration, welcome your questions, and look forward to our meeting.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Luciano

[malucian@syr.edu](mailto:malucian@syr.edu)

Home office: 607-336-2728

Cell phone: 607-226-0912

**Appendix 5. PowerPoint® for Faculty Meetings: Recruitment for CALL® Survey Participation and Interviews**



*Educational Leadership in Middle Schools: Roles of  
Teacher Leaders*

Presentation to the Three Middle School Faculties  
October 3, 2018; put in other dates



Thank you for meeting with me today!  
Purpose: Present my research, answer questions,  
and request your participation.

Mary Ann Luciano, Doctoral Graduate Student



**What?** *Educational Leadership in Middle Schools: Roles of Teacher Leaders*

- Study is to understand how middle school teachers and administrators respond to an external mandate, the Revised New York State English language arts, and literacy standards.
- Not to evaluate individuals or the process of applying the standards but how teachers and principals share leadership responsibilities when applying the standards.



**New Paradigm of Leadership**

- \*Leadership is a not one person's responsibility but is shared or distributed within a school.
- \*Teachers have leadership roles both formal and informal.
- \*Important to maximize a schools' leadership capacity because leadership is connected to learning.



### Why?

- Need for all forms of leadership study.
- Research is needed on distributed/shared middle school leadership.
- All schools in New York State are faced with the same challenges on adopting the revised standards.



**HOW?** Two major steps for participation. All participation is voluntary.

#### Step 1: One-to-one Interviews

- Two 45-minute interviews with the principals and selected teachers.
- A third interview if necessary, with the decision by both researcher and participant.
- Interviews are audio recorded in school, at the convenience of participants. May occur during school, before or after school, during breaks,
- Interviews transcribed by a confidential professional secretary.



Step 2: Voluntary survey for all professional staff via computer portal

\*The University of Wisconsin will set up online portal for a 2-week period for all staff to access. Two weeks determined by school principal.

\*40 minutes for survey, can complete in more than one session.

\*Results describe school's (not individual) shared leadership according to 5 domains: Focus on Learning, Monitoring Teaching and Learning, Building Professional Community, Acquiring and Allocating Resources, and Establishing a Safe and Effective Learning Environment. All these factors are connected to better student learning.



Who?

Researchers: Dr. Joseph Shedd, Faculty Advisor, Leadership Coordinator, Teaching and Leadership Department, School of Education, Syracuse University

Mary Ann Luciano, Doctoral Graduate Student will conduct all interviews

Participants: All middle school professional staff, 18 years or older, who are employed to work in the middle school, and who voluntarily participate

Interviews: Principal, some teachers, librarian, and maybe a district staff member

Email question: All staff

Survey: All middle school professional staff



**When?** Proposed timeline

- Interviews from August to October/November 2018
- (Date) Presentation to faculty at (Name of Middle School) School
- Survey: November/December 2018, date TBD



**Confidentiality:**

- Confidential means: no names of individuals or the school or district appear in dissertation, subsequent publications, or presentations.
- Use pseudonyms making sure not to link specific information to actual names of school, district, or individuals.
- Only Dr. Shedd and will have the key to indicate which number belongs to each participant.
- Audio recordings to be destroyed when research complete.
- No identifying information on the survey or who responds to the survey or not.





- \*Consent form contains all the required information for those who wish to participate.
- \*Consent form is on the emails.
- \*Written consent form for the interviews.



- \* Potential participants may decline to:
  - \* Respond to email question
  - \* Participate in the interviews
  - \* Participate in the survey, or
  - If participating in the interviews or the survey may decline to answer any question.
  - Participant may withdraw without prejudice or penalty.



**Contact information:** If you have any questions or concerns about the research, contact Dr. Joseph Shedd at 150 Huntington Hall, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244-2340, phone 315-443-3808, [jbshedd@syr.edu](mailto:jbshedd@syr.edu)



- If you decide to participate, you will be adding to the research knowledge on middle school leadership and teacher leadership.
- You may also gain from your individual reflection in responding to the questions.
- I welcome your participation.

Slide 15



- Any questions?
- If you would like to speak with me after the meeting or to connect with me about the research, I can be reached at [malucian@syr.edu](mailto:malucian@syr.edu) or 607-226-0912.
- Please take an extra hand-out and give to a colleague who you know is not here today.
- THANK YOU!



Mary Ann Luciano, Doctoral Graduate Student

[malucian@syr.edu](mailto:malucian@syr.edu)

Home office: 607-336-2728 Cell phone: 607-226-0912

## Appendix 6. Handout for Faculty Meetings



DEPARTMENT OF TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP

170 HUNTINGTON HALL

SYRACUSE, NEW YORK 13244-2340

Research: *Patterns of Educational Leadership in Middle Schools: Roles of Teacher Leaders*

**Contact information:** Mary Ann Luciano, Doctoral Graduate Student, Teaching and Leadership Department, School of Education, Syracuse University [malucian@syr.edu](mailto:malucian@syr.edu)  
cell phone: 607-226-0912, home office phone: 607-336-2728

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, contact Dr. Joseph Shedd at 150 Huntington Hall, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244-2340, phone 315-443-3808, [jbshedd@syr.edu](mailto:jbshedd@syr.edu)

Parts of the Research:

- Interviews with the school principal, selected teachers, and others
- Email question to all faculty and staff: Who do you go to for instructional advice in English Language Arts and Literacy?
- Survey to all faculty and staff, the CALL®

### **Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning (CALL®) Survey System**

**What is CALL®?** The Comprehensive Assessment of Leadership for Learning® is an online schoolwide leadership system accessed through a secure school portal from the University of Wisconsin. The purpose is to describe a school's collective leadership, not just one person.

**Development of CALL®:** University of Wisconsin-Madison educational researchers developed the CALL® through a four-year grant funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. The CALL® researchers based the CALL® on extensive research of effective school leadership practices. Teachers and principals vetted the survey items throughout the development process. The CALL® researchers validated the instrument with over 200 schools by correlating CALL® data against student learning data, school leadership effectiveness data, and school culture data.

### **How does this work?**

There are three parts to the CALL system®. The first part is a comprehensive survey of a school's educational professionals. This survey asks questions about core leadership practices, which individuals distribute or share across the school. Participants access the CALL® survey through an email with a connection set up by the University of Wisconsin specifically for this middle school. I will work with the principal and the technology staff, to set up this secure portal and for them to designate a two-week period to be available for answering the CALL® survey.

Participants complete the survey during the designated two-week period and may return to the survey at any time online during these two weeks to complete the survey. The survey takes about 40 minutes to answer. Participating in the survey is voluntary. Participants may choose not to answer some questions or choose not to complete the survey once they start it without prejudice or penalty. Whenever one works with e-mail or the internet there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. It is important for you to understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the internet by third parties.

After the designated two-week period, the researcher will collect the feedback that describes your school's distributed or shared leadership. The purpose is for description only; it is not to evaluate the school.

The CALL® feedback focuses on shared or distributed leadership practices across five domains. What domains does CALL® Measure? 1. Focus on Learning, 2. Monitoring Teaching and Learning, 3. Building Professional Community, 4. Acquiring and Allocating Resources, 5. Maintaining a Safe and Effective Learning Environment. Within each of these five core domains, there are three to five subdomains.

Researchers have determined that these domains are related to student achievement. The map does not portray an individual leader but collective school leadership. For the study, I will utilize this first map as descriptive data. I will keep all the data from your school's map confidential.

Regarding the meaning of confidentiality, for the research, it means that we will not have names of individuals or your school or district appear in my dissertation or subsequent publications. For information I gather by interview, I will use pseudonyms making sure not to link specific information to actual names and change any details about the school, district, or individuals, such as school location and evident descriptors. Nevertheless, persons close to the school may be able to identify some of the information. Nothing on the survey will ask you to identify yourself.

Any risks from participating will be minimal given the procedures I will use to assure confidentiality. You can decline participation altogether, or decline from responding to the email questions, and/or the survey.

Lastly, the CALL® system provides targeted suggestions and strategies to support professional planning and change within the leadership practices of the domains. The CALL® will be available to your school for a free period of one year, through a grant to the researcher. The principal may use the portal and the accompanying resources for your own school's planning and professional development and the staff may complete the survey again. The school may also determine not to continue with the CALL system without penalty.

Thank you for participating in today's meeting. I welcome your participation in the research.

**Appendix 7. Nomination Email and Consent Form to Teachers following Faculty Meeting.**



170 HUNTINGTON HALL

SYRACUSE, NEW YORK 13244-2340

315-443-2685

(CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHER NOMINATIONS)

*Research Study: Patterns of Educational Leadership in Middle Schools: Roles of Teacher*

*Leaders*

My name is Mary Ann Luciano, I am a doctoral graduate student and Dr. Joseph Shedd is my faculty adviser and Coordinator of the Leadership Program in the School of Education's Teaching and Leadership Department. The purpose of the study is to learn how middle school principals and teachers share leadership responsibilities when applying external mandates.

We want to understand the experiences of educational leaders, both formal and informal, in helping others apply the New York State Grades 6 and 7 English language arts and literacy standards. The research purpose is not to evaluate individual leaders or the process but to describe and understand the school's collective leadership. This information should help to better understand how to include educational professionals in the standards' implementation.

We invite you to participate in the study. I presented to the (Name) Middle School faculty on (Date) about the research and distributed written information about the study. If you were unable to attend and would like more information about the study and participating please email me at [malucian@syr.edu](mailto:malucian@syr.edu)

At this time, we would like you to nominate teachers whom you and/or others in this middle school go to for advice applying the New York State grades 6 and 7 English language arts and/or literacy standards.

Completing the nomination question below will take an estimated 3 to 5 minutes. We will invite the selected nominated teachers to participate in two interviews in which they will have a choice to participate. They may also agree to a third interview if they and the researcher think it is necessary. After I complete the teacher interviews, we will provide an opportunity for all the (Name) Middle School professionals to complete an online survey.

Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or decline. You may decline to answer the question in this email without penalty. The risks to your participation in the study are minimal because we will keep your responses in strict confidence, not attributed to you.

For the nominations, I will assign a number to the responses, and only Dr. Shedd and I will have the key to indicate which number belongs to which respondent. In any articles we write or any presentations that we make, we will use made-up names and we will change details about the school, the district, and other details.

Whenever one works with e-mail or the internet there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. It is important for you to understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the internet by third parties.

Contact Information: If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, contact Dr. Joseph Shedd [jbshedd@syr.edu](mailto:jbshedd@syr.edu) at 315-443-2685. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, or if you have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than Dr. Shedd, or if you cannot reach him, please contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at 315-443-3013.

By responding to the question below and replying to this email you are agreeing that all your questions about the study have been answered, you are 18 years of age or older, that you are employed to work at the middle school, and that you give your consent to participate. Please print a copy of this consent text for your records.

*What teacher or teachers in your middle school do you and/or others go to for advice in applying the New York State grades 6 and 7 English language arts and/or literacy standards?*

Please insert names when responding to this email. DO NOT respond to all but only directly to me so that your emailed response goes directly to the researcher and is kept confidential.

Please send an email response.

Thank you for your participation and nominations.  
Mary Ann Luciano, [malucian@syr.edu](mailto:malucian@syr.edu)  
Cell phone: 607-226-0912

Please, let me know if you would like a copy of the handout from the (Date) faculty meeting.

## Appendix 8. Survey Consent Form

Collaborative Assessment of Leadership for Learning® (CALL) produced and validated by the University of Wisconsin and made available from the Wisconsin Center for Educational Products and Services is a survey used in the discipline of educational leadership. The instrument is attached at the end of the appendices. The first page of the survey that will be appended to the copyrighted survey is here.



### *Patterns of Leadership in Middle Schools*

We are interested in understanding how school leadership is distributed or shared within your middle school.

The study survey should take you about 40 minutes to complete and you can complete it in two sessions by \_\_\_\_\_ (date depending on the middle school). Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point or decline to answer any question, for any reason without prejudice or penalty. Your responses are confidential. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study to discuss this research, please email Dr. Joseph Shedd at [jbshedd@syr.edu](mailto:jbshedd@syr.edu)

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in this study survey is voluntary, you are at least 18 years of age, you are a public school educator, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study survey at any time and for any reason.

Thank you for your consideration.

- I consent, please begin the study survey.
- I do not consent; I do not wish to participate.



## Appendix 9. Interview Consent Form



170 HUNTINGTON HALL

SYRACUSE, NEW YORK 13244-2340

*Research Study: Patterns of Educational Leadership in Middle Schools: Roles of Teacher Leaders*

My name is Mary Ann Luciano, I am a doctoral graduate student and Dr. Joseph Shedd is my faculty advisor and Coordinator of the Leadership Program in the School of Education's Teaching and Leadership Department. The purpose of the study is to learn how middle school principals and teachers share leadership responsibilities when applying external mandates.

We want to understand the experiences of educational leaders, both formal and informal, in helping others apply the New York State Grade 6 and 7 English language arts and literacy standards. The research purpose is not to evaluate individual leaders or the process but to describe and understand the school's collective leadership. This information should help to better understand how to include educational professionals in the standards' implementation.

I invite you to participate in the research study through two face-to-face interviews, which I will conduct, and a third if the two of us agree that another is needed. With your permission, I will audio-record each interview for data analysis purposes. Each interview will take about 45 minutes of your time or an hour and 30 minutes total for two interviews or two hours and 15 minutes for three interviews. I will arrange to meet with you, at your convenience, in a place in the middle school that allows for confidentiality.

I will assign a number to the responses, and only Dr. Shedd and I will have the key to indicate which number belongs to which respondent. In any articles we write or any presentations we make, we will use made-up names and will change details about the school, the district, and other details. A confidential professional secretary will transcribe the audio recordings. She will return all recordings and transcriptions to me. I may use sections of the transcriptions to illustrate the study but will not reveal district, school, or personal details. I will keep the recordings and transcriptions in a personal locked office and will destroy the recordings when the study is complete.

Your participation is voluntary and if you do not want to take part in the interviews, you have the right to decline without penalty. If you decide to take part in the interviews, you may decline to answer some questions, and/or if you no longer wish to continue the interview(s), you have the right to withdraw without penalty.

The risks to your participation in the study are minimal because we will keep your responses in strict confidence, not attributed to you. Nonetheless, persons close to the school may be familiar with the descriptions I provide of the school and its experience implementing English language arts and literacy standards. In this regard, we cannot give an absolute guarantee of confidentiality. There are possible psychological and social risks to you e.g., you may be uncomfortable with the questions and there may be embarrassment on sensitive questions if you accidentally reveal your responses to other participants.

There are no direct benefits to you except your personal reflection and knowledge may provide new insights from discussing issues in which you have a personal investment.

Research Contact Information:

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, contact Dr. Joseph Shedd at [jbshedd@syr.edu](mailto:jbshedd@syr.edu) or 315-443-2685. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator or if you cannot reach the investigator, contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at 315-443-3013.

All my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, I am employed by the school district, and I wish to participate in this research study. I have received a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mary Ann Luciano, Researcher Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix 10. Interview Questions**

**For Teachers:** I want to learn about how you work with others on the ELA or literacy standards.

1. Tell me about the work you and your colleagues do together or have done with the revised English Language Arts and Literacy standards.
2. Who guides this work? How do they do it?
3. What role do you play in this work and what do you do? [If they mention that they are leaders, how do you see your leadership role?]
4. Who gives advice? Tell me about that.
5. Do you give advice? Tell me about that.
6. Who makes the final decision for what the group does? What do individual teachers do?
7. How do you and the other teachers work with the principal on this?
8. What do you use for your own professional development?
9. Does your school have teacher mentoring? Are you part of that?

### **For school principals and other school administrators**

- 1 Tell me what your school is doing to implement the revised English language arts and literacy standards?
- 2 Who are your formal and informal teacher leaders who are working with this and what are they doing?
3. How do you work with them?
4. Tell me about your expectations for the teachers' applying the revised standards.
5. Tell me about how the decisions for adopting the curriculum are developed.
6. How do you learn about the new standards? How is your staff organized to do the work required?

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## Vita

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### FORMAL EDUCATION

*Syracuse University, School of Education, Teaching and Leadership Department* (2011 to present) Ed.D. Doctoral Candidate; ABD (January 31, 2018)

*Syracuse University, School of Education, School Administration* (1980 to 2010) Ph.D. Candidate; ABD (May 1982)

*University of Vermont* (1975) C.A.S. Education & Social Services Administration & Planning

*New York State University College at Potsdam* (1973) M.S. Elementary Education & Fine Arts (1969) B.S. Music & Elementary Education

### EXPERIENCE

*Syracuse University, School of Education, Teaching and Leadership Department*  
**Research Assistant** (Fall 2010 thru Spring 2015; Fall 2017 thru Spring 2019)

Teachers Leaders Quality Partnership Grant & University

Study Council Research, evaluation, Annual Teacher Leadership Conference, newsletter.

*School Administration Department*

- **Research Assistant** (Fall 1980 to Fall 1981)  
State Politics in Education Research  
Administrative Interns Placement Assistance

**SUNY Stony Brook, SUNY Cortland, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts** (2010-2014)

- **Field Supervisor for Administrative Interns**

**SUNY Oneonta, School of Education**

- **Adjunct Instructor**, Issues in Education (2010)

**Catskill Regional Teacher Center, Director** (1991-2015)

- Coordinated and provided professional development services to 35 school districts, 2 BOCES; administered action research grants to teachers: technical assistance on research and assessment; collaborative programming with local and regional organizations; grant writing; staff supervisor—up to 7 staff; 21-member Policy Board; established annual legislative forum, Catskill Region History Day, created monthly newsletter, administered annual budget up to \$1Million including state grant and other projects.
- Wrote and developed Gender Equity Career Options Tech Prep project for parents — SUNY Delhi & SUNY Morrisville focused on parent involvement in student career

development. Edited with film maker, *Jobs in a Rural Area*, video for parents and schools.

- Collaborated with SUNY Oneonta Economics Professor on joint project for teachers' professional development on careers and economic development, teacher evaluation consultant for BOCES, grant writer for teacher leadership grant consortium of four local districts, People to People Delegate to Cuba on early childhood education and literacy.
- Southern Tier Regional Teacher Centers, fiscal and program services on Common Core, and New York State Annual Personnel Performance Reviews (2012-2014)
- New York State Teacher Centers' Leadership Academy (2004-2014), initiated, developed, directed, coordinated, and managed an annual competitive grant program to provide professional development to directors and policy board members.
- Volunteer Associate (2015 to present), Catskill Regional History Day, Teacher Leadership programs, Consultant to the Director

**SUNY Morrisville, Norwich Branch Campus (1989-1991)** Adjunct Instructor, Early Childhood Education

**Independent Consultant, Luciano Education Associates (1992-present)** contracts with Education & the Economy LLC, Rochester, NY staff development design and delivery to Rochester City School District; DCMO BOCES revising school boards' policy, four school districts.

### **Vermont State Department of Education**

- *Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Commissioner's Office & State Board of Education (1981-88)* Developed state legislative policy, analyzed federal legislation, and developed interagency collaboration, synthesized education policy research, and recommended legislative language for special education, vocational education, state aid, school district construction aid, kindergarten, PreK, the arts, student assessment, and school district reorganization. Worked with state legislators on educational issues. Director of Gender Equity Program Technical Assistance for local districts, Vermont Federal Liaison to Chief State School Officers, People to People Delegate to China. Provided state impact information to federal policy makers on proposed legislation and regulations.
- *Federal Programs Assistant Director (1978-81)* Monitored ESEA federal programs: Title I Early Childhood, Title II & III School Guidance Counseling, Libraries Title IV Educational Innovation, Program Staff Supervisor, Staffed Federal/State Advisory Council
- *Early Childhood Consultant (1975-77)* Project developer PreK and K projects; PreK-K professional Development coordinator and presenter; program assessments, Early Childhood Newsletter, Co-author Early Childhood Program & Policy Guide, supervised PreK/K state consultants' cadre, adjunct instructor Trinity College, Burlington, VT special education PreK; developed Home Based Pre-K Program with University of Vermont Extension Service
- *Administrative Intern (1974-75)* Project & School Evaluations, established PreK & K Title I ESEA programs throughout Vermont jointly with special education integration Professional Development for K-12 Resource Teacher program, Coordinated

Instructional Innovations Mini-grants process for K-12 teachers; Assisted with Resource Teachers' Project training and placement

*Multi-age Elementary Classroom Teacher* (1972-74) The Wheeler Elementary School, Burlington School District, Burlington, VT: Follow-Through to Head Start Program-EDC Model. Supervised community teachers' aides and a University of Vermont student-teacher. Coordinator of professional development and presenter for summer training on collaborative teaching

The Schoolhouse Inc., Sherburne, VT (1971-72) Head Teacher Alternative private elementary school Grades 1 to 6 established with a parent cooperative, supervised and instructed assisting teacher, University of Vermont student-teacher, and parent assistants. Wrote grants and assisted with state school certification.

SUNY Potsdam Campus School/Research & Demonstration Center, School of Education (1969-71) Instructor Multi-age primary teacher, Primary department chairperson. Demonstrated teaching for education majors and cooperating teachers, collaboratively established "open classroom" model K-3.

NYS Social Studies Education Conference video presentation (1971)

## **AWARDS**

Syracuse University School of Education:

Creative Research Grant (2016-2017)

Superintendents' Alumni Association Scholarship (2014-15)

Helen Jones Bradley Award for Teacher Research (2014-2015)

Joseph P. Cangemi Endowed Doctoral Prize in Leadership (2011)

SUNY Oneonta Exemplary Service Award (2010)

Northeast Coalition of Leaders, Vermont Chapter for Leadership & Support (1987)

Institute of Educational Leadership, Washington DC, Leadership Fellowship with U.S.

Department of Education, Intergovernmental Affairs (1983-85)

Syracuse University Research Assistant Fellowship Award (1980-81)

University of Vermont/State Department of Education Internship (1974-75)

## **RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

*Vermont Department of Education Legislative Policy* (School District Reorganization; General State Aid to Local School Districts; School Construction Aid, Kindergarten, Pre-School, Arts Education; Vocational and Special Education)

*Federal-Aided Innovative Teaching Projects Evaluations*

*Catskill Regional Teacher Center* Teacher Action Research Grants in all curricular areas

*Syracuse University Pilot Projects:* Vermont School District Reorganization, Vermont Legislators & Educational Fiscal Equity

*Syracuse University Study Council:* Research Annotations

## **PUBLICATIONS**

*Retired Educators of New York Chenango.* (2020 to present) Bi-annual newsletter health and wellness and legislative articles for retired educators

Luciano, M. A. & Evans, S. (2013). *Teacher Portfolios: A Guide.*

ON CENTER. (1991-2015) Catskill Regional Teacher Center monthly professional development newsletter

*Early Childhood Education Vermont.* (1976-1978) monthly professional development newsletter to PreK and K teachers and school administrators on policy and programs.

*Title IX Rights and Responsibilities.* (1982). Booklet for teachers and administrators.

*UPDATE.* (1982-1988) monthly Vermont legislative policy analysis to school superintendents.

Kaagan, S. S. & Luciano, M. A. (Winter, 1987). Equity and Organization. *Vermont Policy Journal.*

## **Other Formal Leadership Positions**

National Association for the Education of Young Children, Vermont State President

National Organization for Women, Burlington Vermont Area Chapter President

New England Association for Women in Administration, Founding Member

CCSSO Federal Liaisons Executive Committee

Chenango Arts Council, Personnel Committee Chair

New York Association for Women in Administration, Legislative Liaison

NYS Teacher Centers Policy & Evaluation Committee Southern Tier Representative

Retired Educators of New York—Chenango Unit of the Central NY Zone: Future

Educators' Scholarship Committee Chair, Vice-President, President-Elect

## **Certifications**

New York State School & District Administrator

New York State Teacher N-6