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Using Frequent, Unannounced, Focused, and Short Classroom Observations to Support Classroom Instruction

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USING FREQUENT, UNANNOUNCED, FOCUSED, AND SHORT CLASSROOM
OBSERVATIONS TO SUPPORT CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

Lawrence T. Cook

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education

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DISSERTATION ORGANIZATION STATEMENT

This document is organized to meet the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership Ed.D is a professional practice degree program (Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006). For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation**, candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The program can be a current initiative, a grant project, a common practice, or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan**, candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement with a clear target in mind. Candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, Garnier, Helsing, Howell, & Rasmussen, 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document**, candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state, or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane, and social critics; moral leaders; and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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Abstract

This paper examines the need to do more frequent, short (10- to 15-minute), unannounced, and focused classroom observations to support classroom instruction. Currently, the state requires at least one to three classroom observations per teacher; the number of observations is based on tenured and rating status. Classroom observations consist of at least a 15- to 30-minute preobservation, a 30- to 60-minute observation, and a 30- to 45-minute postobservation. The diagnostic framework of Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, Garnier, Helsing, Howell, and Rasmussen's (2006) systemic change plan was used. The process looked at current (As-Is) and future (To-Be) status of an organization and uses Wagner's 4Cs—context, culture, conditions, and competencies—to achieve sound and purposeful change.

Preface

Lessons learned in year two were sustained, change, and adaptive leadership systems and behaviors. To sustain change, the change needed to be meaningful by starting slow and progressing tenaciously. To further sustain it, leadership needs to be distributed and dependent on many leaders at many different levels. It also requires diverse investigations and research. The talents of individuals need to be developed and the systems to maximize the collaborative influence created. In addition, groups must be organized to inventory strategies, keeping the strategies that work and discarding those that do not.

Change and adaptive leadership are about establishing a culture of compassionate leaders who use organizational power and personal relationships to solve problems. Taking a flexible approach when facing challenges and taking smart calculated risks are necessary attributes for change leadership.

Change also needs to be systemic. The research conducted by Wagner et al. (2006; 4Cs change system) was highly effective. The four components of his system are competency, conditions, culture, and context. It asks leaders to state the problem, build frameworks for analysis, conduct further refinement, and consider what is impeding progress. The As-Is analysis was effective. The process truly forced the review of the 4Cs relative to organizational change and acted as a starting point for addressing the 4Cs of where the organization was headed (To-Be).

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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

I began my career in the fall of 1993 as a high school mathematics teacher and athletic coach in a major metropolitan city. This school was one of 15 schools in the district and it held about 1,200 students. The majority of the students were Black and qualified for free and reduced lunch. There was a principal, three assistant principals, a part-time athletic director, four counselors, approximately seventy teachers, and 30 instructional assistants.

My first day on the job, I was given my keys, books, and class rosters and was told to go teach. For the first two years of my career I was very worried for my students and for me. I relied heavily on my collegiate training to develop curriculum (mostly from textbooks), to give instruction (all lectures), and to write and give assessments. There were mathematics department meetings, but I do not recall any discussions relative to standards, common assessments, instructional strategies, or best practices.

In addition, I relied heavily on my preservice training during my first two years of teaching because of the support and feedback that I received from the principal—the only person who observed me during classroom instruction. For classroom observations, he would quietly walk into my classroom, sit down, and observe my instruction for about fifteen minutes. Later that week, in passing, we would have a casual conversation about what he observed and he would describe my performance as outstanding, encouraging me to keep up the good work. I remembered being observed two more times during my first year using the same observational process and was provided the same feedback. During my second year on the job, the principal did not observe me at all. There were no

preobservations or formal postobservations during the first two years of my teaching career.

After my second year, I moved to a suburban district about thirty minutes outside another major metropolitan area in a different state. I spent 7 years at this district as a mathematics teacher, coach, and assistant athletic director. There were three schools in this district. When I first began, the student body was about 50% White, 40% Black, and 10% Others. The building had about eleven hundred students, a principal, two assistant principals, an athletic director, six department chairs, approximately eighty teachers, and 35 instructional assistants. During my first year, I was assigned a mentor who helped me adjust to the new building/district and assisted me with departmental matters throughout the year. The mathematics department often worked in teams and shared curriculums, instructional strategies, and assessments.

For each of my first two years at the second district, I was observed three times by my department chair and once by another administrator. The observation process was more of a directive process where the observer set the parameters with little input from me. At the end of my first 2 years, I was placed on a cycle consisting of three observations by my department chair and another observation by a different administrator every other year. In addition, the process became more collaborative where we both discussed parameters about the actual observation and recommendations for growth.

The structure of the observation system I participated in at the second district consisted of a preobservation, an observation, and a postobservation. The preobservation was a 15- to 30-minute meeting with the observer and me. Parameters of the observations, the tools the observer was going to use, and the data that the observer was

going to collect were the foci of the meeting. The observer observed my lesson for 45 to 50 minutes per observation and collected data relative to the described parameters set during the preobservation. The postobservation was a 30- to 40-minute meeting between the observer and me. The observer would share his or her observational notes, then encourage me to reflect on the lesson and make suggestions for improvements.

Through this process, I learned how to improve my management system and how to better pace the lesson. Mostly, I was told that I was doing an excellent job and that I should proceed as usual. As I reflect on my experience, there were very few discussions and recommendations about how to improve my instruction, instructional strategies, student engagement, and/or questioning techniques. I now believe that my overall instructional delivery and management could have tremendously improved with many more observations and discussions relative to classroom instruction and strategies.

In 2015, I began my 14th year at Above Average Means High School (AAMHS, pseudonym), which is about 15 minutes from my previous school. It is a suburban school that is located about thirty minutes south of a major metropolitan area. At this high school, I was a dean of students for 1 year, a mathematics department chair for 5 years, and an assessment chair for 3 years. Currently I am in my fourth year as an assistant principal.

I began my career at AAMHS about fourteen years ago as a dean of students and held that position for one year. As a dean of students, my main responsibilities were student behavior, climate control, and student attendance. I mostly interacted with students, parents, and families; hence, I had very little face-to-face interaction with teachers. For the next 5 years, I was the mathematics department chair. I observed

teachers and taught a class. I had to observe nontenured teachers at least twice a year for 4 years, who were also observed by another administrator designated by the principal or superintendent at least once a year. Tenured teachers were observed at least three times every other year: twice by me and once by a designated administrator. Tenured teachers had the option to forego multiple observations and work on a personal professional growth plan. Teachers who opted for this plan were observed only once a year by me. Since I taught a class, I was also observed at least once a year by a designated administrator every other year.

The observation system used at the AAMHS was similar to the three tiered observational system used at my most recent district. Teachers met with an observer for preobservation, observation, and postobservation. During the preobservation, experienced teachers were strongly encouraged to suggest the type of data they would like the observer to collect. Also during the preobservation, the observer and teacher would talk about the tool(s) used to collect the data. At the end of the observation, the observer would give the teacher a copy of his or her unedited notes so that the teacher could review them prior to the postobservation.

Further, the observer and the teacher shared a tool that listed best practices in the areas of planning, behavioral management, and instructional delivery. Prior to the postobservation, the observer and the teacher were to individually review the observer's notes to look for patterns related to the preobservation, observation, and postobservation. At the postobservation, the observer and teacher were to share their findings. They shared their belief(s) relative to the teacher's performance—they look at teaching patterns and

areas for improvements. At the end of the postobservation, the observer would list recommendations for improvement.

Following my 5 years as the mathematics department chair, I was the assessment chair for 3 years. I was charged with coordinating the following major assessments: the freshmen placement assessment, the fall all-school assessments, the spring all-school assessments, and advanced placement assessments. I was also responsible for working with department chairpersons to review and analyze data reports. Lastly, I was assigned to observe 10-15 teachers in various departments using the observation process.

As an assistant principal, my main duties included supervising the dean of students, observing classroom instruction, supervising the in-school detention program, supervising the internal alternative program, coordinating the summer school program, and overseeing Section 504 procedures. Supervising the deans consisted of conversing with deans when major decisions needed to be made or to support their efforts in other difficult situations. The teachers I observed were assigned to me by the principal and the superintendent.

Thus, for more than 13 years, I have been responsible for observing classroom instruction, and I always used the three-tiered system of preobservation, postobservation, and observation. However, I have come to agree with many authors in this study: that observers can obtain good data from short observations and instructional leaders must be intentional and systematic about visiting classrooms.

The classroom observations I conducted were too infrequent and too deferred. Therefore, I rarely to almost never scheduled timely follow-up visits with teachers to observe whether they tried recommendations or whether they were successfully

progressing. I now strongly believe that with more frequent classroom visits, I can better support teachers, establish improved and trustworthy relationships, and better understand what is going on in the school.

The single most important factor in student achievement involves the quality of classroom instruction (Marshall, 2013; Marzano et al., 2011). Further, Marshall stated that one way to support teachers' professional growth involved engaging teachers in examining their own practices through informal classroom observations. He stated:

Supervisors and coaches who become welcome guests in the classroom do so not by directing or being critical of the teacher, but by forming a partnership with the teacher. The value of supervisors and coaches getting out and about lies in the opportunity to provide teachers with occasions to reflect on their classroom practices through the objective data collected in informal observations. (Marshall, 2013, p. 9)

Hence, supervisors and coaches forge improved relationships with teachers by providing teachers with information to ponder on a regular basis. Also, teachers' value supervisors and coaches input when the relationship is deemed a partnership—a *we are all in this together* attitude.

In addition, Marshall encouraged instructional leaders to conduct frequent and short classroom observations throughout the year. He proclaimed that instructional leaders only need to do short classroom observations, considering that after 5 to 10 minutes of an observation, the number of new observational insights level off and decline for the remainder of the class. Not to mention, teachers want to be trusted by their instructional leaders and instructional leaders want to be trusted by their teachers.

Marshall also described a good classroom observation system as one that includes a shared definition of what good teaching involves, a focus on students' learning, and teachers as active participants of the process. He believed that frequent miniobservations

should be used to provide feedback to affirm good teaching and/or be used to recommend professional growth opportunities. Wagner (2008), in agreement with Marshall, expressed that teachers and instructional leaders need to identify and discuss elements of good teaching practices and classroom observation criterion prior to beginning short and informed observations, which he termed “learning walks” (p. 130).

Marshall added that teachers need specific and constructive feedback to improve their expertise, and that the feedback needs to be given in a nonthreatening way to allow for openness and two-way communication. Wagner stated that teachers need to receive feedback to improve instruction, and leaders should document visits and be systematic. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) concurred with Marshall and Wagner when he stated that “observations and feedback are fully effective when leaders systemically track which teachers have been observed, what feedback was given, and whether that feedback has improved practices” (p. 62). Marzano et al. (2011) published that feedback should involve only a few elements for teachers to focus on to improve student learning.

Wagner et al. (2006) stated that informal observations should not be evaluative, but a sampling of what is taking place in the classroom; however, it should be an accurate way of assessing students’ learning in their classrooms through focused observations. Marzano et al. recommended that good classroom observational practices and outcomes are more likely to occur when it is supported in a positive environment. Fullan (2008) added that “people do not function well (at least not for very long) when they are scared and angry” (p. 58). The focused observations should include learning objectives, learning activities, questioning techniques, and students’ engagement.

Furthermore, Marzano et al. stated that focused practices involved a systematic process for developing expertise instructional practices. He also stated that instructional leaders needed to identify specific areas of strengths and weaknesses, monitor teachers' progresses relative to the professional growth, and use feedback to make adjustments to growth plans to enhance students' growth. Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, and Poston, Jr. (2004) believed that through frequent and short observations, leaders can become familiar with teaching patterns and decisions made by teachers, and leaders would have a more accurate understanding of the teaching practices of their building or district.

Downey et al. (2004) reasoned that teachers must be mindful of the observational process, and that follow-up should be a time for active reflection. In addition, instructional leaders can identify common areas of decisions that might prove valuable for group staff development, and growth in the classrooms through teachers' actions will produce improved changes in students' achievement. More importantly, Downey et al. believed that focus should be primarily on factors affecting higher student achievement and teacher development. The authors agree that leaders need "to act more like coaches and mentors" (Downey et al., p. 12).

In 2015, I began my 23rd year in education and 5th year as an assistant principal at AAMHS. Through the many observations, discussions, sharing sessions, implementation, and reflection of the many lessons I observed over the past years, I have learned much about teaching and learning. However, these conversations and learning experiences have taken place with many individual teachers over long time spans. Thus, if our district is going to support teachers at high levels, we need to frequently visit their classrooms to establish great relationships and to collect information for how to better

support our teachers. I believe that instructional leaders can better support the quality of classroom instruction and therefore student achievement through more frequent classroom observations. If conducted carefully and professionally, a systemic classroom observations system could help identify teachers' needs, support good teachers' habits, give actionable and measurable feedback, and maintain rapport and trust amongst instructional leaders and teachers.

During my first 2 years of teaching, I did not learn much more beyond my collegiate training; therefore, I was limited in the instruction I could provide to my students. Currently, I am at an institution where common assessments, common language, common curriculum, and varied instructional strategies are stressed. I believe a good observation process is in place at AAMHS but the process could be enhanced and teachers could be supported with more frequent and short observations with timely feedback; thus, all students can achieve at high levels.

As instructional leaders, we are all responsible for observing instruction through the observational process—preobservation, observation, and postobservation. The system that we use was developed by Jerry and Eleanor Bellon (Bellon, Eaker, Huffman, & Jones, 1982). Their system is a synergetic process where the preobservation conference is used to discuss and clarify lesson objectives and outcomes, careful observations by a skilled supervisor, and a postobservation conference where the teacher and supervisor jointly analyze the data collected during the observation phase (Bellon et al., 1982).

The Bellons described the preobservation conference as a time for active listening and clarifications, formatted to emphasize student learning expectations (Bellon et al.). Preobservations should be held within 24 hours of the observation, should be held in an

instructional setting, should strengthen the collegial relationship, should provide for instructional adjustments, and should focus on curriculum and instruction. The classroom observation length and time should be clearly understood by the teacher and observer. The observer's position and movement in the classroom should be considered, and the observation data should only be used and discussed by the teacher and the observer.

The postobservation conference should be held within 24 hours of the observation, held in an instructional setting, and conducted collegially. In addition, recommendations should be data based and future oriented. Lesson reconstruction through sharing and reviewing the data the observer collects during the observation and pattern identification should be the focus of the postobservation conference. There should be planning for future instruction and concentration should be placed on patterns that most significantly cause instructional interference. About twelve years ago, AAMHS instructional leaders were trained to effectively implement Bellon's system (Bellon et al., 1982). Follow-up training relative to using the system was offered about seven years ago.

Beyond the description of the system, over the course of 4 years, a nontenured teacher is observed 12 times, representing 12 times out of about thirty-two hundred opportunities—less than 1%. Tenured teachers may be observed three times every 2 years or once every 2 years for those opting to create a special project relative to their professional growth. Thus, a tenured teacher could be observed less than a tenth of a percentage point over the course of 2 years.

Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) wrote, "By receiving weekly observations and feedback, a teacher develops as much in one year as most teachers do in twenty (p. 61)." Instructional leaders need to observe teachers teaching more than 1% of the year to

assist teachers who need to improve and to praise those teachers who are performing well. Kachur, Stout, and Edwards (2010) stated that, “Observers gain by identifying faculty strengths in specific areas of instruction, curriculum, and/or classroom management. They also determine specific needs of faculty support, mentoring, and/or professional development (p. 8).” Additionally, Marshall (2013) stated that “Effective teachers won’t get authentic praise and affirmation. Marginal and ineffective teachers won’t get the help they need to improve.” (p. 22). I believe that more frequent and shorter teacher observations with actionable and obtainable feedback is the necessary change needed to move our district to the next level relative to student achievement.

Successfully initiating the change plan to increase the frequency of classroom observations will require attention paid to the biggest barriers to such changes: time management and relational trust. The time commitment it will take to successfully implement more frequent and short informal observations may be a tremendous obstacle in executing the plan. Instructional leaders are obligated by the district and/or the state to spend time elsewhere; we must do at least one full observation (preobservation, observation, and postobservation) for teachers who are on the evaluation cycle. Some instructional leaders are charged with reviewing, revising, writing, and monitoring curriculum instruction and assessments. Others are engaged in multiple weekly meetings that occur on Mondays, Tuesdays, and/or Thursdays from one to two hours each day. Still others are engaged in other duties such as coordinating summer school and annual events, running registration, and reviewing or creating 504 plans or Individualized Educational Plans. Moreover, instructional leaders are charged with daily events that may

unexpectedly occur in the department or building but take away from supporting classroom instruction.

To initiate systemic change at AAMHS, the research uses the 4Cs framework—competency, conditions, culture, context (Wagner et al., 2006).

The 4Cs framework is a systematic process that looks at the whole system while working with various parts of change. The systematic change I plan to share with AAMHS regards the implementation of more frequent informal observations with timely feedback sessions. This change is necessary because frequent classroom observations support classroom instruction at high levels, generates data for relevant professional development opportunities, helps establish trusting relationships amongst teachers and instructional leaders, and helps maximize student achievement for all students.

I will share with the administration the need for less meetings, believing that we can accomplish items discussed in weekly meetings on a biweekly or monthly meeting schedule. Many of the items on the agenda are management items that occur annually or monthly, such as homecoming, security at events, supervision of events, textbook adoption process and deadlines, parent-teacher conferences, open houses, back to school night, and adoption of new courses. Monthly meeting discussions should include items such as student learning, professional learning based on sharing of classroom observation data, school climate and cultural needs, increasing parental and community involvement, and other programs related to student achievement. Following is a brief overview of the 4Cs model and 4Cs in relation to AAMHS (Wagner et al.).

Wagner's 4Cs Model

Real and significant change can be difficult and time consuming. Change is difficult because, “When change involves real or potential loss, people hold on to what they have and resist the change” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 22). The potential or real loss that teachers perceive with the implementation of more frequent informal observations is their summative evaluation rating. Currently, the summative rating rank orders teachers based on ratings and establishes a reduction-in-force list—this is a new process. Teachers who are low on the list would be removed from their department from the bottom up. In the past, the reduction in force list was solely based on tenure and the number of years of services. So, teachers are worried that with more frequent informal observations, that instructional leaders will judge them more harshly and unfairly instead of supporting their efforts and providing resources for growth. The potential or real loss that teachers perceive is loss of career.

This fear was evident in 2011 when in my first year as an assistant principal at AAMHS, the principal encouraged all department chairs and other administrators who did formal observations to carry out an informal observation for all or a significant number of teachers. I sent an all-school email to teachers informing them that I was conducting informal observations. After the first few, teachers with whom I had great rapport with informed me that teachers were complaining to their union and superintendent that the informal observations were not wanted and went against the formal contract agreement between the teachers union and the board of education.

In 2012, I sent an all-school email to staff informing them that I would be conducting informal observations focusing on student engagement and teachers’ questioning. This time, teachers complained to their union, the principal, and the

superintendent. There was much distrust between the teachers union, their department chair, and the principal from the previous year. The principal blamed my email for the distrust that was created. He nullified the fact that prior to the second year of informal observations, several teachers had filed grievances because they were dissatisfied with their summative rating.

Implementing more informal classroom observations at AAMHS will be challenging and time consuming. The new reduction in force format and distrust amongst teachers and instructional leaders are main reasons to the challenges for the change. Therefore, I plan to use the 4Cs systemic approach to the change that is necessary to initiate and sustain the change (Wagner et al., 2006).

The 4Cs process usually starts with identifying a problem and making a commitment to improve it. It should be something one should truly be interested in improving, and related to improving instruction and achievement for school-related endeavors. Thus, if informal observations were conducted on a more frequent basis with specific and actionable feedback, then good teaching could be observed on a more consistent basis, professional development opportunities could be specific and useful, and rapport between teachers and instructional leaders could be enhanced.

The 4Cs include context, competencies, conditions, and culture (Wagner et al.). Under competencies, every teacher and administrator at every level needs to develop their competencies regularly through ongoing development opportunities and professional development. Conditions are the observable arrangements of time, space, and money and culture is shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students' learning and teachers' teaching.

The 4Cs provides a systemic process that helps organizations move from As-Is (problem you have identified) to To-Be (what would result if you accomplished your goal; Wagner et al., 2006). It is a system that helps systems remain focused on the results it wants to establish. More importantly, using the idea of culture, context, conditions, and competencies, systems can identify what it is doing to move from where it is to where it would like to be. Section Two explains how I plan to use the 4Cs and its different components to identify a problem and its implementation for improving instruction (Wagner et al.).

Rationale

Marshall (2013) and Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser's (2012) literature has motivated the need for more frequent, focused, and unannounced classroom observations. Both believe that to improve classroom instruction and increase students' achievements, administrators need to frequently observe teachers' teaching. They also stressed that limited and actionable feedback is necessary to improve classroom instruction and student achievement.

For 13 of the past 23 years of my educational career, I have observed hundreds of teachers teaching. I have learned that good teaching consists of excellent planning, teachers' knowledge and competency, teachers' and students' relationships, the creation of lessons, activating students' background knowledge, the students' engagement, informative assessments, and good questioning and discussion techniques. However, I have mostly noticed that standards for students' conduct are clear and that teachers tended to respond appropriately to students' behaviors; thus, the overall classroom environment has been safe and conducive to learning. Teachers have also done a good

job maintaining and sharing information relative to students' academic progress.

Therefore, it is extremely important that educators concentrate more efforts on academic achievement and learning outcomes. This could be achieved through more dialogue amongst educators in the building through frequent and unannounced observations.

Goals

If AAMHS incorporates more frequent miniobservations, then it would accomplish the following, as described by Marshall: Administrators and instructional leaders would be in classrooms more and observe everyday teaching in action, teachers would get frequent feedback and coaching, administration would be better equipped to address mediocre and ineffective teaching, student learning would be central to the process, and administration and teachers would have a shared understanding of good teaching (p. 41).

In addition, in the contract agreement, language will support more frequent informal observations and many more focused and informal observations will be conducted throughout the entire school year. Emphasis will be placed on good instructional practices and instructional growth. Furthermore, teachers will receive the support needed to support their students. Consequently, students will receive the necessary tools needed in a good learning environment to grow to their maximum potential. As well, more trusting relationships will be forged between teachers and instructional leaders.

Further, additional time would be allocated for instructional leaders and academic related endeavors and the focus would be more on students' learning outcomes. Meetings, whether once a week or once a month, would consist of data collection and

analysis relative to students' achievement. Finally, AAMHS will resist waiting until the end of the year or the end of a semester to look at global student achievement. Instead, there will be an ongoing discussion and sharing of observational and data collection.

Demographics

Above Average Means High School is a suburban school located about thirty minutes south of a major metropolitan area. The average student count for the past 5 years has been about 2,800 students. During that same time frame, the percentage of White students has fallen from 32% to 25%, while the percentage of Black students has risen from 58% to 63%. The percentages of Hispanic and Asian students have remained steady at 5% and 1% respectively.

Students with disabilities have remained steady, around 13%. The percentage of students from families with low income has risen from 14% in 2009 to 24% in 2013, and the percentages of English Language Learners and homeless students have remained low. Further, students' average mobility rate has remained relatively low over the past 5 years, at about 5%.

Since 2010, the percentage of students who met or exceeded AAMHS's state achievement exam has fallen from 64% to 51%. Over the past 5 years, the average achievement gap between Black and White students has been 28% in reading and 34% in mathematics. Over the same span of time, the average achievement gaps in reading and mathematics for students with disabilities and nondisabled students have been forty and forty-three percentage points respectively. A 23% gap existed between students from families with low income and students not from families with low income in reading; and a 25% gap in mathematics.

Above Average Means High School's five-year ACT average for all students is a 21.2. In that time frame, Black students scored an average of 19.6 scale points and White students scored 24.5 scale points. Thus, White students outscored Black students by almost five scale score points. Overall, AAMHS students who are Black, disabled, and from families with low income perform well below White students in the district.

Above Average Means High School has about 160 teachers, 36 instructional assistants (assisting mostly in the special education department), 24 clerical assistants, and 35 specialists. There are 23 teachers in the mathematics department, 19 in the physical education department, 6 in the reading department, 18 in the special education department, 21 in the science department, 17 in the social science department, 12 in the world language department, 8 in the applied academic department, 26 in the English department, and 9 in the fine arts department.

Above Average Means High School's specialized areas consist of three school psychologists, four social workers, five dean of students, eight guidance counselors, two college counselors, two librarians, two nurses, four permanent security personnel, one occupational therapist, and one full-time and one part-time speech pathologist. In addition, it has one superintendent, one principal, two assistant principals, one director of human resource, one director of technology, one director of athletics, one director of activities, one director of finances, one director of curriculum and instruction, one director of special education, one director of operation and maintenance, and 11 department chairpersons.

In 2005, the demographics at AAMHS were about 65% White and about 35% minority students. However, since 2010, the average student count has been about 2,800

students per year. Over the same time span, the percentage of White students has fallen from 32 to 25% while the percentage of Black students has risen from 58 to 63% percent. The percentages of Hispanic and Asian students have remained steady at 5% and 1% respectively.

SECTION TWO: ASSESSING THE 4CS

I plan to use the 4Cs' systemic approach to the change necessary to initiate and sustain the change (Wagner et al., 2006). It starts with identifying the problem and working to improve it. A problem at AAMHS is infrequent classroom observations that result in insufficient and timely feedback. So, when more classroom observations are conducted with specific and actionable feedback, then good teaching could be observed often, professional development opportunities could be specific learning goals, and rapport between teachers and instructional leaders could be enhanced.

The 4Cs include context, competencies, conditions, and culture (Wagner et al., 2006). Context is viewed as impactful external elements deemed to be beyond organization's control. Every educator, at every level needs to develop his or her competencies on a regular basis. Professional learning could be accomplished through ongoing focused and job-embedded professional development opportunities. Conditions encompass the allocations of time, space, and money. Culture is understood as the shared values, beliefs, and behaviors related to students' learning and teachers' instructional practices.

The 4Cs involves a systemic process that help organizations move from As-Is (identified problem) to To-Be (end results, intentional and unintentional; Wagner et al., 2006). It is a system that keeps the focus on the results it wants to establish and can be monitored through using culture, context, conditions, and competencies (see Appendix C for AAMHS' As-Is to To-Be Chart).

Context

Wagner and Kegan (2006) described context as external educational factors that are beyond the control of the organization and that deeply impact the work of the organization. Content also describes knowing the world for which educators prepare students. The major external factors that may be beyond AAMHS's control consist of the teacher evaluation system mandated by the state, contractual obligations between the teachers union and the Board of Education, and heavy focus on standardized testing results (mainly ACT results) and its implications of a district's success.

Currently, as part of the mandated observation system, the state requires that nontenured teachers be observed at least three times a year and tenured teachers be formally observed from one to three times every other year. By the fall of 2016, the number of observations required by state law is as follows: tenured teachers in good standings must be observed at least twice during the 2-year evaluation cycle, and one of the observations needs to be formal; tenured teachers in poor standings must be observed at least three times during the year of the rating, and at least two of the observations need to be formal; and nontenured teachers must be observed at least three times a year, with at least two of the observations being formal.

Presently, the teachers' contract agreements dictate that nontenured teachers be formally observed at least three times a year. Nontenured teachers could be observed at least once every other year if following a professional growth plan, or observed at least three times every other year if without the professional growth plan component. At this time, language does not exist in the AAMHS contract stipulating informal observations.

Standardized test results and its perceived relationship reported through the media represents another external factor that influences the decisions made or not made at AAMHS. Above Average Means High School tends to react to reports by focusing more on standardized test preparation and minimal standardized assessment achievement gains.

The external pressures of the state law are not as prevalent as the contract agreement between the teachers union and the board of education. The state law stipulates at least one full formal observation for tenured and nontenured teachers alike with the option to do more informal observations with written feedback. Hence, the language and the practice of the contract agreement could follow the ideas of the state law and strive to do only one full formal observations with teachers or more when necessary, and execute frequent and shorter informal observations over the course of the entire year.

Above Average Means High School needs to ensure that an effective and coherent curriculum is implemented amongst all of the departments. Its concentration and efforts need to focus on good teaching practices and instructional strategies. Instructional leaders and teachers need to agree on what good teaching looks like and develop shared language around the notion of good teaching. Thus, when instructional leaders perform more informal observations and give constructive, yet nonjudgmental feedback, then AAMHS could begin growing its staff professionally and supporting instruction for all students.

If the systemic changes occur for the context component, then there will be less focus on ACT scores and language in the contract agreement to support more frequent informal observations. American College Testing (ACT) scores will still matter and scores will continue to be analyzed and reported, but there will be less stress on the data

and the performance of AAMHS. Instead, more emphasis will be placed on good instructional practices and growth. Teachers will receive the support they need in order to support their students and students will receive the necessary tools they need in a good learning environment to grow to their maximum potential. In addition, when the systemic change relative to informal observations occurs, then the language in the contractual agreement will include parameters to maintain many more informal observations with feedback throughout the year.

Culture

Organizational culture is described as the patterns, assumptions, beliefs, and interpretations that shape the behavior within the organization. Presently, instructional leaders are contractually obligated to only conduct full formal observations for tenured and nontenured teachers. Each observation consists of a preobservation, observation, and postobservation; hence, it takes at least two hours to complete each full observation. The observations are performed as soon as possible and only the minimum number of observations are conducted. Therefore, most if not all observations are encouraged to be completed by the beginning of February of each school year. So oftentimes, for three full months, instruction is not observed and teachers tend to not receive viable feedback to support instructional practices.

The principal of AAMHS strongly encourages instructional leaders to conduct a considerable number of informal observations per department. He strives to informally visit each teacher at least once throughout the school year. The informal observation consists of making time to move about the building and dropping into classrooms where

there appears to be highly engaged instruction through high levels of active participation and cooperation.

Instructional leaders are encouraged to keep track of informal observations by listing the teachers they observed and the type of feedback that was shared with the teachers. If every instructional leader informally visited every teacher, then teachers could be informally observed at least 12 additional times throughout the year. However, most instructional leaders only see about 25% of teachers throughout the year; thus, teachers are only observed about an additional four times a year. Also, no mechanism is in place for instructional leaders to share what they observed during the informal visits.

If the culture component of Wagner and Kegan's (2006) 4Cs is achieved, then instructional leaders would conduct only one full formal observation per teacher. In addition, instructional leaders would conduct many more informal observations from the start of the school year to the end of the school year. Informal observations would be focused and short and followed-up with face-to-face feedback sessions. Teachers and instructional leaders would be in agreement with good teaching instructions and strategies. Other possible outcomes of the informal observations would be the development of trust and rapport between teachers and instructional leaders. More classroom observational data would be collected to assist instructional leaders and teachers with creating prescriptive professional development.

Conditions

Conditions are the visible allocations of time, space, and money. As an institution, AAMHS could focus more on how we spend time with teachers and students. Currently, instructional leaders have many more noninstructional obligations to occupy their time.

For instance, department chairs are obligated to meet every Wednesday for 2 hours. In my opinion, a high percentage of the meeting is spent on noninstructional or nonacademic dialogue. Over the past few months, the department chairs have discussed activities and events such as freshmen registration, parent association meetings, first semester exam procedures, the structure of institute (professional development), textbook adoption procedures and deadlines, academic showcase logistics, all-school testing format and structure, and parent/teacher conference logistics. While this list is not exhaustive of the typical discussions at these department chair meetings, it shows that a lot of time is spent discussing nonacademic endeavors.

Some of the academic endeavors AAMHS has committed to during this same time period include cognitive coaching, summer curriculum projects, and evaluation updates. Cognitive coaching focuses on improving instructional leaders dialogue with teachers relative to collected classroom observation data and student assessment data. Summer curriculum projects include proposals made by teachers and departments to improve the school climate, classroom instruction, and use of technology. Currently, AAMHS is in the process of changing its evaluation process. A big part of the change includes focusing more on student learning and engagement. The department chair meetings are also attended by the principal, the two assistant principals, the director of curriculum and instruction, and the director of special education.

On Tuesdays, the principal, the two assistant principals, the director of technology, the director of athletics, the director of operation and maintenance, the director of activities, the department chair of assessments, and the department chair of guidance meet. For the past few months, the agenda items included security at basketball

games, snow removal and other building and ground issues, the structure for parent/teacher conference, the format for open house, climate related issues, athletics and activities updates, and the logistics of freshmen registration, freshmen parent meetings, scheduling students' courses, and all-school testing. We rarely discuss instructional practices or other academic endeavors that directly impacts students' learning in the classroom.

On Mondays, the superintendent, the principal, the two assistant principals, the director of special education, the director of technology, the director of operation and maintenance, the director of finance, the director of human resource, and the director of athletics meet to review the Tuesday and Wednesday meetings, athletic events, any updates relative to school business, committee updates, national and local policy updates, and resource allocation.

Another issue that needs addressing under this category is the notion of *I taught it* versus *I learned it*. We need to switch our focus to more of what students are learning rather than teachers taught it. For the past 10 years, after receiving the end of the year all-school assessment results, AAMHS has spent an enormous amount of time ensuring that the information that students were supposed to learn was embedded in the curriculum. Our defense for those items that students missed is to show that we taught it and that it was indeed in the curriculum. For a long period of time, many students often failed classes multiple times. The teachers defense in these scenarios was that I taught it and the students did not learn it.

My classroom observational training, consistent with other instructional leaders, consisted of looking for good teaching habits. These habits include:

- collecting, recording, and interpreting student data;
- ongoing assessments that occur before, during, and after instruction;
- expectations that determine classroom and task structures;
- activities that relate directly to learning objectives;
- having established rules, procedures, and consequences;
- making sure that the overall classroom climate is supportive, orderly, and predictable;
- using routines to maintain a predictable flow of events;
- using interactions that are content related;
- teaching new information incrementally using examples;
- emphasizing important points; and
- integrating new information with a student's prior knowledge.

Often, many of these habits are used sparingly. Having few to no follow-up visits does not give the observer information on whether teachers have improved on these habits.

If the condition component is achieved, then more time can be allocated for instructional leaders and academic related endeavors, more time can be allocated for more instructional/academic endeavors at meetings, and the focus can be more on students' learning outcomes. Meetings, whether once a week or once a month, consist of data collection and analysis relative to students' achievements. By resisting waiting until the end of the year or the end of a semester to look at global student achievement, there can be an ongoing discussion and sharing of observational and data collection. The transition to students learned it mentality would be evidenced through the following observations:

- students will accept teacher's insistence on work of high quality;
- teacher's purpose for the lesson is clear;
- teacher's explanation of content connects with student's knowledge and experience;
- teacher's questions are of high quality and respond time is appropriate for students' learning outcomes;
- teachers successfully engage all students in the discussion;
- students are fully aware of criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated; and
- teacher's feedback is timely and actionable. (Danielson, 2007)

Competencies

Competencies are termed as the collection of skills and knowledge that influence student learning, and the need for focused, continuous, and collaborative professional development endeavors. The other aspect of competency includes leadership and communication styles. Currently, instructional leaders have little formal training regarding informal observations. Leaders need to learn and be able to implement components of effective informal classroom observations. Some of these components are outlined through very informal observation studies. Marshall (2013) stated that informal observations need to be frequent and focused. He believes that a good observation system is one that includes a shared definition of what good teaching is and focuses on student learning outcomes. Finally, Marshall suggested that informal observations should be short and nonjudgmental. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) stated that school leaders could assist in maximizing student learning through observations and meetings with

teachers on a regular basis. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser also stated that informal observations should be in conjunction with the collection and analysis of interim academic assessment data. Further, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser stated that leaders should systemically track which teachers have been observed, what feedback was given, and whether that feedback has improved practice. In essence, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser feel that teachers need to be active participants in the process of thinking about their teaching.

SECTION THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

For this research, I worked with five teachers and observed their classroom instruction at least once every other week. I focused on teachers' questions, students' engagement, learning objectives, and/or teachers' feedback to students. Four of the five teachers I observed were tenured—two teach science, one teaches English, one teaches social science, and one teaches mathematics. I observed, collected, and shared data with each teacher at least biweekly. I met with each teacher individually to discuss the expectations of the informal observations, which include unannounced, short, and frequent observations focused on questioning students' engagement and formative assessments and face-to-face feedback sessions.

At the beginning of the process, I surveyed participating teachers and department chairs relative to AAMHS's current observational process (see Appendices G and H). I interviewed participating teachers and department chairpersons in the middle of the process and interviewed participating teachers at the end of the process to gain their input about the overall process, shortcomings, and recommendations for improvements (see Appendices E, F, I, and J).

My observational design was motivated by the work of Marshall (2013), Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012), and Danielson (2007). Therefore, observations were brief, unannounced, and frequent. I provided nonjudgmental and nonthreatening feedback to encourage two-way communication. During this process, my comments were positive and specific. Teachers shared the strategies they were trying to employ in their classrooms. Since the majority of the teachers I worked with were tenured, with more

than 6 years of teaching practice, I used a collaborative/indirect approach during feedback sessions. Moreover, I encouraged teachers to reflect on the portion of the lesson that I observed.

I met with every participating teacher at least once a week and listened intently to each teacher's lesson. Further, I wrote important observational reminders after each observation and shared that information with teachers through face-to-face feedback sessions that occurred within 24 hours of the observation. I provided praise and reinforcement for good teaching and, when necessary, suggestions for improvements. The frequent and short informal observations should give me a more representative sampling of the participating teachers' work.

I discussed, encouraged, reinforced, validated, and suggested good teaching practices during my feedback sessions. I focused my attention on the following areas of teaching, but were not limited to these areas:

- Awareness of students' learning needs
- Instructional outcomes
- Use of assessments
- Teachers' questioning techniques
- Students' engagement
- Teachers' feedback
- Differentiated instruction

Participants

The key participants in this study were teachers and department chairpersons. I asked these individuals to volunteer their time to be a part of this study. Research

findings were shared with the principal and superintendent. I worked with five teachers from various departments, observing, encouraging, sharing, and occasionally recommending good teaching practices to participating teachers.

At the beginning of the study, I shared with the participating teachers and department chairpersons best instructional practices regarding student engagement, questioning techniques, teachers' feedback, and learning objectives (see Appendix K). According to Danielson (2007), students need skills for evaluating arguments, analyzing information, and drawing conclusions; and that high levels of learning by students require high levels of instruction. Thus, teachers need to engage students in developing their own understanding. Furthermore, teachers engage students in learning by teaching students to be more independent of the teacher and teaching students to use information from a variety of sources to problem-solve and think critically. She also stated that teachers need to be able to determine which concepts and skills are essential for students to learn.

Danielson (2007) believes that teachers need to have strong knowledge of the discipline they teach and a strong focus needs to exist regarding the important concepts necessary for students' successes. Furthermore, to maximize students' successes, she also believes that teachers need to understand their students' backgrounds, interests, and skills. In addition, Danielson indicates that classroom observations needs to be done in person or through video. When observing, leaders need to determine the safety of the classroom environment—for example, that students' behaviors are cooperative and the physical space is conducive to learning. To maximize students' learning, Danielson stated that students needed to be engaged in meaningful work that has stamina beyond unit work—important background information can be successfully incorporated in the current

lesson. Instructional leaders should be able to view samples of student work and determine the level rigor expected from students. Moreover, leaders should observe a culture of hard work and perseverance on the part of the students and where high expectations for all students are evident.

Fisher and Frey (2011) discussed the difference between learning outcomes and learning activities, citing that “when students understand the purpose of a lesson, they learn more” (Fisher & Frey, 2011, p. 3). In addition, they discussed how to formulate questions to check for understanding and inform instruction. Brookhart (2014) discussed strategies for engaging students in higher order thinking and performance. I shared best teaching practices relative to writing learning outcomes, formulating questions, and engaging students in higher-ordered thinking when meeting with each teacher and department chair. I also summarized the findings from listed studies and shared these findings both verbally and in writing (see Appendix K).

I explained to the participants my focus of the informal observations and how feedback sessions were to be open and reflective. Teachers and department chairpersons completed a 20-question, multiple-choice survey regarding the current observation process and experiences. I interviewed teachers and department chairpersons relative to classroom observations. In addition, I interviewed teachers regarding the informal observation process conducted in this study, sharing the results of the study with the participating teachers, department chairpersons, principal, and superintendent of the district.

Data Collection Technique

As mentioned, I provided a 20-question survey to participating teachers and department chairpersons regarding the current formal and informal observations process at AAMHS. Eight of the 20 questions were relative to feedback, 3 regarded frequency, and 9 concerned the functionality of the classroom observations. Once participants completed the survey, it was sealed by the participant and given to the researcher's assistant. As the researcher's assistant collected the surveys, she gave it to the researcher in a sealed envelope. Thus, each survey participant's identity was concealed. The only identifying item on the surveys were the distinction of the teachers from the instructional leaders.

The survey used a four-point Likert scale system using a predetermined range of questions. Results were tabulated and summarize in frequencies. The questions used were mainly based on and built for measurement uses. The four-point scale allowed the researcher to eliminate or avoid the neutral position and forced the respondent to take a positive or negative view.

The interviews consisted of one-on-one question and answer sessions where the five teachers and seven department chairpersons were interviewed for 20-30 minutes. The environment was quiet and the recorder worked properly. Further, the researcher took notes during the interviews as well ascertained full transcriptions of the interview recordings. The researcher provided structured interviews via a series of questions, which were read to individuals to establish an understanding of their ideas on a topic.

Interviews were conducted and recorded verbally and in writing by the researcher. Participant's names were not written on the interview; however, a distinction was made

between teachers and instructional leaders' responses via a heading of *teacher* or *instructional leader* placed on the written interview questionnaire itself. The interview consisted of six questions relative to the teachers' and instructional leaders' perceptions about classroom observations and its frequency, relation to professional development, relationship to students' learning, and teachers' support. Interviews were scheduled for 30-minute intervals; however, some interviews took shorter or longer than the allotted 30 minutes.

Codes were used in the interviews to summarize data into content and primary ideas. The researcher first read the transcripts with no perceived ideas before looking for common patterns and ideas. Open coding was used for single words or phrases of students' ideas, then one code at a time to look for new and overarching themes and developing families using these themes. Finally, one set of data was compared to another and data was analyzed consistently for both teachers and department chairpersons.

The unstructured observation notes were scripted. Classroom instruction was observed and everything heard and seen for 10-15 minutes was written down. The researcher has used this technique for 12 years as a way to record and collect data during a full formal observation. This method offers the ability to capture exceptional information to share.

Observations were conducted where teachers and students were observed and their behavior recorded. The observations were open-ended and activities were recorded, but instructional freedom was encouraged. After each observation, the researcher met with teachers to share feedback and to engage them in reflective conversations.

Data Analysis Technique

As stated, five teachers were observed during classroom instruction, at least once a week. Everything heard and seen for 10-15 minutes was observed. Shortly after each classroom observation session, observation notes were summarized and recorded in writing. In addition, feedback notes after each feedback session with teachers were recorded in writing. Observation data was collected over a period of time relative to use of research based instructional strategies, questioning techniques, students' engagement, and students/teachers' relationships. When scheduling observations and feedback meetings with teachers, the researcher was intentional and systemic.

Five teachers and six instructional leaders completed the survey. Responses were numbered as:

- 4 Strongly Agree
- 3 Agree
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

The teachers' surveys and the instructional leaders' surveys were then summarized and analyzed looking for strong patterns amongst the teachers and the instructional leaders.

Teachers' responses to instructional leaders' responses were then compared.

Within 24 hours of each interview, the information was transcribed using Microsoft Office 2013—specifically, its table functions. Data was sorted using a graphic organizer and codes until patterns and similar conclusions were apparent. First, teachers' patterns of similarities and differences were analyzed, then instructional leaders' patterns.

Finally, teachers' responses were compared with the responses of the instructional leaders.

SECTION FOUR: RELEVANT LITERATURE

This study examined the feasibility and effectiveness of frequent, unannounced, and short informal observations at the high school level. It is important to show that instructional leaders who do frequent informal observations can positively support excellent teaching practices and identify areas for needed professional learning supports. Drago-Severson (2009) stated that “professionals in schools and school systems carry out their work and practices on their own, without the benefit of a supportive yet critically thoughtful observer” (p. 15). This research was designed to determine whether frequent, short, and unannounced informal observations can be conducted in a large high school setting to affirm excellent teaching, identify teachers’ needs, and build strong rapport between teachers and instructional leaders.

If frequent, unannounced, and short informal classroom observations can be used to effectively support teaching and learning, then this study can add to existing research that demonstrates positive relationships between informal observations and classroom instructions. This chapter begins with the description of the formal and informal observation systems used at AAMHS. Next, state and federal mandates pertaining to classroom observations are reviewed. Following will be studies of different informal and formal classroom observation concepts. Finally, there will be a discussion about the potential benefits for implementing more informal classroom observations.

Marshall (2013) cited that the single most important factor in student achievement is the quality of instruction and that good teaching really matters. He went on to say that “school leaders must have a way of knowing what teachers are doing all the time”—that we need to be able to discuss more than a single lesson plan more than two to three times

a year or one to two lessons every other year (Marshall, 2013, p. 27). Thus, for AAMHS to support teachers at high levels, instructional leaders need to do frequent classroom observations to establish great relationships and to collect information to better support its teachers.

Marshall suggested that leaders should constantly analyze learning through focused and frequent observations. He described a good observation system as one that includes a shared definition of what good teaching is, focuses on students' learning, and has teachers as active participants of the process. In addition, Marshall recommended frequent 10-minute miniobservations as a meaningful way to have purposeful conversations with the teacher. Moreover, he pointed out that after a short period of time, "the number of new insights levels off and then gradually declines for the remainder of the class (Marshall, 2013, p. 62). Marshall also suggested that "safety, objectives, teaching, engagement, and learning" are attributes that most instructional leaders always want to observe (Marshall, 2013, p. 71).

Marshall believed that frequent miniobservations could be used to provide feedback, affirm good teaching, and recommend professional growth opportunities. He stated that teachers needed specific and constructive feedback to improve their expertise and that feedback needed to be given in a nonthreatening way to allow for openness and two-way communication. Furthermore, Marshall felt that the leader should keep track of visits and be systematic and documented. Above Average Means High School could potentially implement a system described by Marshall as early as the next school year. How to accomplish this is discussed in Section Seven's, Strategies and Actions for Change section.

Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) stated that the most discouraging component of failing schools is that “everyone on the staff is doing his or her own thing”; thus, instructional leaders need to guide teachers to strategies that will significantly improve instruction and students’ learning (p. 15). The school leader’s main role should be to maximize student learning through observations and meetings with teachers on a regular basis. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser strongly encouraged districts to give district- or school-wide interim assessments four to six times a year, for effective instruction is “based on whether students learned” the information (p. 23).

When it comes to assessments and data sharing at AAMHS, the researcher believes that it is more about appearance than about students’ learning, believing that more time is spent highlighting the number of students enrolled in advanced placement courses and less time discussing the poor achievement of underachieving students. For example, ample amounts of time were spent discussing insignificant ACT scale score gains and less time spent discussing systems that could be put in place to maximize learning for all students.

Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser conveyed that instructional leaders needed to lead data-driven meetings with teachers and its results must transform into significant instructional changes. Like Marshall, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser stated that “observations and feedback are fully effective when leaders systemically track which teachers have been observed, what feedback was given, and whether that feedback has improved practices” (2012, p. 62).

In addition, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser declared that teachers needed to participate in the process of thinking about their teaching. Therefore, great professional

development activities start with knowledge about what teachers' individual needs are. More importantly, "weekly observations, coupled with the interim assessments" can improve individual teachers' needs and specific learning needs of students (Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser, 2012, p. 71).

At AAMHS, every department in its district gives at least four common assessments a year relative to the essential learning outcome in the course. Teachers could meet in their established professional learning communities to discuss the results of the assessments; however, they are not obligated to discuss the assessments in their learning communities. Moreover, department chairpersons and other leaders rarely analyze the results of the assessments in great detail. Therefore, holding meetings, described by Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser system, at least twice a year to analyze the kind and level of learning students achieve.

Marzano et al. (2011) wrote that what occurs in the classroom has the most direct causal link to student achievement and that student achievement increases with highly skilled teachers. Instructional leaders need to observe the entire practice of teaching, and "focus on the interaction of the teacher and student related to student learning" (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 19). He indicated that feedback should involve only a few elements for teachers to focus on to improve student learning.

Like the authors Marshall and Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser, Marzano et al. (2011) agrees that focused practices involve a systematic process for developing expertise instructional practices. He documented that instructional leaders needed to identify specific areas of strengths and weaknesses, monitor teachers' progress relative to the professional growth, and use feedback to make adjustments to growth plans to

enhance students' growth. Marzano et al (2011) suggested that this is more likely accomplished and supported through a positive environment and an exchange of ideas and strategies. Fullan (2008) added that "people do not function well (at least not for very long) when they are scared and angry" (p. 58).

Marzano et al. stipulated that observations are more effective if they are planned by the observer and the teacher. He stressed that instructional leaders and teachers need to be able to ask questions about the prescribed lesson. This notion is different than what others purport in this study.

Wagner (2008) stated that a strong need exists for students to be able to think systemically, adapt to different situations, and make sense of important information. In addition, students need strong communication skills and the ability to apply scientific methods to problem-solving. In my first year as the mathematics department chair, I remembered the superintendent telling me that the curriculum in the department was a mile wide and an inch deep. The curriculum is still too shallow to provide rich experiences for our students in all disciplines. Therefore, we need to reduce the number of concepts students are required to learn per course and ensure that all students learn the concepts prior to exiting any course.

Like Marshall, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser, and Marzano et al., Wagner published that teachers and leaders need to identify elements of good teaching practices; and further, observation criterion must be discussed prior to beginning informal observations, which he named learning walks. Moreover, Wagner believed that teachers need to receive feedback to improve instruction and teach beyond the recall and

knowledge of content levels. Much like Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser determined that teachers need to be able to analyze the effectiveness of their lessons.

Wagner added that leaders need to be good coaches for their teachers and conduct learning walks to assess what is taking place in the classroom. He expressed that learning walks should not be evaluative but a sampling of what is taking place in the classroom—learning walks should be an accurate way of assessing students' learning in their classrooms through focused observations. The focused observations should include learning objectives, learning activities, questioning techniques, and students' engagement.

Downey et al. (2004) established that walk-throughs should be “short, focused, and informal observations” (p. 2). The authors also indicate that walk-throughs are not intended to be evaluative; rather, it is about gathering information about instructional practices. More importantly, leaders should look for students' behaviors, skills and concepts to be learned, and the level at which the students are learning. Downey et al. believed that through frequent and short observations, leaders can become familiar with teaching patterns and decisions made by teachers, and leaders would have a more accurate understanding of the teaching practices of their building or district.

Just as Marshall and Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser, Downey et al. believed that teachers must be mindful of the walk-through process and that follow-up should be a time for active reflection. As stated by Marzano et al. (2011), these authors agree that frequent observations tend to lower teachers' apprehensions and make formal observations more effective. In addition, Downey et al. documented that leaders can better identify common areas of decisions that might prove valuable for group staff development through frequent

classroom observations. Furthermore, in agreement with Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser and Downey et al. contended that growth in the classrooms through teachers' actions will produce improved changes in students' achievement.

More importantly, Downey et al. believe that focus should be primarily on factors that affect higher student achievement and focused on teacher development. As mentioned by Marshall and Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser, these authors agree that leaders need to "act more like coaches and mentors"; and the definitive goal of walk-throughs is for the teachers to be reflective practitioners (p. 12). Unlike Marshall, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser, Marzano et al., and Downey et al., recommend that follow-up feedback sessions should be on occasion as opposed to after every visit.

Danielson (2007) conveyed that students need skills for evaluating arguments, analyzing information, and drawing conclusions; and that high levels of learning by students require high levels of instruction. She also believed that teachers need to continue finding ways to develop and improve their skills; and that more importantly, teachers need to engage students in developing their own understanding. Danielson added that teachers engage students in learning by teaching students to be more independent of the teacher and by teaching students to use information from a variety of sources to problem solve and think critically. In addition, teachers must be able to determine which concepts and skills are essential for students to learn.

Danielson included four domains in her work: planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. She believed that teachers need to have a strong knowledge of the discipline they teach, and there be a strong focus on the important concepts necessary for student achievement. Furthermore,

to maximize students' success, Danielson strongly believed that teachers need to understand their students' backgrounds, interests, and skills. She indicated that classroom observations need to be performed in person or through video and when observing, leaders need to determine the safety of the classroom environment.

To maximize students' learning, Danielson (2007) declared that students needed to be engaged in meaningful work that has stamina beyond unit work. Further, she documented that instructional leaders should be able to view samples of student work and determine the level rigor expected from students and leaders should observe a culture of hard work and perseverance on the part of the students; high expectations for all students are evidence.

Formal Observations at AAMHS

Above Average Means High School uses the Eleanor and Jerry Bellon classroom observation model for formal classroom observation system (Bellon et al., 1982; see Appendix G). For the novice teacher, instructional leaders tend to use a direct approach to observations where the leader gives feedback to the teacher and holds feedback conversations. For tenured teachers, the leaders use an indirect approach where the leader invites the teacher to reflect on observed instruction and finishes the conversation with a reflective question or two.

The model consists of a 15-30-minute preobservation, followed by a 45-60-minute classroom observation, and concluded with a 45-60-minute postobservation. At the preobservation, the teacher and the observer meet for 15-30 minutes and discuss the lesson to be observed. Learning context, students' characteristics, learning outcomes and

objectives, use of assessments, and instructional strategies are discussed at the preobservation.

The learning context is related to the area of study and program goals. Learning objectives deals more specifically with what the students should learn and be able to do as a result of the lesson. Pre- and postassessments are used to determine students' level of readiness and learning. At the conclusion of the preobservation, experienced teachers are strongly encouraged to suggest the type of data the observer should collect and the best tool(s) to collect said data. More often than not, for novice teachers, the data collected and tool used to collect the data is determined by the observer.

For the observation, the observer meets the teacher at a predesignated location. From there, the observer observes the teacher's lesson for 45 minutes to one hour. Depending on the agreed focus of the observation, the observer may sit and take notes, move about the class, record the lesson (rarely used), or enlist a combination of all three. At the end, the observer gives the teacher a copy of his or her unedited notes for the teacher to review prior to the postobservation.

The observer and the teacher share a tool developed by the Bellons that list best practices in the areas of planning and motivation, behavioral management, and instructional delivery (Bellon et al.). Prior to the postobservation, the observer and the teacher are charged to individually review the observer's notes looking for patterns related to the preobservation and observation. Under the planning and motivation section, the observer and teacher look for patterns related to plans that guide instruction, are based on students' needs, and assist in achieving desired student outcomes, as well as instructional strategies that develop positive attitudes about learning. Patterns for

instructional management entail evidence that the system or systems prevent misbehavior, attend to teacher and students' needs, and promote the academic success. In addition, instructional content and student characteristics guide teacher and students' interactions. The instructional delivery section includes patterns that expand students' knowledge, academic feedback, questioning techniques, and response opportunities. At the postobservation, the observer and teacher share their findings—sharing what they believed the teacher did well and what the teacher needs to improve. At the end of the postobservation, the observer lists recommendations for improvement.

The system represents a good system as it includes a focused observation followed by immediate feedback relative to research-based teaching domains. However, the problem lies with the frequency of formal observations at AAMHS. Nontenured teachers are observed at least three times a year for four consecutive years: by the department chairperson at least twice a year and the administrator at least once a year. Tenured teachers are observed at least three times every other year: at least twice by their department chairperson and once by an administrator. Further, tenured teachers have the option to forego multiple observations and work on a personal professional growth plan. If they opt to do the plan, then they would be observed at least once every other year by their department chairperson. Although the process could have gone perfectly, the opportunities for observations and feedback is too small.

Informal Observations at AAMHS

At AAMHS, the expectation for informal observations is minimum. Instructional leaders are expected to visit a predetermined percentage of teachers at least one extra time per year. Leaders perform announced or unannounced classroom visits for 10-15

minutes per visit. After each visit, the observer provides feedback to the observed teacher either verbally or in writing. The main purpose of the informal observation is to look for good teaching and affirm good teaching practices. This practice is supported by Streich (2009) who stated that successful principals view classroom visits as an opportunity to facilitate excellence in teaching by offering suggestions, encouraging perseverance, and affirming excellent performance rather than engaging in fault-finding missions.

State Mandates—Classroom Observations

According to the State Board of Education Non-Regulatory Guidance on the Performance Evaluation Reform Act and Senate Bill 7, every district in the state must incorporate data and indicators of student growth in teacher evaluations. School districts are required to use an instructional framework that is based on research regarding effective instruction. In addition, school districts must address planning, instructional delivery, classroom management, and align to the state's professional teaching standards. The evaluation plan must also consider teachers' attendance, competency relative to their subject matter, and strengths and weaknesses. Further, school districts implementing the Performance Evaluation Reform Act must have student growth component of at least 30%.

Formal observations must be preceded by a conference between a qualified evaluator and the teacher. The qualified evaluator and teacher must discuss the lesson plan or instructional planning and any areas on which the qualified evaluator should focus during the observation. Following either formal or an informal observation, the qualified evaluator must discuss with the teacher the evidence collected about the teacher's professional practice.

Tenured teachers who received an excellent or proficient performance evaluation rating in their last performance evaluation must be observed at least twice during the 2-year evaluation cycle—with at least one observation being formal. Tenured teachers who received a needs improvement or unsatisfactory performance evaluation rating on their last performance evaluation must be observed at least three times during the school year following such an evaluation rating—with at least two of the observations being formal. Non-teachers must be observed at least three times, with at least two of the observations being formal.

Potential Benefits of Informal Observations

Colvin and Johnson (2007) stated that the teachers' actions can no longer be seen as just one among many factors—that teachers are the most important school factor in how much children learn. Marshall (2013) affirmed that the single most important factor in student achievement is the quality of instruction. Therefore, teachers should be constantly supported and provide feedback to encourage good teaching practices and detailed feedback to improve instruction whenever necessary.

Kachur, Stout, and Edwards (2013) stated that observations should focus primarily on student learning rather than on teacher's teaching. Kachur et al. (2013) also stated that any conversations should be nonjudgmental and reflective following the informal observations. Jackson (2013) added that although mistakes are inevitable, most teachers hide their mistakes because they do not want to affect the perception of them and their teaching. Thus, it is important to establish a climate in which mistakes are discussed openly and without judgment so that teachers can deal with and learn from their mistakes.

Wagner (2008) stated that teachers who receive weekly observations and feedback develop as much in one year as most teachers do in 20. He also stated that effective feedback is observable and measurable and that feedback needed to be focused and given in small increments to maximize teacher development. Thus, Wagner would agree that giving feedback in small portions over a longer period of time would increase the development of teachers over time. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) agreed with Wagner regarding providing feedback in smaller chunks more often. Wagner further stated that effective supervision is frequent, rigorous, focused on the improvement of instruction, and performed by people who know what good instruction looks like.

Another potential benefit of short and frequent informal observations recognizes that the instructional leader would have a more accurate picture of what is going on in school when he or she is able to visit many classes on a regular basis (Downey et al., 2004). Downey et al. also found that the frequent sampling of a teacher's actions gives greater validity to what is observed, and the advantage of facilitating teacher reflection can significantly impact student achievement. Marshall (2013) added that unannounced visits are not defensible or feasible unless they are frequent.

Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) stated that teachers who participate in the process of thinking about their teaching are more likely to internalize the feedback and improve their performance. Drago-Severson (2009) found that professionals in school systems practice on their own, without the benefit of a supportive yet critically thoughtful observer. Thus, many times their good work is not replicated, built upon, examined, or celebrated.

Darling-Hammond (2013) stated that the goal of observation involves supporting quality instruction for all students—instruction that is well-informed by an understanding of what students are learning and how teaching can support their progress. Darling-Hammond (2013) affirmed that clear standards of good teaching practice are essential to supporting classroom instruction. Furthermore, she specified that evidence of student learning needs to be used appropriately and strong support for meaningful professional learning needs to be present. Darling-Hammond declared that teachers and instructional leaders need to understand that instructional leaders want to see teachers at their best but they also want to see teachers when they are struggling for then, instructional leaders are able to support teachers as needed.

SECTION FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

I frequently observed five teachers' classrooms consisting of two science, one mathematics, one English, and one social science teacher. Four of the teachers were tenured, with the fifth one in his or her tenured year. I administered surveys to participating teachers and six department chairpersons of the district. I also interviewed the five teachers and eight department chairpersons.

Survey Results

This section reports and interprets the data I obtained from those interviewed and surveyed.

Instructional Leaders

Six of the 11 department chairs completed the 20-question survey in this study. They strongly agreed that teachers were provided specific, actionable, and relevant feedback within 24 hours of an observation. They also agreed that observations were objective, developmental, and conducted with professionalism. Furthermore, they maintained that improvement of students' learning was the focus of observations.

Department chairs agreed that the number of observations was adequate for an observer to provide objective and applicable feedback. They believed that teachers' performance expectations were clear and concise, that postobservations emphasized sharing information, and that applicable feedback only focused on one or two aspects of the lesson. In like manner, they agreed that they had a clear understanding of what was going on in their department. In addition, they believed that frequent 10-minute observations could be used to identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses and that they

were feasible for teachers. Finally, they agreed that feedback was necessary to improve instruction and it should be shared in nonjudgmental ways.

Department chairpersons strongly disagreed with the notion that unannounced observations were ineffective and poor assessments of overall teachers' performance, and that observations should always be announced. They also disagreed with the notion that teachers received frequent feedback and coaching and that there was a shared expectation between teachers and instructional leaders about what good teaching should be.

Table 1 shows the results of the leaders surveyed using the 20-question survey regarding observation. Responses range from one to four where one represents strongly disagree and four represents strongly agree.

Table 1

Instructional Leaders' Results from 20-Question Survey

Question	Leader 1	Leader 2	Leader 3	Leader 4	Leader 5	Leader 6	Avg.
1	4	4	3	3	4	4	3.7
2	4	3	3	4	2	2	3.0
3	4	3	3	2	4	3	3.2
4	4	3	3	3	4	4	3.5
5	4	4	3	2	2	4	3.2
6	4	3	3	3	4	4	3.5
7	4	4	4	3	4	4	3.8
8	4	2	3	2	2	2	2.5
9	4	3	4	4	3	3	3.5
10	4	4	3	3	2	3	3.2
11	4	3	3	2	4	3	3.2
12	2	2	2	1	1	2	1.7
13	2	3	2	3	4	4	3.0
14	3	3	3	4	3	3	3.2
15	4	3	3	2	2	2	2.7
16	1	2	2	1	1	2	1.5
17	4	2	3	2	1	2	2.3
18	3	3	3	3	4	3	3.2
19	3	3	3	2	4	4	3.2
20	4	3	3	4	2	4	3.3

Teachers

Four of the five teachers who participated in this study anonymously completed and returned the survey; as well, six department chairpersons anonymously completed the survey. Overall, the teachers in this study believe that the current observational system at AAMHS provide teachers with specific, actionable, and relevant feedback that is shared in nonjudgmental ways. In addition, they believe that the feedback focused on only one or two aspects of a lesson at a time and that frequent feedback and coaching was necessary for improving instruction.

Teachers responded that their performance expectations were clear and concise, and that there was a shared expectation between teachers and instructional leaders about what is good teaching. They also believed that observations were objective, developmental, supportive, and conducted with professionalism and integrity. Finally, they believed that frequent 10-minute observations could be useful in identifying teachers' strengths and weaknesses and feasible for teachers.

Teachers did not believe that the number of observations in their current system was adequate for an observer to provide objective and applicable feedback over time. Thus, in the current system, they did not believe that teachers received frequent feedback and coaching. Furthermore, they did not believe that instructional leaders had a clear understanding of what was going on in their classroom. In addition, they did not believe that classroom observations or visits needed to be announced nor longer than 30 minutes to be effective and informative.

Table 2 shows the results of the teachers surveyed using the 20-question survey regarding observation. Responses range from one to four where one represents strongly disagree and four represents strongly agree.

Table 2

Cooperating Teachers' Results from 20-Question Survey

Question	Cooperating Teacher 1	Cooperating Teacher 2	Cooperating Teacher 3	Cooperating Teacher 4	Response Average
1	1	1	2	2	1.5
2	3	2	3	2	2.5
3	2	2	1	3	2.0
4	2	2	1	2	1.8
5	3	2	2	2	2.3
6	3	2	1	2	2.0
7	3	2	1	3	2.3
8	3	3	2	3	2.8
9	2	1	1	3	1.8
10	2	2	2	1	1.8
11	3	2	2	3	2.5
12	3	3		3	3.0
13	4	3	3	3	3.3
14	1	1	2	2	1.5
15	2	2	1	2	1.8
16	4	4	4	3	3.8
17	4	3	2	3	3.0
18	1	1	1	3	1.5
19	2	1	1	2	1.5
20	1	1	1	2	1.3

Interview Results

This section reports and interprets the data obtained from the participants interviewed. In addition, teachers and instructional leaders from various department were interviewed.

Teachers

One-on-one question and answer interviews were conducted with five teachers. Interviews consisted of six questions relative to the teachers' perceptions about classroom observations and its frequency, relation to professional development, relationship to students' learning, and teachers' support. These interviews were recorded verbally and in writing by the researcher. Interviews were scheduled for 30-minute intervals; however, some interviews took shorter or longer than the allotted 30 minutes.

Frequency of Classroom Observations

One teacher believed that a classroom observation system consisting of frequent, short, and unannounced visits by the same administrator would have to be "implemented carefully," "required teachers' buy-in," and "everyone needed to know the ground rules" prior to implementation. Teachers reported that it would be beneficial to have an extra set of "professional eyes" in the classroom. Most teachers reported that the system would allow teachers to be more open to trying new strategies without the fear of retribution. They felt that trust and rapport would be stronger between the teachers and instructional leaders and that administrators would have a more authentic feel for what was happening in the classroom for the observer would have a more holistic view of classroom functionality. They also believed that teachers would have "more consistent and immediate feedback" over time.

Teachers believe that the informal observation process has "not been fully implemented" and that it is in the "infancy stage." Informal observations should be more frequent with more data points to provide "a clear picture of the type of teaching that is going on" in the classroom and that "appropriate instruction is taking place." One teacher

reported that one pop-in a year is not effective for teachers' growth. This teacher also stated that "administrators should be in the classrooms and the hallways" not in their offices doing paperwork. Another teacher reported that more frequent classroom observations could be a burden on administrators because "administrators are very busy" and that there would be "some apprehension from teachers." A teacher added that the informal observation process expectations should be communicated clearly and there needed to be at least 2-3-minute follow-ups after each informal observation.

Professional Development

When asked about the relationship between classroom observations and professional development opportunities, only one teacher stated that his or her department chair suggested professional development opportunities after classroom observations. However, the majority of the teachers interviewed stated that there is little to no correlation between the two. They believe that administrators could "suggest professional development" opportunities based on their observations and that the professional development activities should be "tailored toward specific teachers' needs."

Recommendations for Change to the Classroom Observations

Teachers responded that the changes they would recommend for the current observation process to improve students' learning would include the "ability for administrators to revisit classes" for routine follow-ups, believing that it was important for administrators to observe using a recommended skill and providing additional feedback. One teacher reported that there needed to be an improved level of clarity of what was to be observed during informal observations. Overwhelmingly, teachers reported that they would recommend more frequent classroom observations—

observations that would not have to always be long. They also reported a need for more accurate and immediate feedback.

Teachers believe that observations are good for the current lesson and that the focus is too narrow. They believe the current observation system looks at what teachers and students do well but the feedback is also “too narrow.” One teacher stated that he or she does not believe that informal observations are frequent enough to warrant an impact. Furthermore, teachers believe that instructional leaders need formal training to do observations.

When teachers were asked to share their ideal classroom observation system, one teacher reported that the system needed to “include both formal and informal observations.” Another teacher reported that the system required trust and teachers’ buy-in. Teachers stated that observations needed to occur more frequently and there needed to be the ability for feedback and discussions. They also would encourage teachers to visit each other’s classroom to share ideas relative to instructional practices. In addition, they explained that the frequency of visits was important because administrators need to know what was going on the classrooms to “know what is working well.” They also acknowledged that informal observations had to be conducted “by different individuals.”

Instructional Leaders

One-on-one question and answer interviews were conducted with seven instructional leaders. Interviews were conducted and recorded verbally and in writing by the researcher and consisted of six questions relative to the instructional leaders’ perceptions about classroom observations and its frequency, relation to professional development, relationship to students’ learning, and teachers’ support. Interviews were

scheduled for 30-minute intervals; however, some interviews took shorter or longer than the allotted 30 minutes.

Frequency of Classroom Observations

Instructional leaders stated that frequent, short, and unannounced informal classroom observations would open the lines of communication and strengthen relationships and rapport. They also believed it would help establish a level of trust and an “honest collection of data” to inform conversations. They stated it would be a “good way for the leader to get to know the instructors and their teaching styles” and get a better “feel for what was going on in the classroom.”

The instructional leaders surveyed thought that there would be more opportunities for informative feedback and suggestions for instructors relative to improving teaching. Leaders could observe and share with teachers “the decisions that teacher took to cause things to go well.” Further, through repetition, frequent and unannounced informal observations could lead to good insight for teachers and administrators.

To improve students’ learning, leaders expressed that there needed to be more frequent observations, since the sample size for the majority of the teachers is one every other year. To increase the number of observations, one leader suggested that “all the components” of the system be shortened, adding that the observation system that they currently have in place does a good job “pointing out what good teaching patterns look like.” One leader said that there “should be more of a spectrum” for feedback sessions relative to teaching and that “the number of people who sees the teacher should vary.” Further, a leader stated that the system should communicate to the teachers a process to improve instructions thus, increasing students’ achievement.

Leaders expressed that they do not know how authentic announced formal observations would be; working with some teachers in a particular area once a year for 45 minutes would be difficult. One leader stated that the current system “reinforced positive behaviors” while another stated that the process provided “feedback of the strength of the teachers.” Yet another leader said that, “looking for good behaviors may not be giving good feedback” to improve instruction. Leaders stated that there needed to be more follow-up visits to review deficiencies that were pointed out at prior meetings.

Professional Development

Instructional leaders reported that there was little relationship between professional development and classroom observations and little transfer of professional development. One leader reported that he or she had “recommended professional development opportunities after classroom observations, but there is no formal structure in place.” Another leader stated that he or she “recommended that teachers visit each other’s classes,” while another leader believed that professional development opportunities should be “more discipline specific.”

Recommendations for Classroom Observations

Leaders said that they would keep AAMHS’s entire classroom observation system. One leader said that he or she “enjoyed the preconference” and that the “three-part system was necessary.” However, he or she also stated that “all three parts are not necessary all the time.” Another leader commented that “Conversations that occurred” before an observation and the “conversations that happened after” an observation were imperative. Yet other leaders stated that conversations about improving instruction should be the focus of formal observations.

Many of the leaders did not believe that an informal observation system existed. One leader appreciated the fact that he or she could walk into any class unannounced to gather and share information relative to good teaching practices. Another leader stated that the “length of observations” may need adjusting for desirability and practicality. Overall, leaders believed very specific and timely feedback was necessary for improving instructions.

In addition, leaders stated that if they could design their own system that they would like to be viewed as an instructional coach or mentor. One leader said that he or she would like to “model instruction or a lesson with a teacher”; another leader stated that “teachers should visit each other’s classes.” Yet another leader felt that full formal observations should be at least “three times per semester.” Leaders stated that they would keep all three parts of the system but may consider doing one full unannounced observation. Several leaders stated that an informal component should continue to be part of the process and that trust and understanding needed to exist between the teachers and leaders. Finally, one leader stated that teachers needed to be part of the selection of professional development activities and that “professional development opportunities needed to be linked to the improvement of students’ learning.”

Interpretations and Recommendations of the Process

At the beginning of the informal observation process, I met with each of the five teachers individually and explained that I planned to visit their class at least once every other week and follow each plan with a face-to-face feedback meeting within 24 hours of each observation. I also explained and shared written documents regarding the focus of my visits: students’ engagement, teachers’ questioning technique, learning objectives,

and/or teachers' feedback to students. I shared the same written documents with instructional leaders regarding my observational purpose.

To conduct the informal observations and feedback sessions, I reviewed the teachers' schedules to determine when they taught, what they taught, and when they were available for feedback meetings. At the beginning of this process, my assistant continued scheduling my obligated appointments and meetings as usual. However, I found it difficult to observe each teacher's classroom with the intention of following-up with feedback within 24 hours. I learned that I needed to be intentional about scheduling the observations and feedback times. Eventually, I experienced greater success with keeping up with my daily obligations and keeping the observation schedule. In fact, after scheduling the observations, I found that I was able to visit with teachers at least once every other week and provide consistent feedback.

At the feedback sessions, I was always able to speak to all five teachers about the students' engagement, teachers' feedback, and learning objectives. At times, I was able to speak to their questioning techniques but found myself more in-tuned to students' responses. When I spoke with teachers about their learning objectives, I shared that the objectives were strong and really described what students should be able to do with the new information and the level they were to perform. My only recommendation regarding the learning objectives, beyond being written on the board and referred to one or twice throughout the lesson, was that it should be referred to multiple times throughout the lesson to be a better gauge of students' learning.

By frequently visiting classes, I established improved rapport with teachers and a greater appreciation for their efforts in the classroom setting. From the beginning, the

teachers were comfortable with my visits but it took three to four visits before students were less curious about me. Eventually, I became just another person in the class. I believe that I achieved a better understanding for the teachers' instructional styles and management systems.

If I had to begin this process again, I would focus my attention on the same concepts: questioning technique, student engagement, and learning objectives. However, for students' engagement, I would concentrate more heavily on students' responses—length, depth, and quality. I would also set the observational schedule to see teachers in a variety of courses at different times the courses were scheduled. (I found that I often scheduled the same teacher's class because that was the class that fit into my schedule.) I would also request and review written curriculum documents to have a better idea of the concepts and skills students were to learn and have learned prior to my visit.

Interpretations

Teachers and instructional leaders agreed that more frequent classroom observations are necessary to increase the rapport between teachers and leaders, to provide teachers with feedback and sound recommendations for improving students' learning, and to give leaders a better understanding of what actually goes on in the classroom and at the school. They also agree that there could be an improved correlation between classroom observations and suggestions for professional development opportunities. In addition, teachers and instructional leaders agreed that all three parts of the current system are necessary but all three parts do not have to be used all the time nor be as long each time. However, all three parts need to be used more frequently.

Teachers and leaders agreed that a need exists for more follow-up visits to observe whether recommendations were successfully implemented, and that teachers should visit each other's classes. Teachers believe that an extra set of eyes in the classroom is important because teachers do not see everything going on all the time. Teachers also agreed that in the current system, the logistics of implementing more observations may be difficult what with leaders' current workloads. In addition, changes in responsibilities and obligations need to be reassigned, modified, or eliminated. Teachers also agreed that unannounced observations could be highly effective and good assessments of teachers' performances.

SECTION SIX: A VISION OF SUCCESS (TO BE)

As described in the As Is and To Be charts (see Appendix C), AAMHS should incorporate a classroom observation system that includes frequent, short, and unannounced classroom observations. More specifically, leaders should be assigned to visit the same small group of teachers at least every other week to ensure practicality. Every educator should know the ground rules prior to engaging in the process.

Context

As previously mentioned, the state currently requires that administrators and instructional leaders formally observe nontenured teachers at least three times a year and nontenured teachers one to three times every other year. Above Average Means High School's formal observation is a lengthy process—we meet with each teacher at least 15 minutes for a preobservation, then observe instruction for at least 45 minutes, and finally meet for at least 30 minutes for postobservation.

During the preobservation, the teacher and the observer discuss what the teacher plans to teach and the tools and strategies the teacher plans to use to achieve his or her learning objectives. The observer and the teacher then discuss how the observer plans to collect data and discusses other logistical factors such as where the observer will sit and the date and time of the observation.

The observer and the teacher shared a tool that lists best practices in the areas of planning, behavioral management, and instructional delivery. Prior to the postobservation, the observer and the teacher were to individually review the observer's notes to look for patterns related to planning and motivation, instructional management, and instructional delivery. At the postobservation, the observer and teacher share their

findings. At the end of the postobservation, the observer lists recommendations for improvement.

I believe the problem with AAMHS's formal observation process, beyond the time it takes to implement per each teacher and per each observation, involves the fact that it occurs too infrequently to support and improve good teaching.

Currently, AAMHS is in the process of implementing a new evaluative process. I am not privy to what the new process entails for the teachers union; the administration is developing it in closed sessions with representatives from both sides. I am hopeful that more frequent informal observations would be encouraged by the teachers union and the administration.

Culture

The organizational culture just described shows that instructional leaders routinely meet multiple times a week and often the same personnel sit at the same meetings. The department chair meetings consist of the principal, the two assistant principals, the director of special education, the director of technology, the director of curriculum and instruction, and department chairpersons. Agenda items at these meetings include upcoming events, feedback relative to events, book reads, creation of policies; and discussions about all-school initiatives.

The building team meetings consist of the director of operation and maintenance, the director of technology, the principal, two assistant principals, the chair of assessment, the chair of guidance, and the director of athletics. Upcoming events, review of events, grounds, and athletics and activities are discussed during these meetings.

The administrative team meetings consist of the superintendent, the principal, two assistant principals, one director of maintenance, one director of technology, one director of special education, one director of curriculum and instruction, the director of human resources, and the business manager. These meetings review the highlights of the department chair and building team meetings. It also reviews athletic events, upcoming events, and observations of past events. We meet routinely with often the same personnel sitting at multiple meetings.

Beyond meetings, department chairs are obligated to oversee assessments and instruction, teach, do classroom observations, and articulate with feeder programs. Assistant principals are obligated to engage in disciplinary procedures, residency inquiries, Section 504 meetings, supervisions, and formal observations. (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a national law that protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disability.) The principal, superintendent, and directors fill more traditional roles beyond meetings and formal observations.

Conditions

At AAMHS, stronger trust needs to be established and maintained between staff and administration, in conjunction with implementing more frequent informal observations or classroom visits. Further, there exists infrequent and untimely use of summative data and a perception of initiative overload from teachers. Professional development tends to be more global (a one size fits all), although AAMHS is moving closer to more specific ongoing and job-embedded professional developments.

Fiscally, AAMHS is strong—our programs continue to thrive and we continue to offer considerable resources to our students and parents. Above Average Means High

School has a spacious and beautiful facility that allows for a manageable student-to-teacher ratio in most cases. It also offers space for private conversations and opportunities for reflecting about practices.

Competencies

Section Two of this study stated that all teachers are certified to teach in their discipline. Further, many educators in our districts have advanced degrees in curriculum and instruction, educational leadership, and subject-related areas. Every instructional leader has an advanced degree in educational leadership and/or curriculum and instruction. Furthermore, all instructional leaders have been certified to do full observations (preobservation, observation, and postobservation).

SECTION SEVEN: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR CHANGE

Authors in this study stated that good instructional practices are the most important attributes to excellent student achievement. This study showed that classroom observations need to be frequent and focused, and that teachers need to be active participants in the process—the goal of the process is to support quality instructions for all students. It also indicated that the classroom observational process needed to be systemic and focused on maximizing students' learning. Further, feedback meetings need to be nonthreatening, and specific strengths and recommendations need to be given to teachers. In addition, this study stressed that feedback should be given more often and in smaller parts because frequent sampling of teachers' efforts gives greater validity to what is observed.

Above Average Means High School is nearly in compliance with the new state law regarding classroom observations and so will need to change very little. The following represents the number of observations required by state law:

- Tenured teachers in good standing must be observed at least twice during the 2-year evaluation cycle and one of the observations needs to be formal,
- Tenured teachers in poor standing must be observed at least three times during the year of the rating and at least two of the observations need to be formal, and
- Nontenured teachers must be observed at least three times a year with at least two of the observations being formal.

At AAMHS, the number of observations are currently:

- Tenured teachers must be observed at least twice during the 2-year evaluation cycle and one of the observations needs to be formal, and
- Nontenured teachers must be observed at least three times a year with at least two of the observations being formal.

The state law requires that classroom observations consist of a preobservation, observation, and postobservation, which AAMHS currently does. The state also specifies that informal observations could be used for evaluative purposes—provided that it is conducted with the understanding that only written documentations can be used for the end-of-the-year evaluations.

This research study proposes that more frequent and unannounced informal classroom observations are needed to support and maximize instruction, build rapport amongst all educators, and increase students' learning. I recently learned at a leadership team meeting that AAMHS plans to incorporate more informal observations; however, the frequency of informal observations will be only two to three more times a year. The superintendent communicated to the team that he believes that due to the responsibilities and obligations of the instructional leaders, it would be nearly impossible to do more than what is required by the state with the expectation of a few additional informal observations. However, teacher representatives that sit on the evaluation committee expressed the need for more observations so that instructional leaders get a more authentic view of their teaching practices.

Ultimately, I believe that we need a classroom observation system described by Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser (2012). His system consists of data-driven instruction that includes common interim assessments at least four times a year. The assessments would

be aligned to what students need to learn by the end of the day, week, unit, and year.

There needs to be time for postinterim assessment meetings where teachers and assigned instructional leaders meet to discuss the analysis of the assessment. The focus of the meetings is on students' learning. Following data analysis, there should be a plan to address concerns derived from the data and discussion. The instructional leader is highly encouraged to lead face-to-face meetings by asking carefully prepared questions to support instruction.

To ensure that recommendations are being implemented, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser strongly encourage instructional leaders to frequently visit the classrooms and comment on recommendations. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser also stated that every teacher must be observed and provided face-to-face feedback every week and observations need to be systemically tracked to include when a teacher was observed and the kind of feedback that was given. Furthermore, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser indicated that the primary reason for the observations should be to coach teachers to improve students' learning and focused on one or two areas at a time to maximize implementation and improvement.

However, I strongly believe the change we could implement more readily is described by a combination of Marshall (2013) and Downey et al. (2004). Marshall stated that teachers and instructional leaders needed to have a shared understanding of what good instruction looks like and that teachers need to be active participants in the observation process. Further, the five most important aspects of teaching should be safety, objectives, teaching, engagement, and learning. Marshall also said that students' learning outcomes should be the main focus. In addition, he advocates for frequent, brief,

and unannounced classroom observations where instructional leaders have the opportunity to deepen and enrich relationships.

Marshall stated that frequent and unannounced classroom observations occur when they are short and when administrative are redistributed or delegated to others. Moreover, he stated that 10-minute observations are more than enough to gather great data because after 10 minutes into an observation, new insights level off and gradually decline for the remainder of the classroom observation. Marshall agreed with Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser when he indicated that the observational process needed to be systematic and documented.

Downey et al. (2004) added that every informal observation does not need to be followed up with feedback, and that the informal observations should not be intended to evaluate teachers' work. Instead, informal observations should be used to gain a more accurate picture of what is going on in the school and classrooms. Moreover, Downey et al. believe that informal observations should focus on factors that impact increased student achievement, and that feedback sessions should be collaborative and reflective with the focus on teachers' development. Downey et al. agrees with Marshall (2013)—that everyone needs to know the purpose of informal visits. She also believes that instructional leaders could identify common areas of concerns for staff development.

Thus, I strongly believe that AAMHS should develop a system described by Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser; however, it could start with a system described by Marshall and Downey et al. Heifetz et al. (2009) stated that “significant change is the product of incremental experiments that build up over time” (p. 17). I believe that the ideas described by Marshall and Downey et al. are the incremental changes needed to

happen over time to get to the great change of Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser's ideas. Along with the incremental changes, Heifetz et al. (2009) would also state that AAMHS needs to begin shaping changes in its staff priorities and habits.

Above Average Means High School could begin the incremental and experimental process of change by using the systemic change process described by Wagner et al. (2006); these authors stressed that change needs to be systemic. Moreover, leaders need to review the competencies of the organization—specifically, the actual skills and knowledge required to carry out specific tasks. To improve the learning for all classrooms, competencies need professional developments that are focused, job embedded, continuous, and collaborative. Data needs to be constantly collected and a sense of shared accountability will be essential for the continuous improvement of learning.

Context that deeply impacts AAMHS's work and sometimes is beyond its control are test scores—more specifically, ACT scores. For the past eight plus years, it has been the state examination and gauge for students' achievement. Something within the district's control is the number of leadership team meetings held on a weekly basis. Often, these meetings are in groups but at times, these meetings are individual. Some individuals on AAMHS's leadership teams believe that students are achieving at or above the levels that they achieved in the past. They also believe that work is needed to improve students' achievement. Improvement efforts consist of free tutoring seven days a week, a reading program, test preparation courses throughout the year, an additional 10 to 15-minute visit to teachers' classroom, an all-school book read, and time for professional

learning communities to meet. The school and school district are financially stable and departments are compartmentalized with an instructional leader in each department.

Wagner et al. (2006) also stated that supervision needs to be frequent and entirely focused on the improvement of instruction—all educators need to learn how to significantly improve their skills. The document that list the patterns of good teaching habits needs to be discussed at length to increase the notion of what good teaching looks like. All collected data needs to be disaggregated and transparent to everyone.

Actions for Change

It is really important that instructional leaders have time to frequently observe teachers, as well as time to provide actionable and measurable feedback in face-to-face meetings. I propose that leadership teams meet less often to garner more time to support a classroom observation system that includes more focused and short classroom observations. As stated earlier, a leadership team meets every Monday and is scheduled for an hour. On average, the meeting lasts for about thirty minutes. Above Average Means High School tends to discuss management issues such as activity coverage, school updates, and compliance issues. Another leadership team meets every Tuesday and is scheduled for an hour; however, on average, AAMHS tends to meet for about twenty minutes. We discuss mostly management issues such as activity or athletic event coverage, upcoming events, discussions about past events, and other nonacademic events not directly tied to improving student achievement. Still another leadership team meets every Wednesday and consists of mostly the department chairpersons. It should focus more on academic issues that directly impact students' achievement. However, it too tends to focus more on upcoming events or recap past events.

Currently, AAMHS has 20 leaders assigned to observe classroom instruction—one superintendent, one principal, two assistant principals, one director of curriculum and instruction, one director of human resource, one director of finance, 11 department chairpersons, one director of special education, and one director of athletics. In addition, AAMHS has about one hundred and sixty teachers. Thus, I propose, in lieu of leadership meetings, that we assign eight teachers to each instructional leader to do short, frequent, and unannounced classroom observations at least every other week.

If AAMHS accomplishes at least three classroom observations per teacher per course (15 observations per teacher), the process could be completed, on average, within four days a month for the observations and four days a month for the face-to-face feedback sessions. Specifically, each teacher could be observed twice in the months of September, October, November, February, March, April, and May and once in the months of December and January. I strongly believe that this is feasible for all instructional leaders and, as highlighted in this study, pertinent to excellent student achievement.

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Appendix A: Letter to the Superintendent

April 20, 2014

Superintendent
Homewood-Flossmoor Community High School District 233
999 Kedzie Avenue
Flossmoor, IL 60422

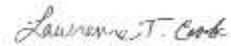
Dear Superintendent,

In reference to our recent conversation regarding informal classroom observations and data collection for my dissertation, I am asking your permission to initiate the process this fall.

I plan to investigate the use and feasibility of informal observations for teachers and instructional leaders. Specifically, I plan to do unannounced and short classroom visits, at least once every other week, of seven teachers in various departments. I also plan to do short feedback meetings with each teacher within 24 hours of each informal observations. I will also conduct a survey and two written inquiries with the teachers, and a survey and an inquiry with instructional leaders.

I look forward to your response, and thank you for your continual support of my professional endeavors.

Sincerely yours,



Lawrence Cook

Appendix B: Informal Observations Research Study Consent Form

You are being asked to take part in a research study of how short, frequent, and announced informal observations could be used to identify, support, encourage, and affirm highly-effective teaching practices, and to offer support for professional learning whenever necessary. I am asking you to participate in this study because I believe that you are an effective educator who would offer honest insights for the study. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have prior to agreeing to participate in this study.

The purpose of my study is to determine whether frequent, unannounced, and short classroom observations would be useful and feasible for teachers and instructional leaders to implement. Short classroom observations shall be described as 10-15-minute classroom observations with feedback sessions within 24 hours of each observation, and will be referred to as informal observations. Full observations are described as a 15-30-minute preobservation, followed by a 45-60-minute classroom observation, followed by a 30-45-minute postobservation. The full observations will be called clinical observations.

The participants in this study will consist of teachers, department chairpersons, an assistant principal, a principal, and the superintendent. I do not anticipate any emotional, physical, social, or political ramifications to staff participants. Names, research information, and school information will be held to strict confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and generalities. Research records will be kept in a locked file, which only I will have access.

I will do informal classroom observations at least once every other week with follow-up face-to-face meetings within 24 hours of each visit with cooperating teachers. My expectation is that frequent informal classroom observations would give me, an instructional leader, the opportunity to build and maintain trustworthy and cooperative relationships with teachers, support great teaching traits, and provide information relative to professional learning and growth.

I asked five teachers from various departments to allow me to observe their class, collect data, and share collected information. I will meet with each teacher at the beginning of the study to explain his or her expectation of the study. I plan to administer a survey that will consist of statements that are brief, clear, and stated in simple language. I will also give open-ended inquiries to teachers and instructional leaders to gauge their perception about clinical observations and informal observations. The survey and inquiries are included at the end of this packet.

Appendix B: Informal Observations Research Study Consent Form (continued)

If the informal observations prove to be as effective as clinical observations, then I will present this information to the superintendent and principal with hope to incorporate more informal observations into our observational system. I have observed teachers' teaching for more than 11 years using the clinical observation system. I always believed that the observations were too infrequent to build strong and trustworthy relationships with every teacher. In addition, I did not believe that I consistently gave accurate and formative feedback based on one or two clinical observations a year per teacher.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Please note that if you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequence(s).

The researcher conducting this study is Lawrence Cook. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 708-335-5604 or at lcook@hf233.org. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact my Institutional Research and Review Board (IRRB) Chair, Dr. Judah Viola at 312-261-3527 or Judah.Viola@nl.edu; or my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Tina Nolan at 847-275-6077 or at tina@tinanolan.com.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Participant Name (printed) _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

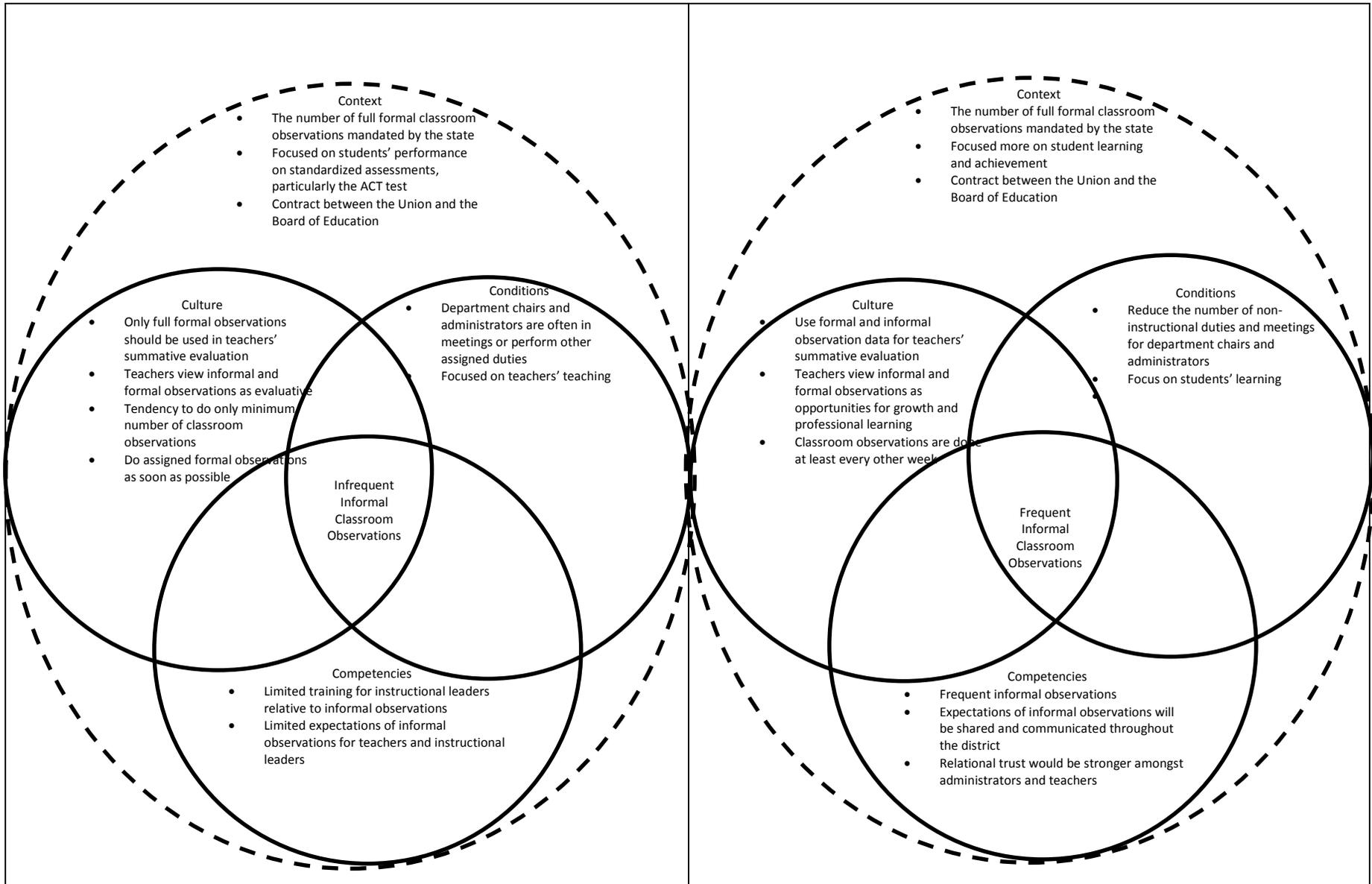
Researcher Name (printed) _____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.

Appendix C: As Is/To Be

AS IS

TO BE



Appendix D: Teacher Participation

I understand that this research study is strictly voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. I also understand that my confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms and generalities.

I understand that the purpose of this study involves determining whether frequent, unannounced, and short informal observations would be beneficial and feasible for teachers and instructional leaders. Specifically, whether the informal observations help build trustworthy and collaborative relationships between instructional leaders and teachers, identify and support good teaching and learning attributes, and whenever necessary, help provide recommendations and other resources for professional learning and growth to improve students' learning.

I understand that the informal observations will focus on learning objectives, teachers' questioning techniques, student engagement, and teachers' feedback. The researcher will visit my classroom at least once every other week for 10-15 minutes. The observations will be open-ended where the researcher will observe and collect written information relative to the aforementioned areas of focus. The researcher will then schedule a feedback meeting to discuss information collected.

Finally, I understand that I will complete a multiple-choice survey, an inquiry relative to the current observational system, and a reflective inquiry at the end of the study. The overall finding of the study will be shared with me at the end of the program via a written hardcopy of the findings and an electronic copy via the internet.

Participant Name
(Please Print): _____

Participant Signature:

Today's Date: _____

Appendix G: Instructional Leader Survey

Thank you for participating in my research study. Data collected from this survey will remain anonymous and used solely for the purpose of dissertation research.

Please check the box that best describe your belief about each statement.

1. Within 24 hours after an observation, the teacher is provided with specific and actionable feedback.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. The number of observations is adequate for an observer(s) to provide objective and applicable feedback.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. Teacher's performance expectations are clear and concise.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. Observational feedback is supportive and relevant.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
5. Postobservations emphasize sharing information, rather than giving advice.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
6. Observations are objective, developmental and supportive, and conducted with professionalism, integrity, and courtesy.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
7. The focus of an observation is to improve students' learning/achievement.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
8. Teachers receive frequent feedback and coaching.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
9. Through open and honest communication, the observer and teacher clarify what was actually observed.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
10. For applicable feedback, observations focus on only one or two aspects of the lesson at a time.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Appendix G: Instructional Leader Survey (continued)

11. Instructional leaders have a clear understanding of what is going on in their departments/school and within each individual classroom.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
12. Observations and/or classroom visits should be announced.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
13. To be effective and informative, observations must be 30 minutes or longer.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
14. Frequent 10-minute observations can be useful in identifying teachers' strengths and weaknesses.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
15. There is a shared expectation between teachers and instructional leaders about what is good teaching.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
16. Unannounced observations or classroom visits are ineffective and poor assessments of overall teachers' performance.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
17. The frequency of classroom observations is sufficient to support teachers' efforts.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
18. Frequent feedback and coaching are necessary to improve instruction.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
19. Feedback is often shared in nonevaluative and objective ways.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
20. Frequent 10-15-minute classroom observations with face-to-face feedback is feasible within my schedule.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Appendix H: Cooperating Teacher Survey

Thank you for participating in my research study. Data collected from this survey will remain anonymous and used solely for the purpose of dissertation research.

Please check the box that best describe your belief about each statement.

1. Within 24 hours after an observation, the teacher is provided with specific and actionable feedback.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. The number of observations is adequate for an observer(s) to provide objective and applicable feedback.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. Teacher's performance expectations are clear and concise.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. Observational feedback is supportive and relevant.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
5. Postobservations emphasize sharing information, rather than giving advice.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
6. Observations are objective, developmental and supportive, and conducted with professionalism, integrity and courtesy.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
7. The focus of an observation is to improve students' learning/achievement.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
8. Teachers receive frequent feedback and coaching.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
9. Through open and honest communication, the observer and teacher clarify what was actually observed.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
10. For applicable feedback, observations focus on only one or two aspects of the lesson at a time.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Appendix H: Cooperating Teacher Survey (continued)

11. Instructional leaders have a clear understanding of what is going on in their departments/school and within each individual classroom.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
12. Observations and/or classroom visits should be announced.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
13. To be effective and informative, observations must be 30 minutes or longer.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
14. Frequent 10-minute observations can be useful in identifying teachers' strengths and weaknesses.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
15. There is a shared expectation between teachers and instructional leaders about what is good teaching.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
16. Unannounced observations or classroom visits are ineffective and poor assessments of overall teachers' performance.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
17. The frequency of classroom observations is sufficient to support teachers' efforts.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
18. Frequent feedback and coaching are necessary to improve instruction.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
19. Feedback is often shared in nonevaluative and objective ways.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
20. Frequent 10-15-minute classroom observations with face-to-face feedback is feasible within my schedule.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Appendix K: Focus of Informal Observations

Observation and Feedback

- **Learning Objectives (Outcomes)**
 - Statements of what students will know and be able to do at the end of the lesson or unit of instruction.
 - Verbs used when writing good instructional objectives are list, identify, rephrase, tell, define, explain, draw, solve, describe, compare, contrast, create, summarize, design, and evaluate.
 - Verbs or phrases to avoid when writing good instructional objectives are understand, appreciate, know, be exposed to, be familiar with, explore, get a sense of, think about, learn, see, and realize.
 - Examples of objectives that do not address learning objectives (outcomes) are:
 - Students will take notes from a PowerPoint lecture about the stock market crash of 1929
 - Students will practice drawing squares, triangles, and circles
 - Students will complete a vocabulary worksheet
 - Students will write a two-page research report on a farm animal of their choice
 - Examples of good learning objectives are:
 - Students will explain causes and effects of the stock market crash of 1929
 - Students will name and create squares, triangles, and circles
 - Students will match German words to their English translations
 - Students will collaborate in groups of three to solve geometry problems
 - In a two-page research report, students will describe a farm animal, tell how it lives on the farm, and explain what it is used for
- **Teacher Questioning Technique**

Research shows questions that focus student attention on important elements of a lesson result in better comprehension than those that focus on unusual elements. *Lower cognitive questions* (fact, closed, direct, recall, and knowledge questions) involve the recall of information. *Higher cognitive questions* (open-ended, interpretive, evaluative, inquiry, inferential, and synthesis questions) involve the mental manipulation of information to produce or support an answer.

Lower cognitive questions are more effective when the goal is to impart factual knowledge and commit it to memory. Studies show that a combination of lower and higher questions are more effective than the exclusive use of one or the other. Increasing the use of higher cognitive questions can produce superior learning gains for older students, particularly those in secondary school, and does not reduce student performance on lower cognitive questions. The use of a high frequency (50% or more) of higher cognitive questions with older students

Appendix K: Focus of Informal Observations (continued)

- **Teacher Questioning Technique (Continued)**

is positively related to increases in on-task behavior, length of student responses, the number of relevant contributions, the number of student-to-student interactions, student use of complete sentences, speculative thinking, and relevant questions posed by students.
- ***Level 1 (Lowest Level)—Remembering/Knowledge***

The teacher then provides verbal or written texts about the subject that can be answered by recalling the information the student learned.

 - ◆ ***Question Prompts***
 - What do you remember about ...?
 - Where is ...?
 - Who was ...?
 - What is ...?
- ***Level 2—Understanding/Comprehension***

The student understands the main idea of material heard, viewed, or read. He/she can interpret or summarize the ideas in his/her own words.

 - ◆ ***Question prompts***
 - How would you compare/contrast...?
 - How would you generalize...?
 - What can you infer from ...?
 - How can you describe ...?
 - What is the main idea of ...?
- ***Level 3—Applying***

The student can apply an abstract idea in a concrete situation to solve a problem or relate it to prior experiences. The teacher should give students opportunities to apply knowledge to new situations, and provide questions that require the student to define and solve problems.

 - ◆ ***Questions Prompts***
 - What actions would you take to perform ...?
 - What other way would you choose to ...?
 - How would you change ...?

Appendix K: Focus of Informal Observations (continued)

- **Level 4—Analyzing/Analysis**

The student is able to break down a concept/ideas into parts and show relationships among the parts. The teacher allows time for the students to examine concepts to break down into basic parts, and requires students to explain why they chose a certain method to solve the problem.

 - ◆ **Questions Prompts**
 - What explanation do you have for ...?
 - How is ... connected to ...?
 - Discuss the pros and cons of ...?
 - What ideas validate ...?
- **Level 5—Evaluating/Evaluation**

The student makes informed judgments about the value of ideas or materials, and uses standards to support opinions and views. The teacher provides opportunities for students to make judgments based on appropriate criteria.

 - ◆ **Level 5 Questions Prompts**
 - What criteria would you use to assess...?
 - What is the most important...?
 - What would you suggest...?
 - How could you verify ...?
- **Level 6 (Highest Level)—Creating**

The student brings together parts of knowledge to form a whole and build relationships for new situations. The teacher requires the students to demonstrate that they can combine concepts to build new ideas for new situations.

 - ◆ **Questions Prompts**
 - What alternative would you suggest for ...?
 - Predict the outcome if ...
 - What would happen if ...?
 - How would you improve...?
- **Feedback**

Feedback is not praise, not advice, not judgment, nor inference; instead, it describes what the student has done and helps the student decide what to do next. Research reports that less teaching and more feedback equals better learning. It further shows that effective feedback is concrete, specific, useful, and provides actionable information. In addition, too much feedback is counterproductive; teachers should concentrate on only one or two key elements of performance. Thus, effective feedback limits corrective information to an amount the student can act on. Feedback should be timely and teachers should follow this feedback with immediate opportunities for students to use it.

Appendix K: Focus of Informal Observations (continued)

- **Student Engagement**

Ask students to do something with the knowledge and skills they have learned. The following list showcases some activities a teacher can ask a student to engage in:

- ❖ *Passive Activities*

- Paying attention
- Taking notes
- Listening

- ❖ *Active Activities*

- Asking content related questions
- Responding to questions
- Reading critically with pen in hand
- Writing to learn
- Presenting
- Inquiring
- Explaining
- Experimenting