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# ENSURING STUDENT SUCCESS IN FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN: PURPOSEFUL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Amy Houlihan

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ENSURING STUDENT SUCCESS IN FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN:  
PURPOSEFUL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND  
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

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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

National Louis University

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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 EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 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. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 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

The change leadership model, developed by Wagner et al. (2008), was utilized to assess the context, culture, conditions and competencies of a large suburban school district during the early stages of districtwide implementation of full-day kindergarten. With overwhelming support from families, teachers and administrators, the change plan revolves around ongoing and purposeful professional development for staff building upon systematic work of Professional Learning Communities in order to provide a high quality full-day kindergarten program across twenty-three kindergarten program sites. When districts and schools focus on purposeful professional development and enhanced practice of Professional Learning Communities programs can work to provide outstanding learning opportunities and the foundation for future student success.

## PREFACE

As any system works to make change, it important to consider the present context, culture, conditions and competencies to know where to begin making a change. Context, culture, conditions and competencies are interdependent components that make up the system as a whole. Changes to improve one arena have implications on all arenas (Wagner et al, 2006.) By assessing the context, culture, conditions and competencies of a school district, leaders can strategically build upon the strengths of the current reality as they focus on continuous improvement as a system and for the individuals that contribute to the functioning of the system.

This change plan focuses on enhancing teacher efficacy in order to deliver a viable full-day kindergarten program district wide in order to set students up for future success. By sustaining and building upon current structures and systems through developing the professional capacity of teachers as members of Professional Learning Communities, teachers are able to deliver a viable curriculum and full-day kindergarten program to all of their students.

Enhancing the context, culture, conditions and competencies make it possible for school systems to enact change and implement programs that benefit student learning. Increased student learning leads to future student success so they move throughout life college- and career ready.

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## SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Problem

Early literacy programs, including full-day kindergarten, are vital to the early development and future success of our youngest learners. “Education reform efforts need to start as early as birth, and be continued through preschool and into early elementary school” (Klein & Knitzer, 2007, p. 4). My District, in the early stages of change as they implement full-day kindergarten, must work to ensure they have a viable full-day kindergarten program to set students up for future success and college- and career-readiness. With a new program, individual interpretation of best practice related to full-day kindergarten is a problem. It is imperative that all teachers, administrators and kindergarten support staff, working interdependently as a part of a Professional Learning Community, have an aligned understanding of the expectations for implementing a full-day kindergarten program as well as the necessary skills to implement the program.

In addition to the change from half-day kindergarten to full-day kindergarten, and the need for an aligned understanding and vision for success, teachers are still developing their understanding of the new state standards, foundational skills and the increasingly rigorous curriculum. Teachers must be supported at the building and district level, through purposefully planned professional development, to help build their self-efficacy, leading to a greater collective efficacy of the educators in the District by developing their understanding and capacity as educators (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). In order to address the problem of various interpretations on how to spend a full day of school for kindergarten students, the District will need to focus on developing the capacity of teachers to deliver an intentional curriculum and provide meaningful learning experiences

for students. Providing proper training and professional development will support district leaders and teachers to deliver a quality full-day kindergarten program.

The focus of this change plan will to build upon curricular structures and systems through collaboration and communication within a Professional Learning Community in order to provide clarity and ensure consistency among building sites when implementing change. The change plan will highlight two integral components of implementing and sustaining change, which are professional development and collaboration in a Professional Learning Community. Through refining teaching practices and enhancing teacher self-efficacy as educators and collective efficacy as members of Professional Learning Communities, the District will be able to deliver a viable kindergarten curriculum to our full-day kindergarten students. This will result in high quality learning opportunities for students, a sustainable change and the ability to more easily adapt to future changes.

#### Rationale

As the assistant principal of two elementary schools in the District, the success of the full-day kindergarten program is important in setting students up for future success throughout their days in elementary school and through high school until they are ready for college or career. Through my Program Evaluation (Houlihan, 2015), themes emerged that drove the focus for my Change Plan towards sustaining and building upon current structures and systems. Teachers expressed a need for clear collaboration and communication among staff, as well as opportunities to learn more about meetings the needs of students in a full-day kindergarten setting. As such, I focus on both professional

development and the collaborative relationships between teachers working in a Professional Learning Community.

My Program Evaluation explained the need for focused, quality instruction in a full-day kindergarten program. I understand the program cannot succeed by simply doubling the time our kindergarten students attend school. Developing the capacity of teachers as experts in instruction will set them up to serve our kindergarten students. Learning how to understand students' needs and potential is vital for setting students up to achieve. "Developmental variations among children are the norm, and any one child's progress also will vary across domains and disciplines, contexts, and time" (Tomlinson, 2010, p. 6). In order to cultivate responsiveness within our teachers, we must develop teachers by providing experiences through ongoing professional development that stretch each teacher's capacity to understand their students as well as meet their individual needs (Fullan, 2011). This will create a deeper understanding of ways teachers can meet the needs of their students throughout their continuous improvement efforts.

Since the change is related to professional development, faculty will be directly involved in the change in many ways, as they are a District's most important resource (Reeves, 2009). They will have opportunities to provide feedback and input that will shape the professional development designed at the building level and offered at the district level. As they express areas where they need support, they will be involved in the professional development process as well as be provided with extended opportunities for growth.

As collaborative members of professional learning communities, teachers, instructional leaders, and administrators will work collaboratively sticking to the

DuFour's "big ideas" of a "commitment to high levels of learning for all students, a commitment to a collaborative culture and a commitment to using results to foster continuous improvement" (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2010, p. 7). All groups will be involved in the change process to come together to formulate a plan that sets students up for future opportunities for success.

Knowing the importance of focusing on teaching and learning, this plan will continue to improve the District's educational environment by creating conditions that set students up for success in literacy and mathematics. Solidifying foundational skills through early and extensive access to the Illinois Learning Standards also known as the Common Core State Standards, students will be better prepared to build on those skills in the future (Department of Defense Education Activity, 2016). With a strong culture and focus on continuous improvement, the District knows the importance of building on small wins to keep the flywheel spinning and constantly achieving and striving for better (Collins, 2005).

#### Goals

The goals of the change plan are to sustain and build upon current structures and systems by developing the professional capacity of teachers to meet the needs of their students and provide a meaningful full-day of learning for all students. As their understanding of foundational skills and the new standards is developing, it is essential for the District to facilitate professional development opportunities that contribute to enhancing their understanding and abilities. The classroom teacher plays a vital role in teaching diverse learners that walk in to their classroom (Tomlinson, 2010). In order to

capitalize on this role, teachers must be supported, given time to plan, and inspired to learn more to effectively teach each learner in their classroom.

Additionally, the change plan incorporates professional development that works to educate parents and families on how they can support their early learner in order to set their child up for future success. Teaching parents how to become involved in their child's education and how they can contribute to their child's success from home is an important component of building the school and home partnership that sets students up for all around success (Tomlinson, 2010).

### Demographics

This change plan targets a large consolidated elementary suburban school district outside of a major Midwestern city. The District is comprised of twenty-one elementary schools, five junior high schools, one Kindergarten through Eighth Grade school of choice and one Early Childhood Center. The student population currently stands at over 14,000 enrolled students. The demographics of the District include 31% low-income, 10% disability, 22% English Learners, and 11% mobility.

The changing assessment landscape has painted a new reality in the District. Achievement gaps, while narrowing, persist amongst ethnic minority groups, students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP), and students receiving Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL), or economically disadvantaged students. Moreover, the growth in linguistic diversity, mobility, and low-income percentages in the District's student population mean that more needs to be done to meet the needs of the diverse population. Like many school districts across the nation, the District is continually focusing on narrowing the achievement gap more and more

each year. With an emphasis on early literacy, the District is working towards setting students up for sustainable success by providing a solid foundation in the early years of each student's academic career.

## SECTION TWO: ASSESSING THE 4 Cs

Context, culture, conditions and competencies are interdependent components that make up the system as a whole. Changes to improve one arena have implications on all arenas (Wagner et al, 2006.) The focus of the change plan is to enhance teachers' efficacy in order to deliver a viable full day kindergarten program to set students up for future success. The goals of the change plan are to sustain and build upon current structures and systems by developing the professional capacity of teachers as members of Professional Learning Communities and as teachers of a viable curriculum and full-day kindergarten program. Ultimately, the goal is to equip and empower teachers through professional development in order to improve teaching and learning. It is through these arenas of change that we can transform the District in order to make system wide improvements that will pay off in years to come.

### Context

Context refers to “the worlds from which students come and those for which they must be prepared” (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 104). The context of this change plan is ensuring student success related to a new full-day kindergarten program and early literacy in a district with 31% low-income, 10% disability, 22% English Learners, and 11% mobility. With the increasing diversity of the District and the demands of the new Illinois Learning Standards, more needs to be done to prepare students for their future. Changes in standards at the state and national level as well as changes in structure of the school day are driving forces behind this change plan.



The full-day kindergarten program, now servicing its second cohort of full-day kindergarten students, is in the early implementation and developmental stages, with ample opportunity to grow and shape the program to set students up for long term success. While the first year of implementation was a success, neglecting further development of the full-day kindergarten program and the staff responsible for facilitating the program could be the difference between full-day kindergarten as an opportunity for extended growth and learning to fiscal irresponsibility and missed opportunities for our youngest students. Knowing the prospective impact of an effective early literacy program as cited in my Program Evaluation (Houlihan, 2015), it is necessary for staff to be supported to make the most of the additional instructional time. It is imperative that teachers work collaboratively and are prepared and able to facilitate a full day of meaningful learning opportunities for students.

### Culture

The “culture refers to the invisible but powerful meanings and mindsets held individually and collectively throughout the system” (Wagner, 2006, p. 102). A culture of continuous improvement at the district, building and team level will support the programmatic changes tied to the implementation of full-day kindergarten. Like Collins’ (2005), flywheel, the culture of continuous improvement is closely tied to the power of the flywheel where “success breeds support and commitment, which breeds even greater success, which breeds more support and commitment” (p. 24). A solid culture of continuous improvement as the foundation of change leads to a willingness to do whatever it takes to do what is best for students. Evidence of the culture of continuous

improvement is evident as the District responds to change by collaboratively seeking deeper understanding and designing curriculum that meets the demands of the new standards and expectations. Regular reflection on practice and collaboration through curricular task forces help set the District up with the tools necessary to implement changes.

One of the strongest reasons behind the collaborative culture of continuous improvement is due to the fact the District grounds their practice in a belief that all students can learn, one of the fundamental purposes of a Professional Learning Community (DuFour, 2010). With student success at the forefront of all decisions and changes, educators are continually aiming to develop their practice in order to do what is best for students. Staff members utilize data from team created common assessments and nationally normed assessments to demonstrate learning, growth and achievement. Using data to drive decisions helps focus the District and the work of individual teams.

As the full-day kindergarten program is a new change, varied understanding and approaches to assessing and teaching foundational skills and planning for a full-day of kindergarten emerged as indicated by program evaluation survey results. Both teachers and administrators emphasized the importance of ongoing professional development at the building and district level as an integral component contributing to the long term success of the full-day kindergarten program. One teacher commented, “Keep the professional development coming!” while many teachers suggested topics for professional development including acceleration, incorporating play, small group work and extended learning opportunities (District Survey, 2015). In order to align

understandings, professional development is necessary to enhance teachers' efficacy to ensure they are spending time in the most effective way each day. "The fundamental goal of school improvement is, of course, improved student learning, especially raising the bar and closing the gap so that all students can learn at high levels. Quality teaching is the key determinant of student learning" (Fullan, Hawley & Rollie, 2007, p. 5).

### Conditions

The conditions are the "external architecture surrounding student learning, the tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources" (Wagner, 2006, p. 101). These are the factors that directly relate to each teacher's ability to meet the needs of their students and provide them with a rich learning experience.

By doubling the kindergarten day, conditions are greatly affected. The District needs added staff, such as classroom teachers and lunch supervisors, added space, by doubling classrooms and added resources, including busing and curricular materials, all come at a cost to the District. To date, these conditions have been updated in order to accommodate the needs of the full-day kindergarten program. The greatest conditions affected by the full-day kindergarten program relate to staffing. A school with three sections of kindergarten that previously staffed 1.5 kindergarten teachers will now have a Professional Learning Community including 3 kindergarten teachers plus additional support staff, as needed. These conditions relate directly to the goals of developing the professional capacity of teachers to meet the needs of their students and enhancing teacher efficacy in a Professional Learning Community. While each of these conditions are important in setting kindergarten up for success in a full-day program, the potential

for academic achievement by altering the condition of time is reason enough to make the change.

The half-day kindergarten structure limits the literacy and math blocks, providing time constraints for teaching to meet the needs of each individual student. It also restricts the opportunity for students to practice with support, independently and to receive meaningful feedback. A half-day kindergarten structure does not allow students to explore clubs, fine arts, or extracurricular activities. Consequently, a half-day kindergarten schedule limits time for Professional Learning Communities to plan lessons and assessments together. With the demands of new standards and the urgency to close the achievement gap, it becomes increasingly important for teachers to work collaboratively. Working in “collaborative teams in which members work interdependently to achieve a common goal for which they hold themselves mutually accountable: learning for all students” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2010, p. 8.). Adequate time to collaborate is necessary for teachers to focus their energy on the right work.

### Competencies

The competencies are defined “as the repertoire of skills and knowledge that influence student learning” (Wagner, 2006, p. 99). The District’s teachers are familiar with curriculum, instruction and assessment. Since the Illinois State Board of Education adopted the Common Core Standards in 2010 to be fully implemented during the 2013-14 school year, teachers have been working to gain a deeper understanding of the standards and how to teach their students. Since the spring of 2013, teachers have been

developing lessons focused on these standards within the half-day setting. Doubling the school day means more time for teaching the standards, and as teachers are still developing and understanding of the CCSS/ILS for foundational skills, kindergarten and beyond, focusing on developing these competencies is important. Individual understanding of how to spend the additional time can be interpreted differently based on bias and it must be done well in order for the full-day to be worth the financial and human capital.

Building based professional development to support district and building goals exists and is strategically planned to meet those goals. As a district, grade level reflection sessions take place to administer new updates and get grade level feedback on the progress and implementation of common core. Teachers are skilled in working collaboratively in Professional Learning Communities as it has been a part of their practice since Professional Learning Communities were implemented in 2007. Professional Learning Communities are used to delivering instruction using a balanced framework, and facilitating a half day of learning for kindergarten students. However, the work of a Professional Learning Community is never done. As new groups of students enter each fall, the reflective process of planning and improving teaching practices begins again. Teachers need support understanding how to; make the best use of the additional time, provide extended differentiated learning opportunities, and meet the social emotional needs of kindergarten students.

Competencies refer to the abilities of the people making the change. The aptitudes of individuals in the District play a huge role in the functioning of the structures and

systems within the District. While the competencies in the District are a solid foundation for new work, they must continually be built and improved as changes take place in order to meet increased demands. As indicated in my Program Evaluation, teachers expressed a need for clear collaboration and communication among staff, as well as opportunities to learn more about meeting the needs of students in a full-day kindergarten setting. Furthermore, developing the capacity of teachers as experts in instruction will set them up to serve our kindergarten students. Since “competencies are most effectively built when professional development is focused, job-embedded, continuous, constructed and collaborative,” (Wagner, 2006, p. 99) the District must take a systems approach when building competencies.

## SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

A mixed methods approach provided a diverse set of data to address the implications of the change. Qualitative data gave insight in to the perspectives of the educators working in the district. Quantitative data demonstrated the effectiveness of the professional development for teachers as related to student growth and achievement.

I collected qualitative survey data in order to gain a better understanding of the context, culture, conditions and competencies. The survey data aided an in depth understanding of the as-is. A current analysis of the existing context, culture, conditions and competencies from the perspective of the teachers and administrators outlined ways to improve each arena and plan the conditions of the change.

Qualitative evaluators work to understand participants' experiences in their own terms by learning how they experience the program and what they think about the program altogether (Patton, 2008). Consistent with the program evaluation, qualitative data from open-ended questionnaire responses is powerful as it provides empirical evidence from involved stakeholders. Evaluating individual stakeholder experiences leads to a better understanding of similarities and differences between and among groups as well as individual thoughts and concerns to consider when implementing change. Collecting qualitative data from open-ended questions gave participants the chance to articulate areas they feel are strengths, as well as areas they are interested in learning more about in order to develop their capacity as an educator.

Quantitative assessment data provided a comparison from half-day to full-day kindergarten, as well as demonstrated growth measures and proficiency of kindergarteners compared across programs. Prior assessment data was incorporated to convey the urgency of the need for the organizational change. Data from subsequent years illustrates the effects of the change and implications of professional development on professional practice, teacher efficacy and delivery of a viable full-day kindergarten program. Quantitative data demonstrates the effectiveness of the program and changes as well as areas for growth in the future.

### Participants

The key participants from whom I gathered data represent two major stakeholder groups in the District that directly affect change. The groups are kindergarten teachers and building administrators. These stakeholders were surveyed through a secure, online questionnaire. No identifying information was asked and all information remains confidential and cannot be traced back to individual participants. Each of these groups represents stakeholders with direct association to full-day kindergarten as well as direct connection to the implementation and follow through of professional development. Overall, twenty-eight kindergarten teachers and nine kindergarten administrators completed the survey. Data from an additional survey administered by the District gained responses from thirty-one full-day kindergarten teachers. These results were analyzed for trends and themes. Their feedback guided the planning and focus for professional development based on the identified areas for growth.



## Data Collection Techniques

The urgency for change was explored through questionnaire data and assessment data. The goal of collecting this data was to assess the need for change, identify areas of professional practice that can be enhanced through professional development, and evaluate the effectiveness of the new program and the effects of enhancing teacher efficacy on student achievement.

### *Questionnaires*

Data was collected based on a questionnaire soliciting feedback from the perspectives of kindergarten teachers and elementary school administrators. The questionnaire was administered through Survey Monkey. The survey was sent out via email as participants, including twenty-one teachers, thirty-three parents and nine administrators, responded in a secure and anonymous format. While everyone completed the same survey questions, a question was created to differentiate data from each stakeholder group, making data analysis more precise and allowing for stakeholder group comparisons.

An initial multiple-choice question asked participants if they agree to participate in the survey. If they choose “I Agree,” they will be directed to the first question on the questionnaire. If they choose “I Disagree,” they can close out of the survey at any time.

By clicking “I Agree,” you consent to answering the questions in this survey.	
<input type="checkbox"/> I Agree	<input type="checkbox"/> I Disagree

The following open-ended response questions aimed to understand stakeholder priorities and perspectives related to the implementation of full-day kindergarten.

What do you believe to be the strengths of a full-day kindergarten program?
What are some challenges or factors worth considering with relation to full-day kindergarten?
What supports will you need in order for full-day kindergarten to be a success?
Please list any additional questions or comments that you may have regarding a full-day kindergarten program.

An additional survey was administered by the District during the early stages of implementation including open-ended questions to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to express challenges and offer suggestions. The District Survey gathered the perspectives of 545 parents and thirty-one teachers.

If you've experienced any challenges that needed to be overcome, please describe the details;
What suggestions do you have of other ways we could make the full-day K experience a beneficial one for students?

### *Assessment Data*

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) data were analyzed to compare the impact of half-day kindergarten to full-day kindergarten. MAP scores are nationally normed and compared in order to inform teachers of a student's abilities. The data were broken down based on academic growth in literacy and mathematics as well as proficiency ratings. The results are significant because they are one measure that compares and predicts student achievement and growth over time via exclusive normative and growth information (NWEA, 2016). Diving in to the MAP data will

demonstrate whether or not the professional development led to a consistent understanding and implementation across elementary schools and kindergarten classrooms. It will also show if kindergarten students were successful in a full-day program and whether the full-day students made greater gains than half-day students that preceded them. Analysis of the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years will detail the results of a half-day program while 2015-16 data will demonstrate the results of the new full-day kindergarten program. The MAP data will either validate or disprove the work being done related to full-day kindergarten.

### Data Analysis Techniques

An analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data provided a broad perspective on the need for change and support as well as whether or not the program and changes were successful during early implementation.

I analyzed the qualitative data by coding questionnaire responses and identifying themes between and among stakeholder groups within the data. Examination of individual stakeholder groups provided meaningful feedback on what professional development they feel is needed in order for full-day kindergarten to fully succeed in the long term.

The quantitative data was analyzed by comparing student results for kindergarten students in half-day and full-day kindergarten program. Student proficiency and student growth were examined to determine the effectiveness of full-day kindergarten when teachers work collaboratively in Professional Learning Communities and are supported through purposeful professional development.

## SECTION FOUR: LITERATURE REVIEW

Education reform is a never ending quest to close the achievement gap and provide students with outstanding learning opportunities. While laws and standards continue to change, teachers remain constant and the most important resource related to education that is directly connected to student learning (Fullan, Hawley & Rollie, 2007). Investing in teachers as well as district wide systems and structures that support teaching and learning will set schools up to meet the constantly changing demands of new laws, standards, and expectations in order to provide all students with high quality learning opportunities. Continuous improvement, in the ever-changing public education systems in the United States, relies on evidence based practice and a collaborative culture to embrace changes and adapt to provide enhanced learning opportunities for students. In order to further explore these ideas, I will review research related to professional development and Professional Learning Communities, focusing on their role adapting to changes in the ever-changing world of education.

### *Hope Drives Change*

Creating conditions for success includes instilling hope as leaders and learners of education (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2010). Members of an organization that “are challenged and hopeful about the future are more open-minded, creative, interested in their work, and motivated to do whatever it takes to accomplish individual and group goals” (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005, p.150). “Organizations can, however, foster hope, optimism, and collective self-efficacy when they create systems that put people in the position to achieve success” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2010, p. 11-12). The

foundation of Professional Learning Communities and collaborative team practices combined with purposefully planned professional development opportunities can set teachers and schools up to achieve success when making great change and as schools continue on in their day to day work.

Efficacy is one of the most impactful elements of change. When teachers and leaders believe their work matters and they can have an impact on student success, change becomes an imperative and organizations are more likely to achieve desired results (Reeves, 2016). Hope can lead to a deeper sense of self-efficacy and the belief that individuals can control their fate. The power of a positive attitude and high expectations to achieve more helps contribute to the collective efficacy of the organization. Self-efficacy leading to greater collective efficacy is important in developing the group and reaching greater heights as an organization (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

Instilling hope as the backbone for change can lead members in the organization to believe in themselves and their power to develop personally and professionally. Hope can empower individuals to take on professional development opportunities as a chance to grow rather than an obligation related to the practice of teaching (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). The individual capacity of a teacher when combined with colleagues to work collaboratively in a Professional Learning Community allows for further development, deeper understanding and a greater impact on student learning (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2010).

### *Professional Development During Change*

The “recruitment and professional development of effective and committed teachers” (Fullan, Hawley & Rollie, 2007, p. 2) must be a priority of school districts seeking to improve their schools. “The fundamental goal of school improvement is, of course, improved student learning, especially raising the bar and closing the gap so that all students can learn at high levels. Quality teaching is the key determinant of student learning” (Fullan, Hawley & Rollie, 2007, p. 5). Schools and districts should be seen as learning organizations with professional development as opportunities for teachers to learn and develop their practice.

While professional development focuses on developing the abilities of teachers and teams, their feedback and input is critical driving force behind the professional development schools and districts design. “Findings suggest that research–practice partnerships that gather teachers’ situated, comprehensive, and insightful perspectives can be invaluable in developing professional development interventions” (Hindman, et al, 2015, p. 12). Educators that are reflective in their practice are comfortable identifying areas for growth and development. Professional development that focuses on “what to teach, how to teach it, how to meet the needs of individual students, and how to build internal capacity” (Reeves, 2009, p. 63) can propel change, improve teaching and shape schools.

Furthermore, Fullan (2007) identify ten essential principles of effective teacher learning, including:

1. “Professional development should be based on collaborative analyses of the differences between (a) actual student performance and (b) goals and standards for student learning.
2. Professional development should be primarily school based and built into the day-to-day work of teaching.
3. Professional development should involve teachers in the identification of what they need to learn and in the development of the learning experiences in which they will be involved.
4. The content should reflect the best research on the given topic.
5. The content of professional development should focus on what students are to learn and how to address the different problems students may have in learning that material.
6. Professional development should provide experiential opportunities to gain an understanding of and reflect on the research and theory underlying the knowledge and skills being learned.
7. The way teacher learning is facilitated should mirror the instructional approaches they are expected to master and allow teachers to experience the consequences of newly learned capabilities.
8. Professional development should be continuous and ongoing, involving follow-up and support for further learning, including support from sources external to the school that can provide necessary resources and new perspectives.
9. Professional development should be connected to a comprehensive change process focused on specific goals for improving student learning.
10. Evaluation of professional development should incorporate multiple sources of information on (a) outcomes for students and (b) instruction and other processes that are involved in implementing the lessons learned” (Fullan, Hawley & Rollie, 2007, p. 7-8).

These principles distinguish effective professional development practices necessary for making great change. They highlight the importance of ongoing, job embedded, collaborative teacher learning opportunities directly connected to student learning. Each principle should be carefully considered and integrated in the professional development process.

## *Professional Learning Communities and Continuous Improvement*

Throughout the continuous improvement process in times of constant change, Professional Learning Communities provide stable systems and structures that lead to great change. Leaning on established structures of DuFour's (2010) Professional Learning Communities leads organization to circle back to the *big ideas* to guide their work. The *big ideas* lead Professional Learning Communities to focus on student learning, collaborative professional relationships, and results orientation.

First and foremost, "the fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure that all students *learn*," (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2010, p. 7) and this focus on learning leads districts and Professional Learning Communities to answer four critical questions:

1. "What is it we want all students to learn – by grade level, by course and by unit of instruction?"
2. How will we know when each student has *learned* – that is, has acquired the knowledge, skills, and dispositions deemed essential?"
3. How will we respond when students experience initial difficulty in their learning?"
4. How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are already proficient?" (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2010, p. 8)

Focusing on student learning coupled with a high sense of self efficacy and collective efficacy "helps educators develop a shared sense of the school they hope to create to better fulfill the purpose of learning for all (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2010, p. 8).



Second, a “collaborative culture and collective effort” (p. 8) is required of teachers working in a Professional Learning Community. A Professional Learning Community is a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students. In order to effectively plan for learning and answer the critical questions, teachers “must work interdependently to achieve a common goal” (p. 8). The collective effort and collaboration allows for a more powerful, analytical and thoughtful response to student learning.

The third big idea relates to the results orientation of a Professional Learning Community to regularly monitor the learning and progress of their students. “In a Professional Learning Community, educators are constantly gathering evidence of student learning to inform and improve their professional practice” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2010, p. 8). This results orientation aids Professional Learning Communities in reflecting on their practice and making changes in response to the results of common assessments, formative assessments, anecdotal notes and other data. With student learning as the focus of a teacher’s work, Professional Learning Communities need time for collaboration and effective leaders will design structures that allow for collaborative team time (Reeves, 2009).

Collaboration in a Professional Learning Community is vital to the success of educators. The work we are doing is extremely complex and cannot be done in solitude. Professional Learning Communities can propel change by providing a solid foundation for reflection and analysis. We must come together, as a team, to determine what is best for our students so all students can receive the best education available.

Overall, work in times of implementing change can be extremely complex but the focus does not have to become muddled by initiative fatigue (Reeves, 2016). Leaning on current systems, such as Professional Learning Communities, and maintaining focus on building individual capacity leads to building the collective efficacy of the organization. In the educational setting, this leads to increased student success and achievement, that is the primary focus of all work in schools.

## SECTION FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

The Program Evaluation of the implementation of full-day kindergarten revealed the need for continuous professional development as desired by teachers and administrators implementing full-day kindergarten as one major factor that will contribute to the success of full-day kindergarten implementation and sustainability. It will be imperative for the District to design purposeful professional development opportunities to meet the needs of teachers and Professional Learning Communities as they implement full-day kindergarten.

### *The Data*

Digging deeper in to the data, when teachers were asked about challenges or factors worth considering with relation to full-day kindergarten, responses included specific areas worth consideration of focus related to conditions in the District, competencies of educators within the District as well as cultural implications necessary for creating and sustaining great change.

Survey data expressed the need for conditions to be tight in order to maximize efficiency of staff and effectiveness of the full-day kindergarten program. The overall condition most important to the change is the master schedule. Designed by the building administrators with guidelines and parameters set by the District, the master schedule is the starting point for orchestrating a well-rounded educational experience for each grade level by setting time for daily literacy, mathematics and content area instruction, designating time for fine arts and physical education, which also leads to plan time for Professional Learning Communities. Survey data indicated teachers wanted to ensure the

new full-day kindergarten schedule made the best use of the additional time in the master schedule. This includes more time in the master schedule for kindergarten students to participate in special activities, more time in the master schedule for kindergarten Professional Learning Communities to plan for the additional instruction. Another important condition involved Professional Learning Community collaborative team time on early release days, for grade level reflection sessions, and for after school professional development offerings.

To honor these requests, building administrators will first need to design the master schedule to allow collaborative team time for the Professional Learning Community to communicate and collaborate. This sacred Professional Learning Community time will focus on lesson planning and problem solving to meet the needs of students (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2010). To increase communication, teams will utilize tools for documenting collaborative conversations and the Professional Learning Community plan for teaching and learning. By keeping these conditions consistent and tight, they will lead to increased competencies contributing to the culture of continuous improvement found in the District.

While educators in the District were in full support of the implementation of the full-day kindergarten program, support that can be attributed to the District culture of continuous improvement at the district, building and team level, and the belief that all kids can learn, teachers expressed their concerns with the varied understanding and approach to assessing and teaching foundational skills. Teachers and administrators see professional development as the key to developing their competencies as educators. Responses that emphasize the need for professional development include learning to

navigate a full day of instruction, proper teacher training as a continuous process throughout the year, and how to differentiate and use acceleration to create independent in kindergarten students. A district survey revealed teachers want support with planning, preparation and additional resources for teaching in a full day as well as figuring out what math and literacy should look like in a full day (District Survey, 2015). Teachers want and need time to better understand the new conditions and logistics of a full day, the acceleration framework as well as ways to build independence in kindergarten. With an increasingly academic day for our youngest learners, teachers expressed the desire to develop their competency through continuous training and coaching to effectively lesson plan and feel their instruction maximizes the independent work time of our students.

When asked what supports teachers need in order for full-day kindergarten to be a success, teachers indicated Professional Learning Community collaboration and supports as well as professional development opportunities to aid implementation. More than half of teachers surveyed referenced Professional Learning Communities as an essential support. Specifically, teachers want clear communication between colleagues and administration, time to plan collaboratively and differentiate instruction, and support staff to help facilitate acceleration and differentiated learning activities (District Survey, 2015).

Comparing growth data for kindergarten students attending half-day kindergarten in 2014-15 and students attending full-day kindergarten in 2015-16, students attending the full-day kindergarten program demonstrated greater academic gains as compared to half-day students. The 2015 half-day cohort had a fall to spring increase in reading proficiency of 2% while the 2016 full-day cohort increased proficiency by 8% in reading.

The mathematics results were even more impressive with the 2015 cohort increasing proficiency by 9% while the 2016 full-day cohort increased proficiency by 22%.

With conditions in the District tightened and competencies of educators developed, the District will continue to evolve as part of the continuous improvement process through the implementation of full-day kindergarten. Professional development and enhancing collaboration in Professional Learning Communities are fundamental and vital elements of the change. By developing teachers and the kindergarten program, students will continue to yield academic achievement results each year.

### *Interpretation*

The results favor continuous professional development opportunities and emphasis on Professional Learning Community relationship and communication in order to deliver a successful full-day kindergarten program. The District should use the teacher feedback to drive the design and implementation of professional development that meets the needs of their teachers.

Professional Learning Communities will need dedicated plan time for collaborating on instruction in core content areas. Ultimately, the building administrator will need to strategically design the master schedule to reflect this plan time for the entire team while honoring the contract and need for daily literacy and mathematics blocks as well as acceleration blocks. Additionally, a communication tool to outline the standard aligned focus for the lesson so support staff can plan aligned lessons for guided and acceleration blocks. The communication tool will be completed during plan time and serve as a record of what is taught as well as a tool for staff whose schedule does not

allow them to be a part of the Professional Learning Community plan time. An alignment of lessons is essential for student learning to remain focused and clear so they can demonstrate proficiency when assessed.

Ongoing professional development will need to be designed at both the district and building level. Districtwide professional development for kindergarten staff will guide teams to implement a consistent full-day kindergarten program across the District. Building based professional development will focus on unique building needs and school improvement goals. Based on the data, professional development will need to focus on instructional implications of a full day of learning, acceleration blocks and opportunities to reteach or extended learning, and releasing responsibility in order to foster student success during independent work time.

## SECTION SIX: A VISION OF SUCCESS (TO BE)

If the District produces the desired results of this change plan, it will lead to the following future contexts, conditions, competencies, and culture that would ensure an effective and sustainable full-day kindergarten program is offered by the District (Wagner, 2006). By focusing on purposeful professional development and enhanced practice of Professional Learning Communities, the full-day kindergarten program will work to provide outstanding learning opportunities and the foundation for future student success for generations to come.

### Context

While the context will remain the same, the significance of student achievement given the context of the District will result in significant progress towards closing the achievement gap. Ensuring student success related to a new full-day kindergarten program and early literacy in a district with 31% low-income, 10% disability, 22% EL, and 11% mobility means more students will be on grade level and learning at high levels than before.

Reflecting on student learning after the first year, during the early implementation of full-day kindergarten, the data demonstrates significant gains in student learning. Kindergarten Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP), a nationally normed literacy and mathematics assessment, reflected growth after the first year of full-day kindergarten. Reading proficiency in 2016 reflected 85% of kindergarten students reading at or above grade level as compared to 81% in 2015. Keeping in mind these are two different groups of students, the 2015 group had a fall to spring increase in proficiency of 2% and the



2016 cohort had a fall to spring increase of 8% proficiency. The math results were even greater with 90% of kindergarten student achieving at or above grade level in 2016 compared to 85% in 2015 with the half-day program. The 2015 group had a fall to spring increase in proficiency of 9% and the 2016 cohort had a fall to spring increase of 22% proficiency.

These results demonstrate the impact a full-day kindergarten program can have on student learning. However, one year of increased results does not mean the work is complete. Since the context has changed, there are further implications for ensuring these high levels of achievement are maintained for future kindergarten students. Additionally, professional development and collaboration through Professional Learning Communities are essential systems that teachers in first grade and beyond will need in order to increase the rigor of their instruction and meet the needs of their advanced learners.

### Culture

The District's culture of continuous improvement will continue to support teacher development and student learning with the underlying belief that all students can and will learn. As the district implements full-day kindergarten, it will be necessary to strategically plan opportunities for kindergarten educators to reflect on their practice and seek a deeper understanding of how they can improve their teaching for the benefit of student learning. Purposeful professional development designed to meet the needs of teachers will lead to an understanding of best practice related to early literacy, foundational skills, and the common core state standards or Illinois learning standards. An important element to consider is the increase in number of kindergarten teachers due

to the change. Since teachers will only have one section of students in the full-day setting, the team will grow and allow for further collaboration.

### Conditions

The conditions of the District include a new full-day kindergarten schedule designed to make the best use of the additional time in the master schedule as indicated in the Program Evaluation. Kindergarten students will have more time to participate in special activities such as fine arts, physical education and all school celebrations. Professional Learning Communities will benefit from more time in the master schedule to allow for collaborative team time to plan additional instruction. As one of the strongest systems in the District, Professional Learning Communities provide the foundation for collaborative conversations and teacher development. Added benefits include more time to plan on early release building institute days, job alike and staff development days, grade level reflection sessions, as well as after school professional development offerings.

Kindergarten reflection sessions will need to be designated for kindergarten teachers to come together to share and discuss ideas for implementing the Common Core while making the most during a full day of instruction. Dedicating time to reflecting and sharing ideas will support teacher development as they meet the needs of their students during a full-day of school. By carefully designing these reflection sessions and professional development opportunities and strategically planning Professional Learning Community agendas and meetings, kindergarten teachers and support staff will be able to deliver a quality full-day kindergarten program.

## Competencies

The competencies of educators in the district, especially those directly connected to the full-day kindergarten program will be enhanced through the change. As self-efficacy increases and collective efficacy at the team, building and district level grows, full-day kindergarten students will benefit greatly. The new competencies that will be present include; a deep understanding of how to use the additional time in the full-day, provide extended differentiated learning opportunities, and meet the social emotional needs of kinder students.

Knowing the importance of a quality full-day of learning, increasing understanding of how to use the addition time in the full day is necessary. The full day allows teachers to plan both initial instruction as well as extended differentiated learning opportunities through acceleration blocks. Strategically utilizing this time to target specific student needs helps boost their learning, giving them exactly what they need based on their strengths and areas for improvement. It also allows teachers to get to know their students as individuals and be responsive to their needs both academically and social emotionally. Focus on the development of the whole child will lead to greater student achievement and future success.

The additional time in the day allows Professional Learning Communities to dedicate time to planning core instruction, creating, administering and reflecting on common assessments, analyzing multiple data sources, and grouping students based on individual needs in order to respond to those needs appropriately. This collaborative team time is essential to the development of teachers and also the planning of high quality instructional opportunities for students.

Overall, as the competencies are positively affected, the full-day kindergarten program will set students up for greater success and enable teachers to meet the needs of their students in order to continue to develop learners for years to come. This can result in more students taking advantage of advanced learning opportunities as well as better preparedness for college- and career-readiness.

## SECTION SEVEN: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR CHANGE

In order to realize this change plan, there is much to be done to ensure the response from the District is timely, appropriate and meets the needs of the teachers. Since the District is in the enacting phase, “improving instruction is the primary and overriding priority” (Wagner, 2006, p. 134).

Given the current, yet evolving culture of the District that values continuous improvement at all levels and truly believes that all kids can and will learn, developing the understanding of best practice related to early literacy and maximizing the full-day kindergarten program by improving instruction as the ultimate goal.

The first step should be ensuring conditions are set to allow for success. Conditions necessary for success include setting daily instructional blocks as well as designing the master schedule to allow time for Professional Learning Community collaboration. In designing the master schedule, administrators will need to make it possible for Professional Learning Communities to spend time engaging in collaboration focused on literacy, mathematics and meeting the needs of individual students and groups of students. This time must be aligned for all members of the team including classroom teachers, relevant support staff, and instructional coaches. The Professional Learning Community will commit to their norms, roles and responsibilities in order to focus on student learning (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2010) but it is up to the administrator to strategically fit this time in to the week so members of the Professional Learning Community can make their collaborative team time pay off for the Professional Learning Community and student learning.

Next, the District will need to focus on building the competencies of educators in the District in order to build their efficacy. The District will need to survey teachers, coaches and administrators to gain an understanding of areas in need of professional development. The primary focus of improving instruction will be addressed by analyzing survey results from teachers, coaches and administrators to gain an understanding of areas in need of professional development. Some of these had been identified through the Program Evaluation (Houlihan, 2015), however the District must consider the evolving needs of the District related to full-day kindergarten as they work to improve instruction. Honoring the feedback of educators directly implementing full-day kindergarten will increase their capacity and improve their impact on student learning. By listening without judgement, the District can make necessary improvements to enhance professional practice that align with the mission and values of the District (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Based on this information, each school and the District will then need to build upon current professional development structures and offerings in order to enhance the efficacy and practice of kindergarten teachers so they are able to deliver an excellent full-day kindergarten program.

All in all, “communication among educators depends on and allows for the development of even greater degrees of collaboration, professional respect, and mutual trust” which benefits the organization as a whole and supports great change (Wagner, 2006, p. 134). By utilizing and continuously improving current systems and structures with a focus on professional development and collaboration through Professional Learning Communities, the District will both positively evolve as an organization while

enhancing professional practice and providing high quality learning opportunities for full-day kindergarten students.

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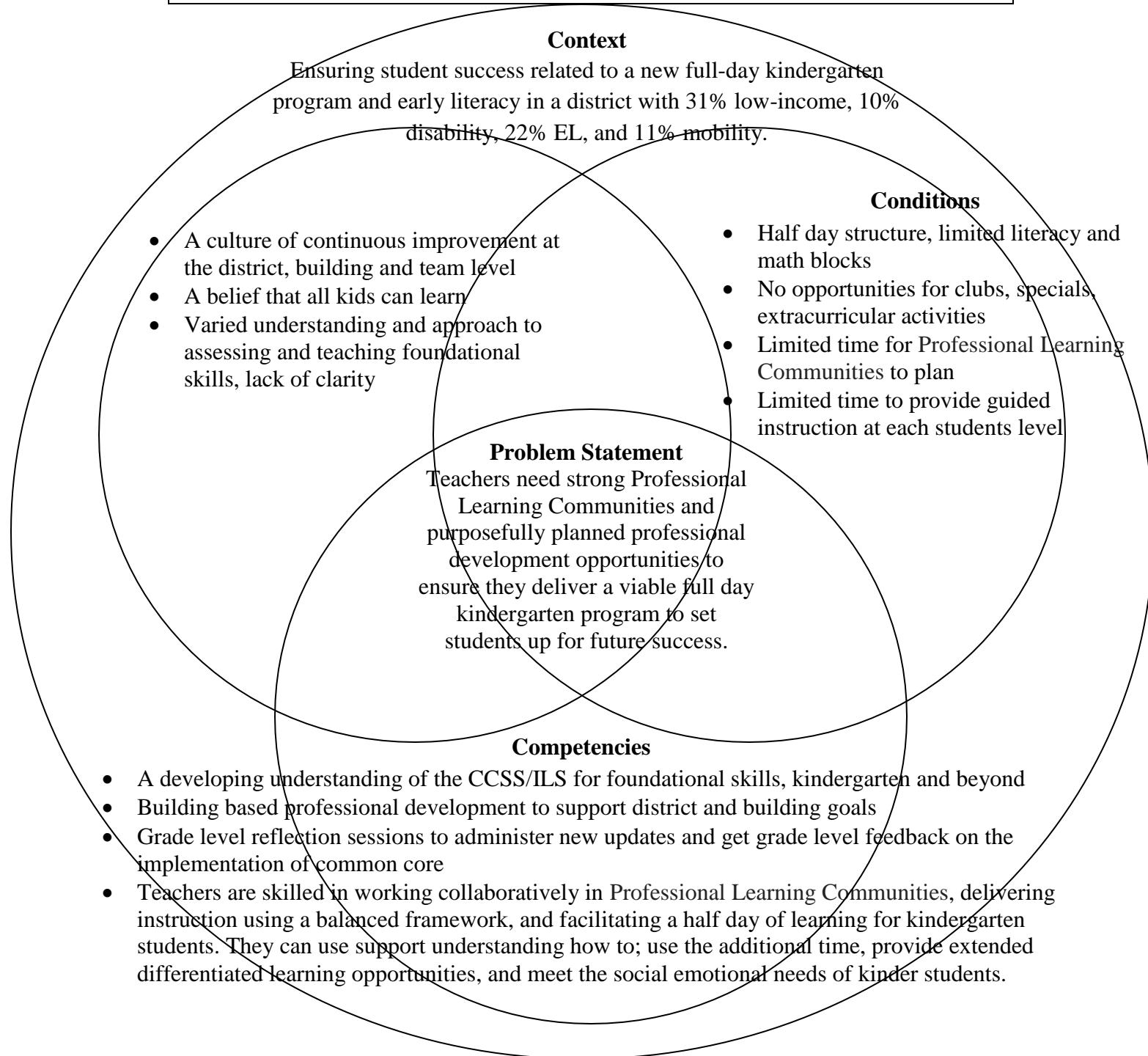
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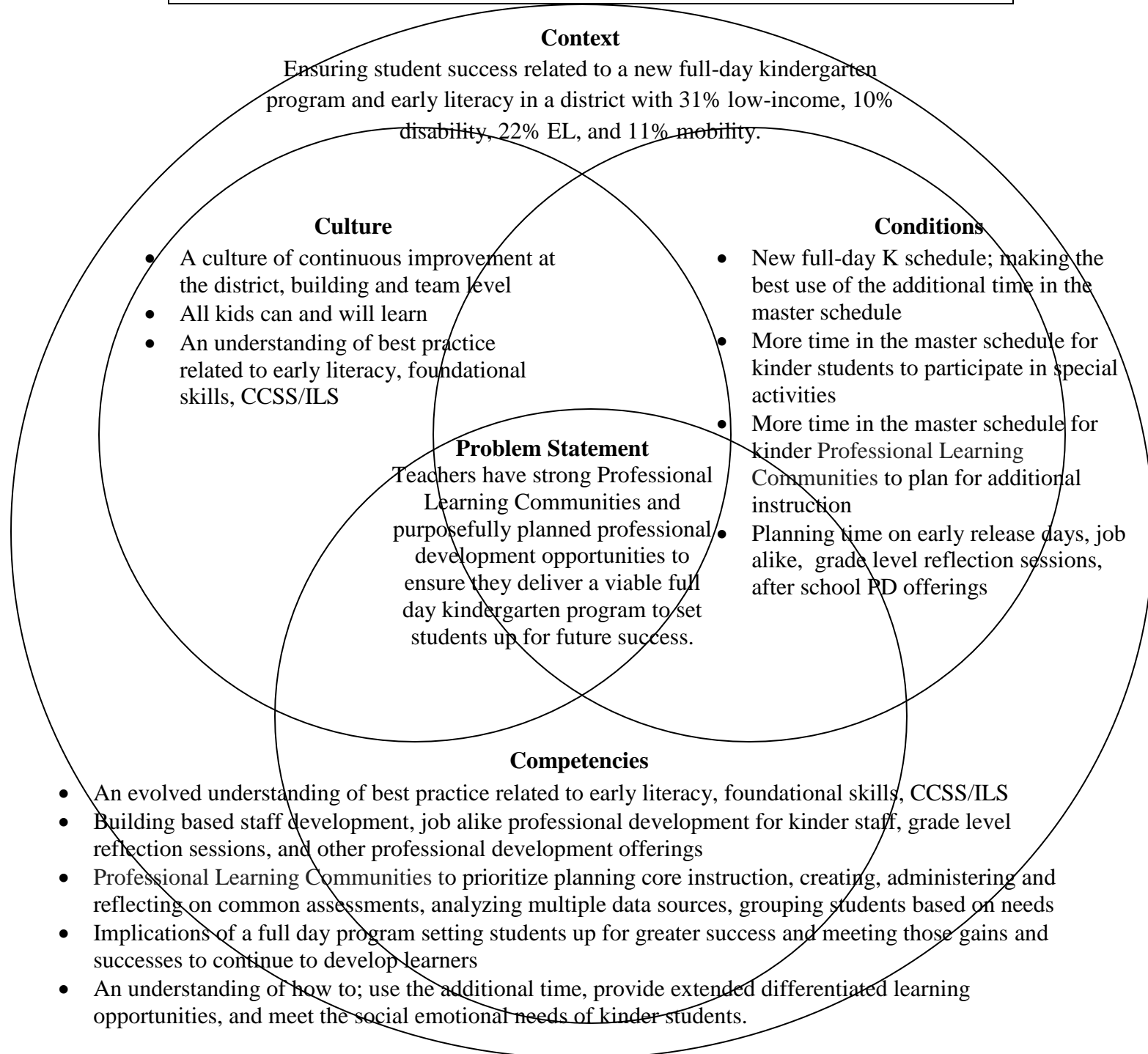
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## Appendix A. AS IS: 4 Cs Analysis for Full-Day Kindergarten



## Appendix B. TO BE: 4 Cs Analysis for Full-Day Kindergarten



### Appendix C. Strategies and Actions for Change

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Actions</b>
<p>In order to build the conditions for a successful full-day kindergarten program, each building will need to carefully design their master schedule to accommodate the daily instructional times for an additional grade level in literacy, math, social studies, science, and acceleration. Each grade level will also need designated time for fine arts and physical education, which will also mean time for Professional Learning Communities to collaborate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The District will need to outline guidelines and criteria for designing the master schedule to ensure consistency district wide and within the parameters of the teacher contract and school day.</li> <li>• Once the schedule is designed, support staff schedules, including bilingual teachers, special education teachers and literacy coaches and specialists, will be created in order to provide the necessary supports at each grade level based on their needs.</li> </ul>
<p>Building on the competencies of the educators in the District, a survey of teachers and administrators should be given in order to gain an understanding of areas in need of professional development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A thorough analysis of the data will prioritize the focus for professional development in the District.</li> <li>• Using the established professional development structures at the district and building level, professional development will be provided in order to enhance the efficacy and practice of kindergarten teachers.</li> </ul>
<p>Relating to both the conditions and competencies in the District, we will rely on and enhance the foundation of Professional Learning Communities to implement and sustain change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build the master schedule to allow time for Professional Learning Community collaboration.</li> <li>• Review the purpose, function and work of a Professional Learning Community.</li> <li>• Use collaborative Professional Learning Community time to reflect on practice, better meet student needs and enhance teacher effectiveness.</li> </ul>