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A CASE STUDY ON TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE WISCONSIN STATE
EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS REQUIREMENT:
MANDATES AND RESULTS

by

Daniel D. Unertl

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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ABSTRACT
A CASE STUDY ON TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE WISCONSIN STATE
EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS REQUIREMENT:
MANDATES AND RESULTS

Daniel D. Unertl

Marquette University, 2024

Teachers are the essential element in improving student learning in education. The State of Wisconsin requires public school teachers to participate in the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System. There is limited research on the links between required participation with the State of Wisconsin's Educator Effectiveness System and on the experience of teachers and their outcomes for students (Dvorak et al., 2014; Jones, 2017). This qualitative case study explored, through semi-structured interviews, the experiences of Wisconsin educators who engaged with the EE System, teachers' connections with EE and subsequent changes to their practice. The study addressed whether teachers' felt the technical elements required within the EE System and the related professional development they experienced contributed to changes in their teaching practice and perceptions of improvements in learning outcomes.

Findings suggest that this governmental mandate has not fully led to the results envisioned, and the unintended consequences are many and the unanticipated results have had a cumulative effect on the educators who participated in this study. Teacher experiences were positive, negative, endemic and often uncertain. This study concludes with recommendations for the Educator Effectiveness System today and for the future.

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Daniel D. Unertl

To my family. In this work, I have dedicated hours that may have been spent elsewhere—time is finite after all—my family has supported this labor and all my toil every step of the way. For my wife Sara, my boys Jon and Sean, and for my daughter Nora. The song has no music without my wife, and all the lyrics belong to my sons and daughter, who color my world. Not to be forgotten, and in keeping with a personal theme—that my life is an embarrassment of riches—I have also been blessed in this life with amazing professional mentors who both helped inspire this work, Dr. Sara Burmeister and Dr. Tim Culver, two people who did everything they could to teach me all that they could, and showed me the standards by which to ascribe. And finally, to my mother Rita and father Mark, who taught me how to work and how to love.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Arguably one of the most significant changes in education in recent United States history is the accountability movement (Farley et al., 2018). Nearly three decades since *A Nation at Risk* was published, the United States' education system is still struggling with the effects and implementation of new systems of accountability (Wisconsin Department of Education, 2008). The call for accountability and associated legislation has made most states laboratories for new modes of teacher supervision and evaluation, each with their own unique flavors and focuses (Cosner et al., 2015). In the state of Wisconsin, public schools fall under the authority of the state Department of Public Instruction (DPI). During the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years, DPI allowed pilot programs of a new supervision and evaluation system, soon to be required by law. In the fall of 2014, the Wisconsin Quality Educator Initiative—the preceding state required license renewal system—concluded, and a new system took its place. Every public school in Wisconsin implemented this new, required supervision and evaluation system for the 2014-2015 school year; which meant some Wisconsin school districts had been using Wisconsin's newly approved supervision and evaluation system, the Educator Effectiveness System (EE), since the fall of 2012. In less than 20 years, Wisconsin has moved from credit attainment requirements to the Wisconsin Quality Initiative to the Educator Effectiveness System (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2018).

The call for accountability in education presents schools across the nation with challenges that can feel insurmountable. Combined with the ever-present need for professional development, coaching and growth, this level of accountability finds school

leaders in interesting times to say the least. A well-known challenge facing school leaders is providing teachers with high quality, relevant professional development where teachers have time to collaborate and plan (Hirsch, 2008). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) recommend further investigation into how successful teachers collaborate and experience professional development to support and facilitate higher student performance. District leaders work toward recommendations like those found in the work of Best and Winslow (2015), calling for targeted professional development and better use of student data.

In conjunction with the professional development challenge facing school districts across the nation, there exists growing effects on teachers stemming from the accountability movement (Wisconsin Department of Education, 2008; Scott, 2011). Best and Winslow (2015) also assert that districts should work to “...identify areas of professional need to support ineffective educators” (p. 5). Given these challenges, school districts must respond to the dual demands for both accountability and professional development. In the midst of these efforts, school districts must address and account for the effects on educators as well, since so little is known in terms of how teachers have fared in this complex and demanding environment where professional development and teacher evaluation have been deliberately stitched together. The groundwork is set for unique opportunities, accountability, and support—respectively required by Wisconsin State law, and utterly necessary to further the ambitious goal of preparing students for the challenges of an emerging and fluid world yet to be imagined. The elements are all there and teachers appear squarely situated in the middle.

Statement and History of the Problem

Most states have purchased or mandated the purchase of digital systems, tools, or repositories for their public schools to house all the relevant documentation that has been created or required to address and operationalize the requirements of the accountability movement (Cosner et al., 2015). Dodson's (2015) research suggests, in surveying Kentucky principals in the wake of the implementation of such a system in that state, that the new evaluations systems brought forward in recent history are incomplete improvements over what has come before. Over 40 states require some form of educator evaluations (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013).

In the context of the state of Wisconsin, graduates of Wisconsin teacher preparation programs after August 31, 2004, experienced something called the Wisconsin Quality Educator Initiative (QEI), a system designed for educator preparation, program approval, and licensing. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) used terms like *recruit*, *attract*, *support*, and *retain* in their communications. DPI cited a development timeline for the QEI that began in 1993 and culminated with the process launched in 2004. DPI cited guiding principles including career-long education preparation. Prior to August 2004, educators were required to return to institutions of higher education to meet credit acquisition requirements in order to renew their license. Starting in 2004, through a professional development process that included the help of a mentor, teachers were to move from initial educator to master educator by creating and working through the steps in a professional development plan (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2021). Found in Sixel's (2013) research are qualitative accounts detailing the lived experience of educators who participated in the QEI. Study results are complex and nuanced. They are prone to common observations made about systems of

evaluation in that they are time consuming, often with limited support, and it can be challenging to know if efforts result in positive outcomes for either the teacher or the teacher's students (Sixel, 2013).

Act 166 in Wisconsin altered the landscape yet again. In the fall of 2014, the Wisconsin Quality Educator Initiative concluded and a new system took its place. New licensure requirements were established and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction began a process which ultimately culminated in a pilot program in 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, entitled the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System (EE). The program began in earnest throughout the state the following fall. In a report commissioned by the DPI from the Robert M. LaFollette School of Public Affairs (2014) at the University of Wisconsin – Madison, researchers recommended that the DPI undertake several courses of research to understand the effects of implementing the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System. Those recommendations included, but were not limited to, “...qualitative data collection including educator perceptions of and comfort with the EE system...metrics should include educators’ perceptions of changes to their practices...” (Dvorak et al., 2014, p. vii).

Researchers considering the Wisconsin model have posited that, “When an individual is trained on how to use the Educator Effectiveness System as a platform for growth, it may become very meaningful and influence every aspect of the teaching task” (Kroner, 2017, p. 97). Jones' (2017) research of Wisconsin's EE system implementation at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Research Partnership (WEERP) suggests that not enough allocated time for teachers to engage with EE and inaccurate feedback can actually detract from teacher efforts to improve their

practice. Jones writes, "...teachers in districts where principals are better able to efficiently manage feedback opportunities to provide teachers with useful and accurate feedback, trust their principals more and view them as more qualified to provide feedback" (p. 10). Jones (2017) goes on to state, "...a district's EE process is intimately connected to how satisfied teachers are with their jobs" (p. 11). Ultimately Jones suggests that, "Districts should explore ways to create additional opportunities to provide teachers with performance feedback, even during non-evaluation or supporting years" (p. 12). Clearly, new systems are wrought with implementation challenges. However, EE has now existed in Wisconsin since 2012; the system has been updated, and veteran teachers have grown more accustomed to the nuances of the model.

Kroner (2017), in studying accountability and how evaluation systems in Wisconsin affect teacher self-efficacy, writes, "The four sources of self-efficacy (mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective responses) were...examined, and the research demonstrated the impact of the sources, as they were included in the evaluation system, on teacher self-efficacy" (p. 75), and "Off-summary year participants reported more frequent and valuable experiences of the sources of self-efficacy, particularly in the area of social persuasion" (p. 76). It concludes that,

Participant reports confirmed that positive experiences, related to feelings of a successful year, were attributed to sources of efficacy experienced as a result of the Educator Effectiveness System 92% of the time. Negative experiences were attributed to experiences related to the Educator Effectiveness System in 69% of the responses. Within the positive and negative experiences is a breakdown of reports of each of the sources of self-efficacy being experienced. It can be

concluded that the sources of self-efficacy are incorporated into the Educator Effectiveness System. (p. 79)

Kroner further states, “The Educator Effectiveness System is extensive, and comprehensive. Therefore, teachers who have not been formally trained may feel overwhelmed and use it more as a check-off system than as a growth tool” (p. 97). In considering implications for future research, Kroner calls for further review to consider the social effects on teachers related to engaging with the EE system.

The problem investigated in this qualitative case study builds on many of these research findings and recommendations for further study in exploration of how teachers lived experience of participation in the EE system impacted their professional development and learning outcomes for their students.

Need for Further Study of the Problem

There is a significant body of research related to teacher supervision and evaluation. Developing targets for student learning and developing goals for teachers is not new. Region, school, or district facilitated professional development is an annual, common facet of education. However, Wisconsin’s EE system is relatively young, having existed for less than a decade excluding the pilot years. In addition, there was over a year in a global pandemic when other normal hallmarks of a traditional school year, such as evaluation and supervision, were deprioritized by school districts attempting to address the far more pressing basic educational needs of students by developing virtual learning opportunities or other associated efforts. Wisconsin’s EE system is a tool attempting to knit these important parts of education together. It is ambitious and sweeping in scale, wrapping thousands of Wisconsin teachers in its embrace. In the early days of the EE System, the Department of Public Instruction commissioned a study from

the La Follette School at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In that study, Dvorak et al. (2014) ultimately made several recommendations for future research conducted around “...educator perceptions of program experiences...”, “...changes to teacher and educator behavior...”, and “...long term student outcomes” (p. 17). And finally, “DPI should also conduct interviews or focus groups to gather more detailed qualitative information about program implementation and outcomes” (p. 19). This case study is intended to examine, in the context of these ambitions and recommendations, how teachers perceive these efforts in terms of the effects on their professional development and the learning outcomes of their students.

Theory and Action Related to the Problem

The theory and action related to the problem in this case study was to describe how teachers’ participation in the EE system impacted their perception of professional development and learning outcomes for their students. The accountability sought by policy makers in their deployment of the EE system has consumed countless hours of efforts from teachers. The question is, under the EE system, what have teacher’s experienced—how have nuanced positive, neutral, or negative professional development and student learning outcomes and experiences under EE changed the landscape?

Legislating, developing, and implementing the EE system was rooted in positive, aspirational goals. Presupposing a desire for positive professional development and improved student learning outcomes are the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction’s implementation goals, which are to both strengthen educator practice and to improve student learning, through either the Stronge (2011) or Danielson (2013) standards embedded in the EE system. Districts could also create and seek approval from the Department of Public Instruction for their own platform, though few did. The

Stronge Performance Standards and Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching—the two established acceptable frameworks for public schools under the Wisconsin EE System, could both serve as the theoretical framework for this case study; however, the research site selected the Danielson Framework, which was then used here for clarity. Further, the road leading to each research subject’s story starts with a historical call for accountability, followed by iterations of systems. Over time, the call for accountability is operationalized as a model in Wisconsin, followed by another model—the EE system currently employed. This pathway from the historical call for accountability to the EE model, and ultimately leading to teacher-perceived outcomes, serves as the theoretical framework for this case study reaching back into history, then to the goals espoused by DPI, implemented through the EE system, and employed throughout the state of Wisconsin.

Current Status of the Problem

Accountability, what that means functionally and what is required, is a problem that has, for better or worse, been addressed by the state of Wisconsin. Public schools are required to have, maintain, and use the EE system. However, most teachers still believe that professional development is lacking (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014). A well-known, common challenge facing school leaders is in providing teachers with high quality, relevant professional development, where teachers have time to collaborate and plan (Hirsch, 2008). Time to engage deeply in the work of collaborative sharing and curricular material development remains a necessary priority (Hirsch, 2008). In order to best address such challenges, researchers like Best and Winslow (2015) recommend that schools, “...link data from accountability systems to provide educators with targeted professional development opportunities and identify areas of professional need to support

ineffective educators" (p. 5). Others call on the need to adapt to the changes in society and technology by giving teachers the tools to measure the effects of their practice to better support learning (Farley et al., 2018). Currently, districts have the tool, the EE system. That tool has provided context for teachers' distinct and real lived experiences as they engage with the system's various elements, discuss the value to their professional development, and the effect it has on learning outcomes for their students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study is to describe how teachers perceived the outcomes of their participation in the EE system, specifically, how that participation impacted their professional development and learning outcomes for their students. The following related research questions will be explored:

1. How do teachers describe their experience with the EE process?
2. How do teachers describe their experience with both the Student Learning Objective and Professional Practice Goal elements of the EE process?
3. How has participation in the EE process impacted teacher professional development?
4. How do teachers describe the learning outcomes for their students as affected by their participation in the EE process?

Significance of the Study

While accountability—supervision, evaluation, and facilitated teacher growth and improvement—has long existed in public education, the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System is relatively new. While the format and structure are common between school districts, little is known regarding the lived experience of teachers

participating in this system (Dvorak et al., 2014). Beyond providing a structure for supervision and evaluation, EE is also billed as a coaching model, a system for improving student learning outcomes, and teacher goal setting. This study will contribute to the existing knowledge based on the experience and perceptions of the participants in the field.

Overview of the Research Study

Given the research purpose of investigating whether teachers found participation in the EE system of value to either or both their professional development and learning outcomes for their students, the research approach was qualitative in nature, employing case study methodology, and a research design consisting of in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The research site was a southeastern Wisconsin elementary school located in one of Wisconsin's 25 largest school districts. All teachers were invited to participate; five responding volunteers were included in this study. Interviews were conducted back-to-back in a single day. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by a transcription service. The researcher identified themes in teacher responses.

Limitations of the Case Study

Limitations of this case study exist and are important factors in interpreting the results. Recounted experiences are limited to the teachers who participated in this study; this is not a comprehensive study of all Wisconsin teachers who have in the past or are currently required participants in the EE System. Individual perceptions are inherently limited by a given individual's life experience. Further, each research participant joined the teaching ranks at different times. The sweeping changes in the Wisconsin education system have occurred over time, and the point at which one became a teacher may affect perceptions of a given initiative as compared to what has come and gone in the course of

one's career. There are also reverberations as the world and southeastern Wisconsin emerge from a global pandemic. The stories shared should not be generalized or generally applied to all Wisconsin teachers.

Delimitations of the Case Study

Delimitations, or the fixing of boundaries for this case study, are important factors in interpreting the results as well. Only one District is represented here, and in that district, only one school. Large Regional School District (LRSD) is geographically located in southeastern Wisconsin; this geographic feature made the District and school easily accessible. This researcher, as a result of choosing to conduct this case study at a single school, also limited the number of teachers despite accepting all volunteers at the school, to a manageable volume of participants. No matter if the entire staff agreed to participate, the entire staff is less than 30 individuals. As Bazeley (2013) notes, this choice to draw lines and create limits was necessary due to the granular intensity and volume of the qualitative research methodology employed.

Vocabulary of the Study

Throughout the course of this study, the terms below were defined with the following definitions:

Coaching Model: “Intentional, job-embedded professional learning designed to support teachers and staff in implementing practices with fidelity. Coaching takes place after training and happens while practitioners are doing their work” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2021, para. 2).

The Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System (EE): “A learning-centered, continuous improvement system designed to improve the education of all students in the state of Wisconsin by supporting guided, individualized, self-determined professional

growth and development of educators” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2021, para. 1).

Learning Outcomes: student experience intended grade level results or performance measures during a school year or other defined period of time (Cook, 2017).

Professional Development: the specific activities or learning a teacher engaged with in order to improve their knowledge, skills, or dispositions related to improving student learning (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014).

Teacher Evaluation: the annual system, measurement tool, or employee supervision process utilized by a district to assess the performance of a teacher (Mielke & Frontier, 2016).

Teacher: an individual providing instruction in a public school setting, holding a state issued license (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2021).

Summary and Forecast

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the experience of Wisconsin teachers in their work with the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System and explore how their participation in this state required process may have affected perception of outcomes in their professional development and/or their perception of learning outcomes for their students. Chapter Two shares the theoretical framework of the study through the Danielson Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2013). Next, follows a review of the literature related to the historical features of the accountability movement, subsequent state required systems of teacher evaluation, the system of accountability preceding the Wisconsin EE System, the implementation of the Wisconsin EE system, and the arrival of the EE system at the site of the case study LRSD.

Ultimately, this review of literature and subsequent case study are the story of how a government accountability measure translates to the experience of professionals in the field. Chapter Three details the qualitative case study methodology used here. Chapter Four shares the results of the study, which will help provide a better understanding or explanation regarding the assumption that this government mandate has not fully translated into the experience of professionals in the field. Chapter Five discusses the findings of the study and the conclusions drawn along with applications for those findings for educational leaders in the field. In sum, the state of Wisconsin has made a considerable investment in the EE System, as have individual districts in operationalizing those mandates. This research, through the framework of Danielson (2013), holds implications for leaders working to leverage their systems for improved student outcomes.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the historical underpinnings of the accountability movement in American Public Education, subsequent iterations of accountability methods implemented in the state of Wisconsin, and ultimately the current iteration of the system of supervision and evaluation presently used throughout public schools in Wisconsin. This literature review culminates by examining how the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction implemented requirements for teacher accountability—which were implemented in school districts throughout Wisconsin—and subsequently down to every individual public educator in the state based on local district plans. Thousands of teachers and students have been affected by these initiatives.

The research question asks: how did teachers perceive the outcomes of participation in the Educator Effectiveness System and how this participation impacted perceptions of professional growth and student learning? Teachers were asked about their experience with the EE system generally, the specific technical elements of the EE process, and the nexus of participation in EE and effects upon their own professional development. Finally, participants were asked for descriptions or accounts of learning outcomes for their students through their own engagement with EE.

This chapter also reviews literature addressing research and theory related to the study of professionalism and professional development, along with lessons from earlier iterations of the state of Wisconsin's model for supervision and evaluation. It examines teacher independence and aims of the model immediately preceding the EE system along with the state of Wisconsin's own inchoate process improvements and recommendations.

Finally, it includes recommendations in best practices for systems of evaluation. A summary and analysis of evident themes and research findings within the reviewed literature is presented at the end of the chapter.

The literature review will be broken into nine sections. The first section is the Theoretical Framework. The second section is The Politics of Education: Accountability. The third section is The Politics of Education: In Practice. The fourth section is Wisconsin Implements the Precursor to Educator Effectiveness. The fifth section is Wisconsin Implements Educator Effectiveness. The sixth section is Teachers Experience Educator Effectiveness Nationally. The seventh section is Wisconsin Teachers Experience Educator Effectiveness. The eighth section is Educator Effectiveness Comes to Large Regional School District (LRSD). The ninth and final section is a Summary and Forecast of Chapter Three.

Theoretical Framework

When Wisconsin public schools were required to implement the EE system, each school district needed to select a framework which underpinned the system each of their participants would use. Choices were either the Danielson Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2013) utilizing a digital platform called Teachscape, or the Stronge Performance Standards (Stronge, 2013) utilizing a digital platform called Frontline. The Theoretical Framework in this case study uses the Danielson framework, since it was the research site's selection. Each system is designed to address all phases of a teacher's practice, and both contain methods for goal setting and measuring student growth. The six components of the Stronge (2013) teacher standards are: Professional Knowledge, Instructional Planning, Instructional Delivery, Assessment, Learning Environment, and

Professionalism. The Danielson (2013) framework for teaching includes: Planning and Preparation, Learning Environments, Learning Experiences, and Principled Teaching. Critically, both frameworks are accepted frameworks for public schools in the state of Wisconsin. Before the current use of either framework became standard in the public schools of the state of Wisconsin, the accountability movement swept through the United States public education system.

The Politics of Education: Accountability

In 1983 a landmark publication, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, altered the course of history as it espoused a fear that mediocre performance outcomes for learners posed a threat to the United States. Fears fueled by Cold War reverberations were an important part of the cultural landscape. National fear of ascendant global powers, coupled with objectives like fairness and a return to the success of prior decades, proved persuasive. Concepts for learners such as high expectations, goal setting, and progress monitoring were identified as necessary for national progress. Who could argue that drivers as powerful as the American place in the global hierarchy was not worthy of governmental intervention?

Post 1983, academic standards became ubiquitous. The year 1989 marked George H.W. Bush's National Governors meeting where K-12 performance goals were targeted for the year 2000. During the Clinton year's two key pieces of legislation, *The Improving America's Schools Act* and *the Goals 2000: Educate American Act*, calling for the content standards and testing and the writing of those standards, respectively, were enacted. George W. Bush brought the *No Child Left Behind Act* into the forefront in 2001 (Wisconsin Department of Education, 2008).

Political pressure to double down on accountability in education movement continues to this day. In 2018, the National Governors Association furthered its recommendations regarding teacher evaluation by advocating governors lead by also enacting policies and legislation to support continuous improvement practices and professional development supporting such practices (National Governors Association, 2018). State governmental instrumentalities fund their state school systems and wield broad authority to implement such initiatives. Sweeping support for improvement nationally translates to the language of continuous improvement living locally in the goals and practices of state departments of education, including the State of Wisconsin.

In *A Nation Accountable: Twenty-five Years after A Nation at Risk* (2008), it is clear that schools throughout the country continue to struggle with systems, supports, and tools designed to foster greater accountability in education. However, there are arguably positive signs including improved curriculum, higher standards and expectations, enhanced teacher quality, improved leadership and greater financial support (Wisconsin Department of Education, 2008).

Today all 50 states have content standards and tests administered at designated grade levels. Notably, however, there has not been significant additional time added to school year as a result of these various recommendations and subsequent reforms. There has, however, been a notable increase in local, state, and federal total spending for education (Wisconsin Department of Education, 2008).

Some of the common language of education was considerably impacted by *A Nation at Risk*, such as what we now commonly call ‘education reform’ (Scott, 2011). In a retrospect of significant legislation following the publication of *A Nation at Risk* but

preceding Wisconsin's implementation of systems of accountability, Scott (2011) noted that at the 1989 National Governors Association summits, the *America 2000: Excellence in Education Act*, which did not pass, was showcased. The act was the precursor to the *GOALS 2000: Educate America Act*, which became law in 1994. These legislative initiatives build upon one another; *Goals 2000*, led to the 2002 *No Child Left Behind Act*, marking a sea of change in United States educational policy (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

A notable assertion in *A Nation Accountable: Twenty-five Years after A Nation at Risk* (2008) is that teacher quality and leadership have improved when compared to the time of writing of *A Nation at Risk*, namely through the implementation of increased recruitment standards in university education programs. Once employed in roles as teachers, a new experience awaited these newly minted educators. The legislation, *No Child Left Behind*, required states to develop systems designed to support better practices in teaching and teacher accountability, which required additional management and supervisory skills of principals and district leaders.

The Politics of Education: In Practice

The Accountability Movement has necessitated many changes in the years since these notable pieces of legislation. University faculty can attest to the changes made in preservice education programs. Principals and other school leaders have seen their roles evolve considerably. Thousands of individual teachers who have lived through these changes have seen their requirements shift. Farley et al. (2018) state that there has been considerable educator evaluation reform in the era of school-based accountability.

The landscape for teachers has changed in a few short decades. Farley et al. (2018) urges planners of teacher preparation programs to promote continuous improvement practices, familiarity with the use of data dashboards tracking multiple measures of growth, and practice receiving coaching as realistic supports for a future where they are required in the teaching workplace. Data acumen and applying continuous improvement concepts are now ubiquitous features found in schools throughout the United States however, it is easily forgotten how quickly these changes have come to pass. Farley et al. (2018), primarily focusing on pre-service education practices, states that,

...ultimately, a philosophical shift from compliance toward continuous improvement in K-12 policy necessitates a renewed focus on the pre-service teachers who will one day work in those settings. We advocate for a next phase of evaluation within teacher education—one that supports a learning orientation and prepares teachers to integrate information from multiple measures to reflect meaningfully on their practice and better meet the needs of all students. (p. 5)

This is a new and expanded landscape for teachers, far different from the historical charge to new teachers of prior eras in United States education.

Similar shifts and changes have happened for school principals as well. Dodson's (2015) work focused on the experiences of Kentucky principals. A notable finding in Dodson's (2015) research includes that teacher performance ratings may be detrimental to professional growth. Taking even reasonable risks in instructional practices can feel more challenging in a high stakes environment. Dodson's (2005) principal participants

also note anecdotally that the new evaluations systems are incomplete improvements over what has come before; progress has been made, but there is significant room to improve.

Doherty and Jacobs (2013) research for the National Council on Teacher Quality centers on the idea that any system of evaluation must be targeting improved learning outcomes for kids. Further, Doherty and Jacobs note that at least 27 states require teacher ratings to include measures of student growth, 44 require observations, and 11 states mandate an entire platform or evaluation system. These findings from 2013 catalogue systems of teacher evaluation that exist throughout the United States, accounting for over 40 states and the District of Columbia Public Schools; the logical conclusion, systems of teacher evaluation in public education are ubiquitous. These evaluation systems inform a wide variety of important areas for educators. For example, some states use teacher evaluations to make decisions regarding tenure and licensure, professional development, improvement plan placement potentially leading to termination, compensation, and layoffs. There are even eight states who reportedly track the preservice institution of study and correlate those institutions with teacher performance on these systems.

Ultimately, Doherty and Jacobs (2013) detail 15 lessons and recommendations. Notably, the researchers write, “Leadership is key. Regardless of laws and regulations on the books, the strongest states are those providing solid state models for statewide or district adoption” (p. vi). Doherty and Jacobs (2013) also note that, just because there is a system, does not mean it will garner results. For example, issues with alignment between standards, non-tested areas, specialists, training for evaluators and the evaluated, and the use of strong measures and tools, must all be accounted for in a given state or district’s evaluation system.

Lacireno-Paquet et al. (2016) conducted a case study of the relationship between school climate and teacher evaluation satisfaction, which they defined through multiple measures including perceived professionalism. Their work suggests that work environments perceived as more professional—indicated through support and fidelity in implementation of professional development—contribute to greater satisfaction with the evaluation process. Notable findings include teachers reporting higher levels of satisfaction with the evaluation process when they also perceived levels of principal leadership as high. Teachers who scored high reported higher satisfaction levels, as well as teachers whose scores did not include student test scores. Lacireno-Paquet et al. (2016) noted in the context of implications for further study, “What elements of leadership—such as establishing a culture of trust or providing appropriate supports to teachers—are most directly related to teachers’ satisfaction with the evaluation process?” (p. 7). The implications for professional development are considerable.

Wisconsin Implements the Precursor to Educator Effectiveness

The system required to renew a teaching license immediately preceding the Educator Effectiveness system in the state of Wisconsin was called the Wisconsin Quality Educator Initiative (QEI). This model required the development of a Professional Development Plan that an educator would design and implement over the course of several years. Ultimately, the teacher would move from a status of “initial,” to “professional,” and ultimately “master” teacher, and each designation had numerous requirements necessary to be met in order to attain the given designation (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2021). There have been case studies of the QEI, where research questions similar to this case study have been asked and answered (Sixel, 2013).

One such case study by Sixel (2013) probed the lived experience of teachers in a post accountability, or following legislative requirements movement, in a Wisconsin school district. Utilizing a qualitative review of teacher perspectives (interviews, reflection logs, professional development plan documents, and semi-structured interview questions) the researcher worked to answer the question, “Does self-directed learning through creation of a professional development plan provide teachers with the professional growth needed to impact their instructional practice and ultimately student learning?” (p. iii). One only need replace the language related to the QEI with language related to EE, and Sixel’s research question becomes holistically similar to this researcher’s question.

Participants in Sixel’s study were drawn from a single school district, narrowed by individuals who have completed their initial cycle under PI 34, the first step moving a teacher from “initial” to “professional” in the studied district. Sixel drew a list from DPI, meeting the criteria above, netting 49 potential people. Sixel ultimately worked with six individual research subjects. Sixel outlined the requirements of PI 34, the subsequent wave of requirements like the professional development plan, and then asked teachers if all the actions they took in order to address the requirements of PI 34 made an ultimate impact on student learning. Sixel asked four research questions. Two of those questions are relevant to this research. Questions one and three read: “What motivates initial educators to change their instructional practices? What types of professional learning opportunities do initial educators believe impacted their professional growth and ability to impact student learning?” (p. 41). Sixel (2013) concluded, “Four out of five participants did not believe the PDP was useful in helping them to reach their goal” (p.

93). Sixel noted use of a single district, participants who just finished their initial cycle, and the fact that transferable assertions beyond these five people could not be made as limitations of the study.

In cataloguing opportunities for continued research, Sixel (2013) suggested, “Professional growth based on evaluation by certified evaluators using a defined, research based model could provide systematic, ongoing learning, based on classroom practices and student learning rather than mere verification” (p. 120). Years later, in its design, the Educator Effectiveness System was to be systematic, ongoing, and rooted in addressing student learning objectives.

Wisconsin Implements Educator Effectiveness

School districts in Wisconsin may have started implementing Act 166—later and currently known as EE, Educator Effectiveness, or the EE System—in Wisconsin as early as the 2012-2013 school year, when the first pilot programs began following the 2011 passage of the act (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2014). Where the QEI ended, EE began. As noted above, by the 2014 school year, all Wisconsin public school districts were required to use the EE system. In a 2014 report from the Robert M. La Follette School of Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin – Madison, commissioned by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, researchers reported on the inception, design, and goals of the EE system, and ultimately made recommendations for future research. From the earliest days of the development of EE, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction shared positive objectives or goals related to academic gains for students and improved performance for principals and teachers. Implementation of the EE system required the expenditure of considerable cost

and effort from its legislative inception, design by the DPI, and finally through supporting local implementation in schools across Wisconsin. Rolling out the Educator Effectiveness System was a sizable undertaking for all stakeholders. Design work on EE began in 2010 when State Superintendent Tony Evers commissioned a design team. The focus was clear: effective teachers make the difference in improving student learning, and the path is through monitoring and continuous improvement practices. Beyond these characteristics, there were implications for human resources decision, the design of professional development, support and guidance of pedagogical decisions made in undergraduate preparation programs, and the opportunity to compare performance measures across the state. (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2011). Using the recommendations of the design team, legislation was passed, and the DPI was tasked with creating such a system. What came next was a system of supports from the physical platform used by individual teachers and principals, online training systems, professional development materials—the essential components of the system. All these efforts were supported by the state’s regional Cooperative Education Services Agencies (CESAs). By the 2014-2015 school year, the EE system was in use across the state (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2018).

Noted in the La Follette study, Dvorak et al. (2014) ultimately made several recommendations relevant for this case study including future research conducted around “...educator perceptions of program experiences...”, “...changes to teacher and educator behavior...”, and “...long term student outcomes” (p. 17). And finally, “DPI should also conduct interviews or focus groups to gather more detailed qualitative information about program implementation and outcomes” (p. 19). While not extensive, there is a degree of

research on the EE system so far. Much of the existing research paints a familiar picture in terms of the challenges facing any system designed to improve outcomes for students.

In the years preceding implementation of the EE system in Wisconsin, the literature around supporting, or rather coaching, supervising, or otherwise providing professional development, is well established. Teachers by and large are aware that they need, and, in many cases are requesting, better professional development. Professional development that does in fact help move education, in general, toward the espoused goals of the EE system. In a 2008 publication developed through the U.S. Department of Education with the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, entitled “Identifying Professional Contexts to Support Highly Effective Teachers,” Hirsch notes, “...schools put far more energy into formal training and evaluation of teachers than coaching, support, and networking...” (p. 6). Put differently, the human resources component of operating a large organization with many employees often comes before the challenging and artful work of building and maintaining an environment where teachers can do their very best work. Further, Hirsch writes, “Teachers’ perceptions of their schools are their reality, and their behavior and efficacy are a direct result of those views” (p. 6). Hirsch goes on to note the importance of clear standards and expectations for positive professional contexts, specifically United States states making explicit through standards or guidelines like what Wisconsin has attempted through the EE system, what is expected from educators. This work preceded the inception of EE by several years; however, goals of the current system and preceding systems contain the seeds of these observations and recommendations. In short, the goals of the EE system are not new, are known, and have existed in other models before.

A widely cited report from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2014), entitled “Teachers Know Best: Teacher’s Views on Professional Development,” details teacher wants and needs surrounding improving their craft, all espoused goals of the EE system and essentially any other widely adopted system of supervision and evaluation. The key theme is *support*, so teachers can get better and their students can achieve better results. There are very specific forms of support, however, which are favored. In the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Report (2014) it is noted that teachers’ ideal support system has five components: relevance, interactivity, is delivered by someone with an understanding of their specific experience, is sustained, and is supported by treatment as a professional. At time of publication, teachers reported broad dissatisfaction with the meeting of these espoused objectives. Coaching, which often serves as a stands-in term for support, is often focused on new or struggling staff. Administrators are often not who teachers want, or they believe to be qualified, to coach them. Common criticisms included administrators having not taught for years, not taught long enough, or not taught in the teacher’s area. According the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s (2014) research, a teacher’s ideal coach would be a content expert, who is not an administrator, is non-evaluative, and is consistent during the years they work together. The authors go on to state that the more choices teachers have in their professional development, the higher the degree of satisfaction they report. Often training, time, or money are cited as the reasons for falling short in meeting a teacher’s desired type and amount of professional development. Working to address or affect finite resources is a theme running through much of this work.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's (2014) research supports coaching, and in 2014, right as the EE system was coming into place throughout Wisconsin, an element they termed a "promising innovation," was noted, this research states, "Platforms that close the loop for teacher evaluation by providing web-based evaluation and coaching tools and other resources that support teacher effectiveness systems" (p. 15). EE is consistently described as a coaching model; it is web-based, its key elements are research-based standards and indicators, and teacher derived data supported student learning objectives.

Driven by the policy developments enumerated above and the call for greater accountability generally, numerous states have enacted new systems of teacher evaluation (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013). Much of these evaluative responsibilities like classroom observations, coaching sessions, and the completion of required evaluation system materials falls to principals. Of the millions of public school teachers in the United States, in most cases it is the school principal who evaluates them. For these systems to succeed, Wisconsin, key to this case study, is reliant upon principals. Regardless of federal, state, or local policy decision, school principals must oversee the process at individual schools in Wisconsin and throughout the country. Cosner et al. (2015) have studied the subject of the role of the principal in the implementation of systems like Wisconsin. Principals direct, manage, and support countless efforts each day; they are responsible for literally hundreds of tasks. Cosner et al. (2015) cites three buckets of principal responsibilities derived from the review of systems of evaluation. A principal must ensure that: (1) teachers establish student learning objectives, (2) each yearly evaluation cycle is completed, and (3) all evaluation evidence is completed. These

responsibilities are overlaid upon the hundreds of existing responsibilities which have grown throughout the history of public education in the United States. In consideration of these enumerated challenges, Cosner et al. (2015) recommends outsourcing of observations and coaching where possible—while retaining the principal’s role in final evaluation—and establishing teams of teachers who could aid one another in supporting the evaluation process. In practice, Cosner et al. (2015) recommends closely attending to the time all these tasks take, and align communication, professional development, and all the various tools and routines of each unique school district accordingly. Inarguably, Educator Effectiveness calls for considerable amounts of time, from both principals and teachers, and time is a resource. Time is finite, and the time this process takes must be accounted for, and at best, aligned with the key work of a school.

Teachers Experience Educator Effectiveness Nationally

As more states implement various evaluation systems, rooted in the same principles of teacher effectiveness as Wisconsin, research has begun to emerge. The state of Pennsylvania utilizes a similar evaluation model to the one used in Wisconsin. The state uses the Danielson Framework as the source of standards and indicators within the state’s system, the same framework used in many districts in Wisconsin. Cook (2017), a researcher studying a small, rural Pennsylvania school district, unearthed some evidence indicating a correlation between EE scores and student outcomes, strong enough to suggest further research. Cook conducted a mixed methods case study, where teachers were interviewed and student performance data were collected over a multiple-year period. While qualitative results were mainly negative, with teachers expressing overarching negative sentiments regarding the research question of whether or not

participating in the Pennsylvania Educator Effectiveness System resulted in improved practice, quantitative data collected in the third year of the study indicated that when teacher effectiveness scores were compared to student achievement data, a correlation began to emerge. While this was a small study, in a rural community, the results call for further study. Further observed by Cook (2017) was a not-uncommon phenomenon in education, that of administrative turn-over; administrative shifts at both the building and district level were noted and suggested as the reason for variance in Educator Effectiveness scores.

The quality and duration of the relationship between teachers and administrators also appears in other similar research. In a distinctly different, but related area of research, Ford et al. (2018) further defines the connection between EE and improvements in teacher overall sense of positive professional development. Ford et al. writes,

We found a small, positive relationship between the perceptions of supportive teacher evaluation experiences and U.S. secondary teachers' satisfaction after controlling for other important teacher and school characteristics and working conditions. Further, teachers who felt their evaluation led to positive changes in their practice had higher satisfaction. (p. 22)

Again, relationships matter, especially in the high stakes and highly personal world of teacher supervision and evaluation.

Teacher empowerment also figures prominently in assessments of, and recommendation for, existing evaluation systems. Wisconsin researchers Mielke and Frontier (2012), in writing about systems of evaluation generally, state that “Only by empowering teachers as the central users of comprehensive teaching frameworks can we

ensure that the evaluation system improves teacher effectiveness, rather than merely measuring it” (p.13). There are notable pitfalls related to required evaluation systems, and researchers like Mielke and Frontier offer cautions to avoid drift from the espoused intentions of the drafters of state or system-imposed modalities of supervision and evaluations. When something additional is required of individuals who are already taxed, especially without ownership in the process, it is not shocking when we are left with a system of measuring and sorting, as opposed to a system of coaching and supporting. There is a place for measurement, but without a road for improving, all we are left with is a new way to view a situation, not improve it. Further, Mielke and Frontier note that, “The most effective supervision and evaluation systems empower teachers to accurately assess their own practice and self-diagnose areas for growth” (p. 12). As noted here and elsewhere in the research, teachers teach with limited supervision and evaluation, governed by the simple math related to the responsibilities of principals, the number of teachers they support, and the hours in a given day. Self-assessment tools and practices become essential parts of the process, when even a moment’s consideration is given to a teacher and principal’s time. Should the system of supervision and evaluation fall down in the effort to also serve as a modality for both coaching and self-evaluation, schools will rightly find that, as Mielke and Frontier (2012) note, “...If the school views the need for improvement as a liability, why would teachers ever acknowledge their need for deliberate practice?” (p. 12). If there are penalties, real or imagined, for not knowing a best practice or effective strategy, it stands to reason that a reasonable response might be to avoid or at the very least, fail to disclose, what one may not know. Ultimately, “The best evaluation systems engage the teachers subject to those systems; they allow for self-

assessment, and reflection on their own impact on student learning” (Mielke & Frontier, 2012, p. 12). There is room for self-assessment and individual goal setting included directly in the interface for the Wisconsin EE System. This self-assessment tool lives in one of the first forms required of every public school educator, though how these tools are engaged with and used varies widely.

Wisconsin Teachers Experience Educator Effectiveness

Teachers conduct much of their work in isolation or in collaboration with small teams. When teachers are asked to conduct self-assessment, as noted above or assess their own efficacy, EE has the potential to be a useful and relevant tool. Kroner (2017) reported after studying efficacy in Wisconsin educators that, “...sources of self-efficacy are incorporated into the Educator Effectiveness System” (p. 79). Further, “Participant reports confirmed that positive experiences, related to feelings of a successful year, were attributed to sources of efficacy experienced as a result of the Educator Effectiveness System 92% of the time” (p. 79). However, not all assessments are as positive, with one participant noting, “The school year started out with far too many new initiatives and responsibilities. The most challenging was the online Educators Effectiveness Plan, (which) was overwhelming, as it was challenging to input things online. The time it took to input things into the computer took away valuable time that could have been better spent” (p. 82). The EE system is not elegantly designed. Pages upon pages of digital forms accrue over years of use. For most educators, the year begins by completing a form called, Effectiveness Project Teacher Professional Goal Setting. The form is exhaustive, housing reflective prompts and boxes to select for six standards with over 40 sub-standards or indicators. Simply reading the form in its entirety is highly time-

consuming. The form starts with a prompt to draft a Student Learning Objective, followed by a reflection on the standards noted above, and concludes with a prompt for Professional Goal Setting. Teams can collaborate on much of this process; however, the forms must ultimately be completed by each individual practitioner.

Teaching requires time. The time dedicated to preparation, delivery, and reflection quickly fills the hours. Kroner (2017) noted,

When an individual is trained on how to use the Educator Effectiveness System as a platform for growth, it may become very meaningful and influence every aspect of the teaching task. The Educator Effectiveness System is extensive and comprehensive. Therefore, teachers who have not been formally trained may feel overwhelmed and use it more as a check-off system than as a growth tool. (p. 97)

Time constraints are legitimate concerns in the context of EE; when the EE system was required, days and hours were not added to complement that additional requirement. Kroner notes training can make or break a given teacher's experience. Time passes, and that which was difficult and burdensome can become more manageable, or at least familiar, and what was the signature new challenge for a period of time—here EE—can get easier; however, new individuals join the field annually, and for them, EE is another item on a long list of overwhelming elements. Without the wherewithal to blend the EE system into practice, problems can mount (Kroner, 2017).

Accordingly, in terms of recommendations for successful utilization of the EE system, both time and training figure prominently. More time within the year is necessary, and critically a district must, as Kroner (2017) directs,

...comprehensively train teachers on how to use the Educator Effectiveness System as a complement to their own instructional practices, rather than as an extra task. If the evaluation system were taught to the point that it is recognized as a part of practice, there would be a true chance that teachers internalize the components and utilize it as a reflection tool to improve practice. (p. 100)

Jones (2017) conducted statewide research on teacher job satisfaction in the context of the Wisconsin EE System. Ultimately Jones' research included 8,654 teacher surveys, covering 641 schools and 182 school districts. Through the survey, Jones (2017) uncovered a number of findings, several of which prove instructive for schools leaders navigating the EE System. Time is a significant resource in education. Everything occurs on a calendar and a schedule. Jones notes, "...many teachers felt they did not have enough time/resources available to them to complete the steps of EE" (p. 6). Given the constraints of an already busy field, EE requires extensive attention to involved reflection and documentation requirements, for both the evaluator and the teachers being evaluated. Suddenly, in the pilot or implementation year, the requirements of EE arrived, and educators, as noted, suddenly needed to attend to these many requirements. These many hours needed to come from somewhere.

Alternatively, Jones' research notes that, "Relatively few teachers, however, reported engaging in collaborative activities with other teachers such as observing another teacher's classroom or going over student assessment data with other teachers" (p. 6). Meeting to review assessment data, or taking a valuable hour and spending it in the classroom of a colleague takes both preparation and time, two resources that EE

called upon, particularly in the first years an educator engages with the system.

Compounding frustrations, Jones goes on to note that,

...fewer teachers felt that the feedback they received was high quality (timely and specific), that they were provided the opportunity to use feedback to improve, and that they used their feedback by trying new instructional strategies, seeking professional development opportunities, or changing how they plan for instruction. (p. 6)

In sum, elements of Jones' research suggest that despite training and an extraordinary investment of time and effort, successful practices like collaboration or the use of effective feedback were rarely cited by teachers as byproducts or features of the EE system. And as Jones definitively notes, "The results of this analysis suggest that the impact of EE on job satisfaction is a function of how well it is implemented" (p. 9).

In subsequent research, Jones and Gilman (2018) conducted a statewide survey of principals on educator development, support, and retention. Principals' perceptions of the various topics were collected. The principal is often the sole evaluator in a given school, and schools can use the data collected from the EE system in a number of different ways. Jones and Gilman (2018) noted a continuum from teacher development to human resources decisions. Where a given school falls along that line matters. Jones and Gilman used the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction for contact information of Milwaukee area school principals. They invited hundreds of principals to participate, with nearly 900 surveys submitted. The Milwaukee Public School System is the largest system in Wisconsin. Jones and Gilman note that of the schools in the system included in their research, 188 are urban, 203 suburban, 316 rural, and 200 in towns, totaling 536

elementary, 134 middle, 209 high school, and 28 combined elementary/high schools (Jones & Gilman, 2018).

As often the sole or key evaluator, principal perceptions are an important part of the dynamic. In terms of findings, Jones and Gilman (2018) noted,

There was general agreement by principals that the EE process can lead to improved principal and teacher effectiveness. It is clear that principals understand that improvement occurs through the feedback they provide to teachers; there was a strong correlation between their perceptions of the impact of the teacher evaluation process and their feelings of *Feedback Efficacy*. (p. 11)

Belief that their efforts and influence can help facilitate improvement is an important baseline; EE contains a framework for these efforts. Further,

Most principals indicated that their school used teacher evaluations to inform a number of teacher development processes, such as planning individual professional development (82%) and supporting school-wide strategies for improvement (84%). The more that schools used teacher evaluations to inform teacher development efforts, the greater impact principals felt that teacher evaluations were having on teacher practice and student learning. (p. 16)

These principals were able to use EE to centralize key elements of school leadership, school improvement, and coaching and evaluation. All teachers are required to self-assess, set improvement goals for their students, and record a professional practice goal. All three of these facets can be aligned with both school and individual teacher improvement strategies or plans. Given that certification and calibration are requirements to use the EE system as an evaluator, it was unsurprising that three quarters of principals

both used EE to make retention decisions and reported having been trained in providing performance feedback. Notably, “Nearly all principals reported high levels of self-efficacy that the teacher evaluation process and their teacher feedback improves the quality of teaching and increases student learning in their school” (p. 16).

Jones and Gilman (2018) conclude by noting that districts can gain the most by considering implementing the following practices: (1) committing to training principals, (2) focusing some of that training on supporting principals in building their efficiency so they are not spending onerous amounts of time completing evaluations, (3) use the EE system to inform staff development decision (p. 17). The Jones and Gilman recommendations are inherently practical when thinking about how Wisconsin public schools are structured and funded; principals are the local implementers of statewide legislative aims.

In Bui’s (2019) research reviewing the Teacher Effectiveness Performance Evaluation System (TPES)--another term for the EE system--and Student Reading Achievement on Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR), Bui asserts that there is a priority placed on teacher quality and identifies teachers as holding a key role in student achievement. Then it points out that there is no commonly held and agreed upon way to measure the effectiveness of a teacher and connection to student achievement. Bui’s hypothesis to be tested was if a teacher receives high TPES scores, then that teacher’s students should post high STAR scores, is evaluated through a quantitative study, designed to discover if such a relationship does, in fact, exist. Bui used ANOVA and Pearson’s correlation in order to formulate inferences. Bui drew from 917 students in grades 2-8 from 52 classroom teachers and ultimately concludes that,

“...there is no statistically significant dependence of student STAR scores on their teachers’ TPES rating” (p. 133). In Bui’s analysis of possible correlation between the four different TPES ratings and student STAR performance, Bui found that, “...students of teachers scoring 4-distinguished perform better than their peers taught by teachers scoring 2-Developing or 3-Effective...,” (p. 141) but went on to say that the researcher likely needed more teachers in the sample in order to make generalizations to the broader population (p. 143). Bui (2019) writes, “...study could be constructed where the views and observations of teachers are considered over time and the actions and variables that could impact the student growth scores could be studied” (p. 171). This case study explores those very teacher views and observations.

Educator Effectiveness Comes to Large Regional School District

Like every other public school district in Wisconsin, the Wisconsin EE System came to the Large Regional School District (LRSD). At LRSD, the EE system was implemented for the 2014-2015 school year. Principals attended required calibration training and were ultimately certified as EE evaluators. As noted and recommended by Best and Winslow (2015), LRSD attempted to use EE to create more targeted professional development and facilitate a better structure for engaging with student data. LRSD worked to achieve their strategic initiatives with EE. LRSD tried to embed EE in all their work, to use it as a framework or skeletal system, upon which all other initiatives were connected, housed, or recorded. LRSD encompasses many schools, each with their own unique culture. A single elementary school was selected as the research site. The teachers who work at the sample elementary school have varied levels of time teaching. Some experienced the implementation year for EE. Others have recently joined the

profession and have no direct experience engaging with any system that has existed prior to their time teaching. The individual experiences of these persons contribute to the body of research on EE, particularly because the lived experiences of practitioners engaged in this work is sparse. This case study will be a contribution to the qualitative research body. This elementary school in LRSD, while a single site, experienced something contextually common in Wisconsin education. These teachers worked through this phenomenon, and their stories contain wisdom and reflection which could prove valuable for other practitioners in the field, for school leaders hoping to shape better outcomes for both staff and students, and for those tasked with building the next system—that if time tells us anything—is sure to come.

Summary and Forecast of Chapter Three

The previous review of literature represents the theoretical framework related to the research questions addressed by the study. This final chapter section summarizes prominent themes and findings within the framework. This summarization will serve as a base for comparison of study findings to relevant literature in Chapter Five. The Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System, when executed as envisioned and directed by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, touches nearly every element of a teacher's practice. In the early years of implementation, the process was all-consuming, cumbersome, daunting, new, and promising. This chapter discussed how the historic story of the accountability movement in the United States ushered in a new era for public education. It included an explanation of how practice implications for implementation of the changes ushered in by the accountability movement shaped the classrooms of today. It delineated the history in Wisconsin, first reviewing what directly preceded EE in

Wisconsin, teachers engaged in the Quality Education Initiative, where lessons were learned leading into the early years of EE. Then, as early as the 2013-2014 school year, some Wisconsin teachers began to pilot the EE system. By 2014-2015, every public school teacher in Wisconsin was working under the umbrella of EE. National research indicates a number of best practices for using systems of supervision and evaluation, and some of these best practices made their way into the design of the EE system. Research in Wisconsin, while not definitive, does exist; however, there is limited qualitative data sharing the stories of practitioners in the field who have lived through this era in Wisconsin public education. This study analyses, on a limited basis, an elementary school in LRSD which is filled with narratives, some with the potential to shape future policy decisions, in a challenging world, not yet fully imagined.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Rationale

Public Educators have been participating in the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Program, in some cases, since the program was piloted during the 2012-2013 school year. This case study employed a qualitative research approach to better understand the unique experience of educators working in this new landscape. One-on-one, in-depth interviews in a single elementary school was the data collection tool used to unearth prominent themes and universal experiences common among the participants, followed by a focus group discussion designed to look more deeply into the identified themes. Creswell (2014) notes that using the case study methodology approach is valuable when working to describe the experiences and common themes in groups of people within a “bounded system.” Here, that system is a group of teachers at a single school who experienced the EE System. A data collection survey was also used to discern background information on the teachers who participated in the in-depth interviews; the background information was not used in answering the research questions. In qualitative research, the researcher acting as data collector and analyst, works to understand the subject’s experience through an inductive process (Creswell, 2014). Using an interview protocol, in-depth, one-on-one interviews conducted with five participants were recorded and interviews were transcribed by Vanan Online Services. For consistency, the researcher created a codebook and descriptive codes, and manually coded the transcripts from the interviews. Responses were sorted using multiple rounds of manual sorting of the transcribed interview responses, which were then used to formulate the protocol for the focus group. Focus group responses were also recorded and coded in similar fashion. As the

researcher has considerable experience with both the EE System and school operations generally; coding was performed as Bazeley (2013) directs, in an evolving, iterative style, to ensure the data could be seen by the researcher in a new context.

As noted, five participants were selected to participate in this study. The total number of study participants fit within Creswell's (2014) case study sample size guidance. As Guest et al. (2013), notes, "The smaller the sample size, the more intense and deeper are the data being collected" (p. 81). Here, a small sample size, confined to a single elementary school proved both convenient for the researcher and the participants and allowed for significant depth of experience. Finally, as Yin (2018) cautions, this group is not a sample population, and results are not to be more broadly transferable. However, while not transferable to the population larger than the group, this case study proved an illustrative experience gathering endeavor that may be useful feedback for further studies.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this single-site case study was to address a critical element in the life cycle of the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System, the experience of the educators participating in that system. There have been prior iterations of supervision and evaluation systems in Wisconsin, and certainly there will be subsequent iterations; here are collected experiences from this iteration. The intent of this case study is to discover how teachers perceive the effect of engaging with the EE System on both their professional development during the time of engagement with the EE System and their perception of student outcomes during that same duration. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How do teachers describe their experience with the EE process?
2. How do teachers describe their experience with both the Student Learning Objective and Professional Practice Goal elements of the EE process?
3. How has participation in the EE process impacted teacher professional development?
4. How do teachers describe the learning outcomes for their students as affected by their participation in the EE process?

Research Approach

Nature of the Methodology

According to Yin (2018) and Creswell (2014), case study is used when other tools like a survey, for example, will prove insufficient in attempting to learn about and understand situational details and experiences beyond the story a researcher could tell using statistics. Yin (2018) shares that a defined number of circumstances warrant a case study, notably when a “How” research question is being asked and when the event being studied is contemporary. All four of the key research questions guiding this study are “how” questions. Therefore, case study methodology is well suited when attempting to understand the experience of a group of teachers, working at a single research site, where the researcher has no control over any event associated with each teachers’ experience. Common themes and unique or universal experiences can and do flow from the case study methodology.

This research helps move beyond quantitative measures through unearthing the unique experiences of the participants. There are literally thousands of Wisconsin public school teachers who have experience with the EE System from pilot to present. Quantitative measures, however, may not tell the story of how these people felt, or how

they perceived their impact on students or their personal experience. These stories, and these other sources of data, help us probe the complexity of this major legislative initiative. Creswell (2014) tells us that qualitative research helps give voice to complex issues, which was the precise aim of this research.

The frame for this research employs the approach detailed by Plano Clark and Creswell (2015), "...researchers select participants, collect qualitative data, analyze the data to develop themes as results, and discuss general conclusions about the themes..." (p. 285). The topic has affected and continues to affect thousands of teachers and educational professionals and their students. There are as many stories of experiences as there are affected individuals. Here collected are a few of those stories, and perhaps, while not universally applicable, those stories may prove relevant to decision makers and implementers alike.

Appropriateness of Methodology to the Research

In the search for data relevant to the research questions, this research used a case study methodology. This research is firmly situated within the field of education, and occurred at a single elementary school during a single school term. Time-bound case studies occurring at a single site are common in the field of education (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2018). Case studies are a tested way to review issues and processes, and gain deeper understanding. As Merriam (1988) notes, "...case study research, and in particular qualitative case study, is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena" (p. 2). Circumstances such as the prescribed calendar of the school year and the life cycle of both a career and the EE System dictated the method of research. There are clear qualities of case study research; Creswell (2014) notes that interviews and subsequent analysis which uncover themes are some of those qualities.

Interviews allowed the participants the opportunity to detail changes in their professional development which may have been impacted—and, how learning outcomes for their students may have been affected through the use of the EE System.

Research Plan

Selecting a location and participants for a case study are important decisions for a variety of reasons. Data was collected from personal interviews and a focus group. The researcher performed all interviews and the focus group himself. An outside service provider Vanan Online Services, transcribed the results of the interviews and the focus group; they signed a confidentiality agreement in order to guarantee the safety and fidelity of the data. The researcher coded the data himself. This research utilized a single site, and focused on a relatively small number of participants, within the guidance of Plano Clark and Creswell (2015), noting that a small sample size is acceptable when studying individual experiences and observing a unique phenomenon.

Site

In many ways, the elementary school selected for this single-site case study is substantially similar to schools throughout the state in terms of how and when the EE system was implemented. Large Regional School District (LRSD), and specifically, Regional Elementary School did not participate in the state-wide pilot and implemented the EE system for the 2014-2015 school year—the required first year of state-wide participation. Principals attended required calibration training and were ultimately certified as EE evaluators. School leaders, in ways not altogether unique to LRSD, worked to align the requirements of the EE System, with elements of the district’s strategic plan, and the school’s school improvement plan. Both a strategic plan and a school improvement plan can be called many things, but elementally, they are nearly

ubiquitous features of schools and school systems. As is common in schools throughout the state, the teachers who work at the elementary school have varied levels of time teaching. Some experienced the implementation year for EE. Others have recently joined the profession and have no direct experience engaging with any system that has existed prior to their time teaching. Regional Elementary School, like all schools, has its own school culture—how people engage with one another, how they problem-solve or coalesce around an issue. Culture is unique and can play a role in how any initiative, large or small, affects a system.

Sample

Participants from a single school within a single district helped assure consistent experiences among the sample participants. The district and the school provide onboarding and professional development training throughout the career, and the EE System has played a role in those supportive efforts since implementation. A fundamental reason for using a single site was that, at the end of the day, this study was about the experiences of the individual participants, not about differing implementation and integration processes between districts and schools across Wisconsin.

Initial contact was made with the elementary school's principal, followed by contact with the District Administrator. Next, the entire staff was asked to participate in this research. Despite soliciting participation from the entire staff, five participants consented to engage in the case study. No interested individuals were turned away. A basic demographic and professional participant profile was collected. Years of experience and time spent at the elementary school and within the district were most relevant among the collected information. Each participant in the study also signed an informed consent form.

Data Collection

Data for this case study was collected during the late spring of 2023. Institutional Review Board approval was sought and obtained in the early spring of 2023. Following Institutional Review Board approval, site approvals through both the school and district were achieved. Immediately thereafter, participant contacts were made. A broad solicitation of the entire school staff returned five interested participants. Each participant received details regarding the methodology and timeline for the study, followed by the participant demographic and professional profile document (see Appendix A).

One interview was conducted with each research participant (Appendix B) in the late spring of 2023. The interview transcript of their own individual interview was shared with each participant via e-mail for review and member checking, a process where the participants can affirm, elect to remove, or correct any statements they made during the interview process. Each participant was given a period of several days to share any corrections, then asked to affirm again prior to the focus group whether they had any corrections they would like to make. In a single instance, a participant corrected a mis-transcribed former school district where she had been employed. No other corrections were noted or made. The time between the interview and the focus group provided an opportunity for participant reflection between sessions. The interview focused on how each participant perceived interacting with the system itself, the technical elements, and the role the EE System played in their professional development over time. Next, participants were asked questions largely focused on perceived student outcomes in relation to use of the EE System. Once interviews were completed, a focus group was

conducted with all participants in the study. The data was transcribed by Vanan Online Services, then manually coded by the researcher.

Interview Process

In-depth one-on-one interviews are involved and can be extraordinary sources of insight into an individual's experience with a given phenomenon. Interview question topics were directly related to either an individual research subject's personal experience with EE at their current or former school, the technical elements of EE, such as the Student Learning Objective, goal setting process, i.e., the Professional Practice Goal, or the perceived impact on students. Interviews are a fairly common source of data when one is trying to unearth perspectives in the education setting (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015; Yin, 2018). Each participant was informed, as noted by Plano Clark & Creswell (2015), of the reason for the research, the sort of questions asked, and that a recording would be made. Interviews were conducted in a school office conference room at Regional Elementary School. This setting was selected so participants would not be inconvenienced by travel or time concerns. The setting was also familiar and comfortable. In-depth one-on-one interviews are clearly, one-on-one, but also open-ended, probing at times, and conversational (Guest et al., 2013). Additionally, the researcher used probes, often asking the participant a probing question following an initial answer, to the effect of, "...could you share an example?" Or a request to say more or elaborate. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and all five interviews were conducted back-to-back.

Focus Group Process

A focus group, following individual in-depth one-on-one interviews, was conducted with all interview participants together, in order to better understand the

research subjects collective responses. In the late spring of 2023, the research participants came together, and the researcher solicited further information regarding their experiences with the EE system. The researcher conducted the focus group, and it lasted approximately one hour. All five individual interview research subjects participated in the focus group. The five teachers and the researcher sat at the Regional Elementary School main office conference room table. The questions raised by the researcher were developed following the interviews and focused on themes identified from those interviews. The question protocol (Appendix C) for the focus group was designed to solicit further reflection and discussion based on individual themes. Participants were encouraged to be open and share their experiences without moving too far afield from the question protocol. When one subject began a response to a focus group question, after they finished the researcher paused, and a natural pattern emerged, where in the majority of instances, each participant, in turn, added their perspective. Conversation was robust and spirited at times. Participants affirmed one another with nodding or words of affirmation or respectfully noted they had a different experience. The interview protocol was strictly adhered to in order to prevent moving astray from the research questions. There were no notable shocking or surprising responses; the majority of responses affirmed the descriptions and accounts detailed in the individual interviews. All participants were aware that the focus group was being recorded indentially to the individual interview, with both a dedicated digital recorder and a back-up. The recording was transcribed by Vanan Online Services. The transcript was shared with all participants of the focus group for review and member checking. Each participant was

given a specific deadline to submit any corrections. All participants were reminded of the deadline via email. No corrections were requested.

Nature of Interviews and Focus Group

This case study used in-depth, one-on-one interviews as the key source of data. The research questions which are the focus of this case study are highly individual; the researcher was attempting to understand individual experiences. Plano Clark and Creswell (2015) note, “One-on-one interviews are ideal for studies that include participants who are articulate, who can share ideas comfortably, and who are not hesitant to speak. They are the best way to learn in depth about the perceptions and experiences of single individuals” (p. 340). Here the individuals appeared very comfortable with one another, and empathized with each other throughout the process. Although time consuming, without the use of in-depth, one-on-one interviews, the depth of data sought would have remained unattainable. The interview focused on the use of the EE system, and the associated professional development—the more technical features of the system, coupled with the individual experience interacting with those systems. Next, followed questions focused on the participant’s perceived associated student outcomes—outcome focused.

The focus group allowed the participants to come together, to reflect upon of one another’s experiences. A focus group following all interviews is not an uncommon facet to educational research, or case study research generally. Plano Clark and Creswell (2015) share, “Focus groups are a good type of interview when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information and when interviewees are similar to and cooperative with each other” (p. 339). Here, a few simple, short questions were asked of all participants, and everyone was able to participate. This offered the

opportunity to elaborate on a shared experience, while the individual, one-on-one, in-depth interviews allowed for substantial sharing of an individual nature.

Appropriateness of the Technique

This research was centered on the experience of individuals. Teaching is a people profession, a helping profession, and is often uniquely a key part of how a person who teaches describes themselves; they may say, “I am a teacher,” as opposed to “I teach.” Here, in this qualitative case study, the participants were not represented as numbers, so to speak, they were asked to share their experiences, and their stories were recorded and reported. Interview environments were cooperative, warm and respectful, which in turn, allowed for open and honest responses. The one-on-one, semi-structured interviews had enough structure to remain on topic but were not so structured that the researcher was unable to capture the authentic experience of the individual participants. Probing allowed and permitted the researcher to go deeper into the teacher’s individual experiences moving beyond the pure facts of an individual’s experience and approach their real authentic experience and perceptions. When seeking to learn how individual teachers experienced the EE System, in-depth, one-on-one interviews were the best source of data. Following those interviews, a focus group served to more deeply explore the depth of the shared and individual experiences of the participants.

Data Analysis

Following a literature review, in-depth one-on-one interviews, followed by a focus group, took place. Every interview was recorded, then professionally transcribed, following Bazeley’s (2013) directive to transcribe in order to remain true to the conversation. After transcription, the researcher cross checked the transcripts with his notes from the interview sessions to ensure nothing was missed. The reviewed transcripts

were shared with the participants for member checking. As noted above, transcription occurred immediately following the interview and focus group, using Vanan Online Services. Verbatim transcripts were sent to participants immediately thereafter, with a deadline for return, and asked to check for factual accuracy. Again, only one technical correction was made between both the interviews and the focus group. The research participant who made the correction, sent the correction via email to the researcher prior to the focus group. Email correspondence was saved with all original transcripts. The researcher also drafted short summaries of each interview and the focus group where he recorded his main impressions of the experience. Following transcription of the interviews, extensive review and coding took place. The same process took place again following the focus group. One of the approved theoretical frameworks of the Wisconsin EE System, and the framework utilized by the host research site, the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching (2013), was used to aide in the development of descriptive codes, contained within a codebook. The organization of the data was critical to addressing the research questions.

Transcribe and Code

Transcription and coding was critical to the identification of themes and patterns (Bazeley, 2013). A codebook was developed for consistency and credibility, and noted each code used in the analysis of the transcribed interviews. Viewing the transcribed data through the theoretical framework of Danielson allowed for considerable organization and alignment with the research questions. The first iteration of this coding process was performed by highlighting passages from transcribed interviews. This allowed for the development of initial coding categories falling within the theoretical framework. These coding categories when viewed through the theoretical framework, subsumed much of

what the framework designers, and subsequently policy makers in the state of Wisconsin, view as the essential elements of being a teacher. Essentially, the teaching standards identified in the framework served as coding guideposts. Coding was performed by manually sorting interview subject statements, which aided in the sorting and tracking of the data. As Bazeley (2013) directs, coding was performed until a point of granular, saturated understanding was reached. The division of data—the highlighting and bucketing of responses—followed the Rubin and Rubin (2012) directive to focus on examples, events, and concepts. Through the coding process, all the participants' answers were sorted based upon the conceptual framework, and each area was applied to the aligned research question. The data could then be applied to each unique, but related facet within the case study. That sorting eventually allowed for the narratives to coalesce around themes addressing each of the four research questions.

Role of the Researcher

Qualifications

The researcher of this study is currently a Wisconsin Superintendent. Prior to the role of Superintendent, the researcher was Assistant Superintendent in the same district, where the role of Effectiveness Project Implementation Coach was a notable responsibility. Effectiveness Project Implementation Coach was and remains a state required role for public schools in the state of Wisconsin; designees are charged with the local support and management of the EE System. The researcher was a contributor to regional, Southeastern Wisconsin, collaboration between Effectiveness Project Implementation Coaches in neighboring school districts and attended trainings provided by both the regional area Cooperative Educational Service Agency and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. As Effectiveness Project Implementation Coach, and

Assistant Superintendent, the researcher annually managed the EE system for the district, and provided training for principals, who in turn supported implementation by teachers in every classroom in the district.

Prior to occupying the role of Effectiveness Project Implementation Coach, the researcher was a school administrator, responsible for the coaching and evaluation of over 30 teachers on an annual basis, including during the state of Wisconsin's pilot and implementation years of the EE system. The researcher holds master's degrees in education and administrative leadership, and a law degree. The researcher is currently enrolled in the doctoral program in Educational Policy and Leadership at Marquette University.

The researcher conducted all interviews and the focus group; objectivity and strict adherence to the question protocol was maintained throughout the data collection process. Participants were aware that the researcher was a superintendent in another southeastern Wisconsin school district. Participants were reminded that their responses would be confidential, and that their participation was approved and endorsed by their district. Member checking—including removing any response participants wanted—was, as noted above, also a part of the process. Again, only a single technical correction was made by a sole participant. The researcher's temperament was welcoming and professional throughout the interview and focus group process.

Biases

According to Merriam (1988), understanding and accounting for personal bias, and how any personal bias could influence a given study, is of great importance. As an educational professional, formerly with a responsibility directly aligned with the research topic, the researcher could relate to and understand the feelings expressed by the

individual research topic study membership. Thus an objective interview protocol was developed from the literature review and was strictly followed. The researcher refrained from sharing any of his personal feelings of experiences regarding use of the EE system or any potential shortcoming or needed or unneeded future iterations. The participant interviews were transcribed and provided to each participant for member checking. Data was exhaustively coded to strengthen validity as well. These strategies were employed to exclude any researcher bias from the study.

Limitations

The purpose of this study was to explore the experience and perceived outcomes of the teachers who participated in the study. The study is limited to the responses collected from the participants, accordingly, broad generalizations cannot be drawn from the responses of the finite pool of participants. Given this case study focused on the experience of five participants, broad generalizations are not appropriate and indeed limit the depth and breadth of the findings. Yin (2018) counsels new learnings can be generalized contextually. This study delves into the experiences of the teacher participants at a single site, engaging in specific work. The findings in this study could be context-specific, given the unique culture, policies, and practice of Regional Elementary School. There are a great many teachers in this state, and leaders charged with overarching, related responsibilities within a substantially similar context. However, to a degree, insights, observations, and perhaps even recommendations may prove relevant, even helpful. These generalized findings, however, may not apply to other teachers across the state, or even other teachers in adjacent classrooms in the same school. Self-report bias should also be considered; the giving of expected answers by

research subjects was an initial consideration. However, through anonymity of research subjects, and adherence to the questioning protocols, self-report bias was sought to be avoided, and given the ample positive and critical data, was avoided. It is also important to note that this case study focused on teachers, not counselors, administrators, or any other employee designation potentially covered by the Wisconsin EE System. Further the Danielson Framework for Teaching (2013) has unique standards and indicators that, while similar to the Stronge Framework for Effective Teaching (2013), are not identical. Analysis using the Danielson Framework (2013) guided the analysis of this case study, and, therefore, the findings may not necessarily align with the evaluation framework of other systems. Additionally, there is acceptable variance in which of the EE System functionalities are selected by each school and district. For example, there are a maximum number of years a teacher can teach before they are required to receive a summative evaluation, but a district could feasibly perform a summative evaluation each year. The same is true of any number of other unique elements. This case study may not encompass all possible tools or features within the EE System. This case study and the findings therein are what was observed at the research site and confined to the research site's practices.

Delimitations

This is a case study of a limited pool of participants, analyzed using the Danielson Framework (2013). There are many educational professionals who touch the EE System. There are required participants and permissive participants. Administrators may be both evaluator and evaluated using the EE System. Districts differ in the use of the EE system itself. There are tools supplied through the platform that are not required by statute. For example, participant observation minimums are stipulated, but maximums are not. The

researcher chose to limit this study to teachers—not counselors, not administrators—teachers. The research site was selected because of accessibility, not any other notable factor.

Responsibilities

A review of the literature gave rise to research questions. Those questions led to the development of interview questions. After transcription, themes were identified and subsequent questions developed for use in the focus group. The researcher conducted both the interviews and the focus group. The recordings of both the interviews and the focus group were transcribed by Vanan Online Services. Coding and data analysis were conducted by the researcher. Each research subject was assigned a numeric code, which served as their pseudonym.

Timeline

Following approval from the Institutional Review Board at Cardinal Stritch University, and permission being granted at the host school and district level, this research was conducted during the spring of 2023. Data analysis and subsequent conclusions were drafted immediately thereafter concluding in fall for 2023.

Forecast Chapter Four

The qualitative methodology of this case study is outlined in Chapter Three above. Included therein is a rationale for the research itself, detail surrounding the single site of the research, descriptions of the data collection process—both the individual interviews and the subsequent focus group—and, ultimately, the coding process for data analysis. In Chapter Four, you see the product of the research design, the research results. Findings based upon the interviews and the focus group are outlined. In

conclusion, this summary relays findings based on the data, and answers to the questions guiding this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH RESULTS

Presentation of Approach

The purpose of this case study was to explore the individual experiences of teachers who have participated in the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System throughout their years of service in education. Interview questions regarding both the technical elements of the system, the nexus to professional development, and perceived effects on student outcomes were asked and answered. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do teachers describe their experience with the EE process?
2. How do teachers describe their experience with both the Student Learning Objective and Professional Practice Goal elements of the EE process?
3. How has participation in the EE process impacted teacher professional development?
4. How do teachers describe the learning outcomes for their students as affected by their participation in the EE process?

Case study methodology, employing the qualitative data collection tools of semi-structured one-on-one interviews, followed by a focus group were used to address the research question. The study also included a literature review of related research and theory in the areas of the study of professionalism and professional development, lessons from earlier iterations of the state of Wisconsin's model for supervision and evaluation, teacher independence, and the aims of the model immediately preceding the EE system along with the state of Wisconsin's own process improvements and recommendations.

This chapter presents a summary of data generated through an individual

interview and a focus group conducted with five participants. All participants are colleagues from a single elementary school situated in a large regional school district. The entire staff was invited to participate, and five individuals were able to commit to participating in this single site case study. The data collected from the interviews and focus group reveal that shared experiences, coalescing into themes, were evident in the professional experiences of all participants; while each described their own path, there is shared experience.

The data from the interview and focus group were recorded and professionally transcribed. Following transcription and utilizing the Danielson Framework as a guidepost, descriptive coding was conducted manually. As instructed by Plano Clark and Creswell (2015), the researcher utilized a rigorous and thoughtful process in order to unearth detailed descriptions from research participants in a way that was designed to uncover patterns or phenomena from the accounts provided by participants. The data reflect that this sweeping state-wide mandate has changed how serving as a professional educator has changed for the participants who experienced EE. Notable observations are shared in relation to both perceived professional development experiences and student outcomes. Some of the data noted here align with the espoused aims of the EE system.

Participants

The effort to achieve data saturation was accomplished with five participants from a single site, an elementary school situated in a large regional school district. According to Guest et al. (2013), "The smaller the sample size, the more intense and deeper are the data being collected" (p. 81). The participants ranged in years of experience from four years to 35 years; one participant shared that she was in her final year and would be retiring at the conclusion of the 2023-2024 school term (Sandy, personal communication,

May 10, 2023). Participants taught a variety of assignments in their collective years at the elementary level, nearly all at the elementary research site; one participant had also served as a special education teacher. Table 1 offers a succinct participant profile with a notable key quote shared by the individual research participant. The quote was selected because it captured an overarching sentiment shared by the individual directly related to the research question of how did the individual perceive their experience in interacting with the EE system from either or both a professional development or student learning perspective. Pseudonyms were used for each participant.

Table 1

Teacher Profile

Teacher Pseudonym	Code & Years of Experience	Summary Quote
Kate	Student Outcomes Four years of total experience.	“...I think that students have had a very great outcome with it. I think that students with the SLO, especially, they're getting the extra group time, you're really focusing in on their data. You're really looking at them to make their scores and make them jump. And it kind of as a teacher, when you're so overwhelmed with everything throughout the day, you can have that time with them and seeing that growth is very, very special. So they're getting more of group time, more of everything, and it keeps you as a teacher, especially with everything going on throughout the day, it keeps you grounded into knowing what that goal was and keeping yourself and your students on track to achieve that goal.” (Kate, personal communication, May 10, 2023)
Sandy	Professional Development Twenty-five years of total experience.	“I guess being in education for so long, I just keep seeing the pendulum go this way, this way, and we're always like, okay, what's it going to be now? What are they going to throw at us now? And especially elementary level, I feel like we just roll with it. It is what it is. Let's just keep rolling to a fault sometimes, because I feel like we sometimes feel powerless to say, what do we need to make things better?” (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)
Naomi	Student Outcomes Twenty-three years of total experience, four in special education.	“...from that aspect, the kids benefit. They benefit in the part that we are pushing them forward. And force is not the right word, but it allows for the structure in which we are going to make sure that they are growing. It also allows for us as teachers to look at different ways to approach stuff. So I'm going to go back to the special ed aspect for a second, I can really hone in on-- right this minute, I'm really honing in on fluency because that's where my kids are struggling even with their comprehension is fluency.” (Naomi, personal communication, May 10, 2023)
Jessica	Professional Development	“...when you look at the kids that we're targeting, a lot of times you go in thinking this is the reason

Teacher Pseudonym	Code & Years of Experience	Summary Quote
	Thirty-five years of total experience including service as a math interventionist and working in a Title 1 role.	why they're struggling. And you've picked these kids so early in the year. As you get to know them, you start to find, like, that isn't their challenge. Like there's much more to this that I need to work on this and this before I can even address this. So I think sometimes it's just hard early in the year to really know what it is that kid needs. And so that's a challenge for me with that. (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023)
Cathy	Student Outcomes Twenty-five years of total experience.	“I do like tracking data and checking on it for student growth, so that was never an issue. So when you set the smart goal for the kids and to see what you wanted them to do or how you wanted to track it, that's been nice, something that you were doing before, but maybe not so much in a formalized fashion. (Cathy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Teacher participants in the case study gave accounts reflecting a shared journey. They noted either their onboarding or rollout experiences—always reviewing or returning to the Danielson Model’s Four Domains—and navigating the local training decisions. Two participants shared their experience in a prior district and compared and contrasted their experience there with their local experience, illustrating just how different experiences can feel from district to district. Nearly every participant recounted observations regarding their experiences with evaluators. All participants noted concerns that arose at various stages from their first learnings around the EE system to present day. Those concerns ranged from ambiguity with the platform itself to the sheer volume to work experienced as a result on participation in the EE system. Negative and positive experiences with various facets of the system were noted in detail. And finally, each

participant had thoughts on needs and recommendations for the EE system going forward.

Findings Related of the Research Questions

The research site utilized the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching (2013), which the researcher used as a guiding theoretical framework from which to develop the interview protocol and data analysis. The use of the Danielson Framework was critical to initially organizing the eight question interview protocol. Probes were also utilized. Permission was sought and granted for all interview subject interviews to be recorded. Each was then professionally transcribed by Vanan Online Services, remaining true to Bazeley's (2013) directive to transcribe in order to remain true to the conversation. Copies of transcripts were then sent to each interview subject for member checking. One participant noted a correction—a transcription error related to the name of a prior school district where she had once worked. Following the initial interview of each interview subject, a focus group was conducted with all five participants. Again the Danielson Framework served as the root of the focus group questions, built upon by the answers given by research participants in their prior individual interviews, in order to draft the nine question protocol used in the focus group. Responses were again professionally transcribed and sent to participants for member checking. No corrections, modifications or edits of any kind were necessary.

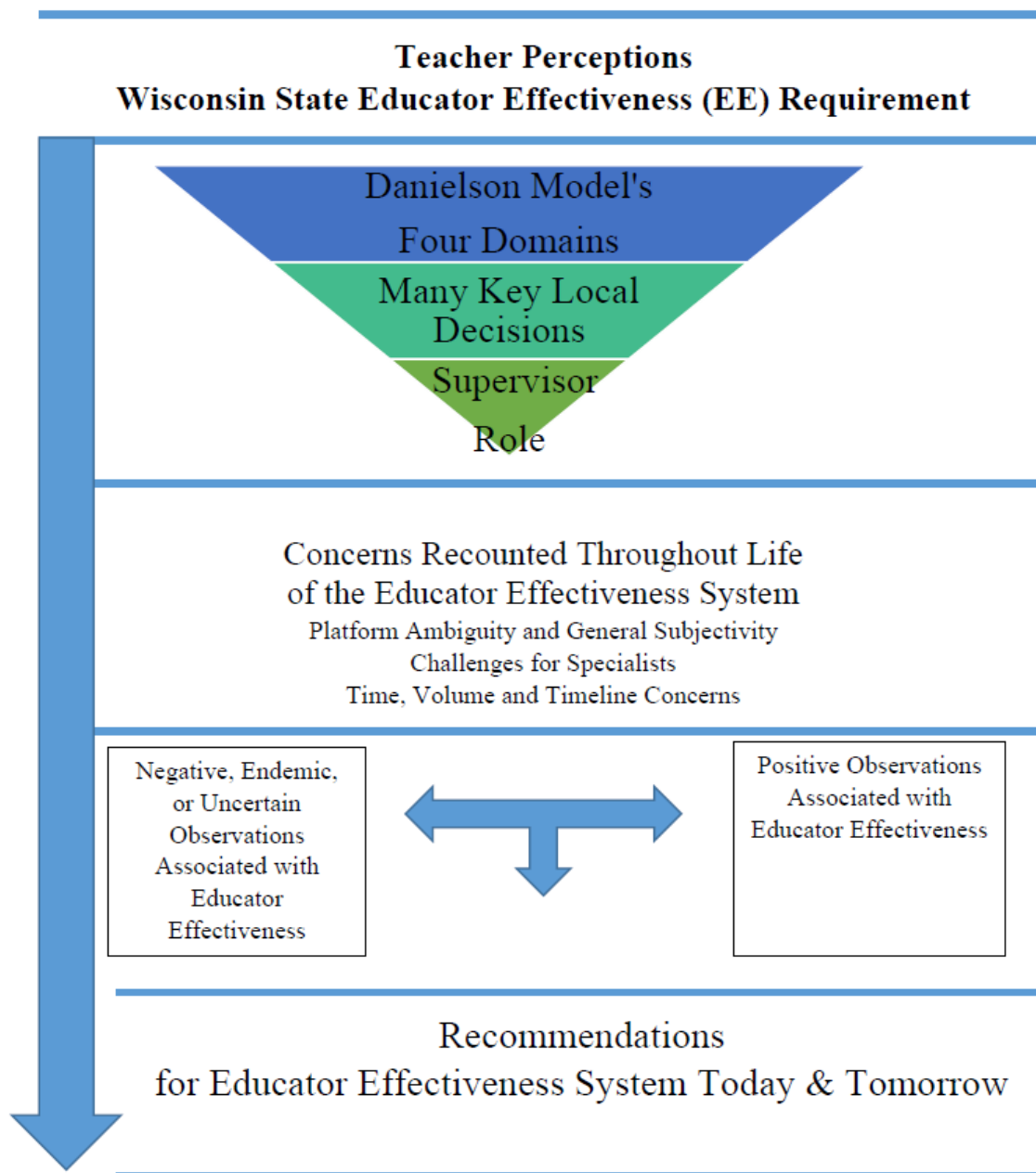
Following both the individual interview and the focus group, exhaustive coding took place. As Bazeley (2013) pointed out, the decision to transcribe and code proved critical in the identification of themes and patterns. Without the transcript, the manual process of coding would have proved inordinately burdensome and inefficient. A code

book was created from the transcripts for both credibility and consistency; nearly every line of dialogue from both the interview and the focus group resulted in a descriptive code in the codebook. In all iterations the process of coding was performed manually; the researcher highlighted passages from interview transcripts, physically separated those highlighted passages from the transcript, and sorted them in initial and subsequent rounds of coding. Round after round of coding iterations were necessary to determine themes or patterns codes in the data. Ten pattern codes were reduced to four key themes after several rounds of, "...playing with the data and searching for promising patterns, insights, or concepts" (Yin, 2018, p. 143). The Danielson theoretical framework proved critical in initial phases of coding, helping the researcher view what the framers viewed as the essential elements of teaching, then sorting based on interview subject reactions to questions derived from those aims.

Review and analysis of the participant's responses resulted in data responsive to the research question and four sub questions. The four key themes found in the data were:

1. A nexus of elements of the Danielson Model's Four Domains, key decisions made locally, and the role of the supervisor.
2. Concerns recounted throughout the life of the Educator Effectiveness System.
3. Negative, endemic, uncertain, and positive observations associated with Educator Effectiveness throughout the life of the system.
4. Needs and recommendations for the Educator Effectiveness System today and tomorrow.

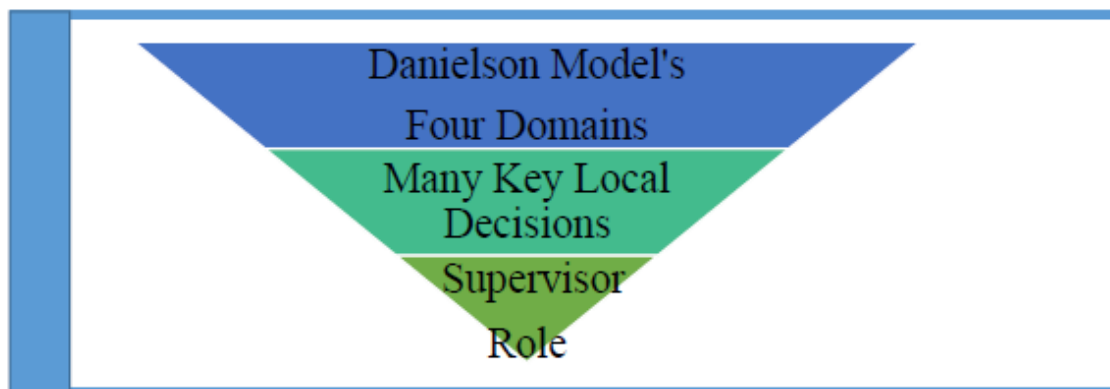
Figure 1

Research Findings

Each of these themes will be reviewed in the pages to follow.

Figure 2

Theme One: A Nexus of Elements of the Danielson Model's Four Domains, Many Key Local Decisions, and the Supervisor Role



A Nexus of Elements of the Danielson Model's Four Domains, Key Decisions Made Locally, and the Role of the Supervisor

After numerous rounds of reading through participant responses, and coding the subsequently developed descriptive codes, an initial theme resembling the funnel graphic above was developed. The Danielson Framework for Teaching (2013) breaks the art and science of teaching down into elements and components organized around four domains: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibility. Any remark made by a teacher participating in this research that implicated an element of the four domains was noted here. The Danielson Framework was atop two other major related sub-themes in this finding the many key local decisions that had to be made in schools and districts, and the supervisor role, the key individual in supporting teachers in the carrying out of the local decisions rooted in the Danielson Framework.

Danielson Model's Four Domains

When asked about experience with the EE System, Cathy noted a common experience reiterated by nearly every participant:

...you had to go through this big reflective process and answer all these questions...and reflect on what you felt or what part of the Danielson model you wanted to grow in, and then set your goal for that. So we would do that, and then again, you would do your work throughout the course of the year, but it was always by the end that you were expected to be like, you've got it. That's it.

(Cathy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

The Danielson Framework's four domains serve as the scaffolding of those teacher reflections, which in turn lead to the development of goals and targets, which are time-bound to the year. One may note that in the conclusion of Cathy's remark the tension around the time bound nature of the process. This is consistent in the data. Kate elaborated on the shape the goal development process takes during the school year, marked by Danielson's four domains:

...and most of that work is reflecting on data. We have data walls throughout the whole school, so we have a shared drive with every grade level's data that you'll plug in—math scores, reading scores—and you see the improvement throughout. And then it's really helpful for the upcoming school year when you can see your future students' data and where they're at with everything. (Kate, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Kate's reflection above notes key elements from the Danielson Framework, most evidently, the focus on planning and preparation. Uniquely, Regional Elementary School also, "...sort of found is if it's some way connected to our school growth, it's just a lot, it

makes sense to do that because you're kind of combining everything rather than having these very separate” (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023). Within the context of these practices and within the Danielson Framework, Regional Elementary School also employed additional practices, which, while subsumed by the Danielson Framework, do not exist expressly to address requirements in EE. For example, Jessica recounts intervention practices employed at Regional Elementary School:

We also have a committee, the MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports) committee, where we look at that. So it's the reading specialist, it's me, sometimes speech and language, the school psychologist, and the impact coach who does a lot of math, so we are continually tracking and seeing, okay, which of these kids are on our radar? What kind of intervention are they getting? What kind of help are they getting? How's it going? Do we need to change something, add something, kind of a thing? (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Jessica outlines key features of intervention, which can be noted in EE, but also in other settings within school teams, perhaps discussed during team meetings, Professional Learning Committee meetings, or any host of other settings where staff come together to review student performance data. Many staff members tailor goals within EE in the following way:

Okay, so my PPG Plus this year is to get all students or 76% of students on grade level for reading. And that's with decoding and comprehension, which ties into our school improvement plan. Right now, we're at about 75%, so we need one more student right now to get to grade level, and that one student is one reading level away from getting there. So I have very, very, very high hopes that we're

going to get there by the end of the year. So that's a success and that, when you see that, that makes you feel really good as a teacher. (Kate, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

EE provides a physical location, digitally, where such assessment data and intervention data are kept. Regional Elementary School also maintains these data separately in a shared drive; some staff members link the drive as their EE data used to showcase outcomes. Cathy notes how the practice of checking for growth existed before and during the era of EE:

I do like tracking data and checking on it for student growth, so that was never an issue. So when you set the smart goal for the kids and to see what you wanted them to do or how you wanted to track it, that's been nice, something that you were doing before, but maybe not so much in a formalized fashion. (Cathy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Many Key Local Decisions

The EE system has a number of statutory requirements, mainly associated with the frequency of evaluation; however, within the system, there is flexibility for schools and districts to make local choices that affect the day to day experience of those required to participate, like how and when teams come together around data, or how they set goals alone, or together. Beyond noting how Regional Elementary School addresses requirements in EE, Kate, in particular, because of her time elsewhere, articulated how different experiences can be from district to district:

And then my third year teaching, I came to [regional school district], and I got a new experience of this because the PPG and the SLO here are combined into the

PPG Plus, which I think that's where most schools are heading toward now. So it was very cool to get to see both of them collide, because in [another large regional school district], my PPG and my SLO was completely separate. They had nothing to do with each other. (Kate, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Districts must engage in the EE System or a DPI approved variation. Teachers must be evaluated, but in how these requirements are addressed, stories of variation were shared by each participant who experienced the EE System anywhere else. Sandy shared:

So I would say, 11 years ago, right before I left was when I felt like it was starting to happen. And I remember in a prior district, we got the whole packet of all of the domains, and we were to write something for each one, evidence for every single domain, which took me hours. So I remember being very overwhelmed. It was the end of the year, and I thought, oh my God, what the heck is going on here? And that did not come with a whole lot of instruction. It was just, this is what we're doing, fill it out, and provide evidence, and that was it. (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Sandy went on to share that:

When [Regional School District] just began rolling it out, they rolled it out a lot slower. We did beginning of the year PD about it. We did mid-year, end of the year, so they didn't roll it out that year then. I mean, it was kind of like, we're going to dabble in this. This is what they're heading to on PD is they focused on each domain. So it wasn't just being thrown at us, which I appreciated because I came from something so different. And I thought, okay. And also I thought, I'm in the right district now. (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

As time passed and familiarity increased, and teachers like Cathy joined the staff, requirements shifted locally; “So when it first started, I was kind of past the point where you had to do, like, tons and tons and tons of different stuff” (Cathy, personal communication, May 10, 2023). This was a welcome change acknowledged by every participant. As a school, choices like collaboratively working together on nearly every aspect of EE were made. Cathy shared how the process of aligning efforts came together:

We are encouraged, and not like with a forceful hand encouraged kind of thing, but to, if possible, tie our PPG Pluses into school improvement with the whole thought process, like work smarter, not harder kind of thing, because there is a lot of work that we have to do with the school improvement. (Cathy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

The central concept linking the alignment efforts together was student outcomes, through the act of data sharing. Kate observes how these efforts around alignment are designed to improve student outcomes:

...we have a school improvement plan every year. So last year we focused on improving our phonics, and then this year is improving our reading comprehension, which will ultimately raise our reading scores. So we meet every couple of weeks to talk about that. (Kate, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Kate went on to share how the local effort around alignment works with multiple team members across the District:

And then weekly we have two PLC meetings a week. So that's when we talk with our grade level and our higher ups in the school, our administrators there, impact coach, reading specialist, sometimes the ELL teacher is there to help out. And

we'll look at data regarding our school improvement plan and come up with ways that we can assist students and help with our own instruction. (Kate, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Supervisor Role

While EE requirements exist, local districts and schools decide how these requirements are ultimately experienced by the participants. Every individual teacher is assigned an evaluator in the EE system, typically the school principal. Every participant in this case study made note of the importance of this relationship. Each noted that the evaluator can make all the difference in how a teacher experiences the imposed requirements of EE. Bridging the gap between district and building alignment efforts, and the role of the supervisor, Kate noted, "...it's also important that we also meet with our team and our admin to discuss doing this. And meeting with a team and your admin comes with a lot of different perspectives, and it helps a lot with having support" (Kate, personal communication, May 10, 2023). Collaboration links and bridges the administration and the staff team together here at Regional Elementary School.

Alignment efforts, however, did not solve all concerns, Sandy shared:

I just felt with it the whole time there was never concrete answers. And even within our district, our principal was new, two years into me being here, and so she was very by the rules. She was going to follow it to the T, meeting with us every other week, which became a lot when you're evaluative year. So the meetings, the observations, and then making sure you're collecting artifacts along the way, because it needed to be throughout the year. I remember that being extremely stressful. (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Sandy's assessment was reiterated by nearly every participant—each noting with empathy the daunting duties delegated to the building principal, but also noting the downstream stress those the execution of those daunting duties imposed upon staff:

The principals are busy. That was one added thing for them to do. And knowing the principal that we have, she always wants to do things right and in a way that is going to make us grow. And that's kind of where I had to change my mindset, because also getting to know her as a principal, too, is really realizing she wasn't doing it to spy on us. She was doing it to make us grow, which I liked. (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

The time Regional Elementary School's principal got to spend with her staff and growing comfort in utilizing the flexibility inherent in the EE System led to observations of progress and thoughts on going forward:

But there has to be some flexibility in the administrator deciding how to go about doing this. I felt like it didn't really have to educate—the EE didn't have anything to do with kids. Even though there was a domain about it, I felt like it was about me. I don't know. And so I don't know if the link there makes you better or is it the person delivering the feedback make you better? (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

However, in Sandy's comment, one must consider whether or not EE or the school leader was responsible, played a role, or simply was present, during a period of growth for this staff:

And now, so [the principal] comes to our—if you're on summative, she comes to your room like every two weeks. So she's constantly collecting evidence, and you

don't have to worry about—you just do what you do and then she will say, like, I haven't seen this yet, and then you can just tell her or show her what you've done for that. And it's not like this dog and pony show anymore, you just do your thing. So I think part of the reason it works is because we have [the principal] too, is because she is in our room so often and she gives us feedback on the visit, whatever it might be. (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Jessica described a sentiment noted by all participants, that they have a positive impression regarding the building principal. Sandy further notes:

Yeah. I feel like our principal has done a really good job staying consistent. But she's also realized the expectations in the beginning were unreasonable on her, on us, and so over time, it's lax, but not in a bad way. I think in a less intrusive way or aggressiveness of it, she gets it and turned it to be having you growing as an educator. (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Sandy expressed the group's universal sentiments regarding how the feeling regarding the EE requirements pressed upon principal here and elsewhere, and subsequently teachers, had evolved over the years.

Jessica further describes how the key role of the principal can make a critical difference in helping each staff member focus on what are important, versus burdensome efforts geared only toward compliance:

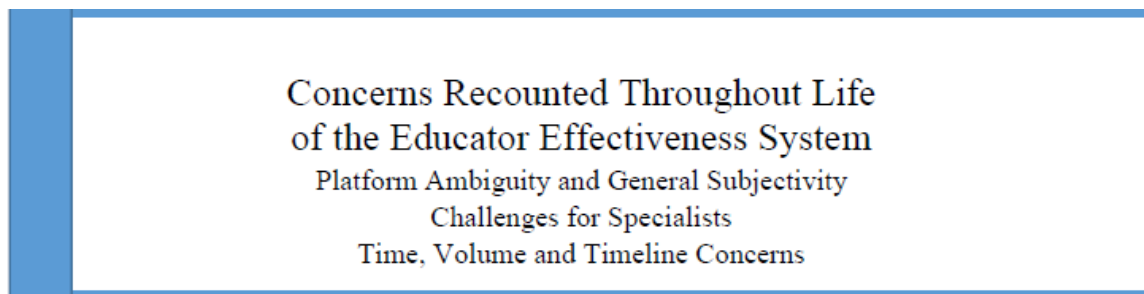
I do think that with all these observations, she sees it, so you don't have to keep gathering all this other stuff to show. So I mean, this is who I am. If you don't know what I do or you want to see something, ask me, but you're probably going to see it anyway. So in that way, I think it's made it a little easier. Again, I don't

know how other districts use the Danielson model and what kinds of evidence pieces they need to collect, but over time, I feel like that has become a little more realistic, where you don't have to have this huge amount of artifacts. (Jessica, personal communication, May 17, 2023)

Practicality and reasonableness in the expectation of the principal were noted time and time again by nearly every participant. The data suggests that the role of the principal/supervisor should not be underestimated.

Figure 3

Theme Two: Concerns Recounted Throughout the Life of the Educator Effectiveness System



Concerns Recounted Throughout the Life of the Educator Effectiveness System

Interview subjects noted similarly that platform requirements can be confusing, specialists in particular are challenged by the prescriptive nature of EE, the amount of time required and the prescriptive nature of time-bound requirements present challenges, standards of evaluators can be subjective, and the volume of requirements can be overwhelming. Many of these observations go back to the very beginning of implementation and have evolved here at Regional Elementary School.

Platform Ambiguity and General Subjectivity

These changed are summed up here by Jessica:

Well, I've been here from the get-go with that. And I just remember when it first started, it was extremely overwhelming because you just had all these statements and we had to have evidence to share for each one. So we would create these huge binders and have to give it to our principal, and it just seemed like it went nowhere and it was an incredible amount of work... It's very different now. Now

it's much more manageable and more meaningful, I think, too. (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Cathy added:

I remember it being confusing at some points. And things that people felt would be beneficial for them, not knowing where it would fit in, where could you use it, I want to do this, but where would it best fit, or can I use this for this, or do I have to use it for that piece of evidence, so, like, confusion. (Cathy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Jessica shared further that, "...the technology part of it was, when it first started, didn't work right and super frustrating" (Jessica, personal communication, May 17, 2023). And it wasn't just that there were requirement and technical frustrations inherent in the early days of EE, something deeper, a feeling that there was inequity across the profession when all public educators in Wisconsin were by stature supposed to be experiencing the same thing:

I think the hard part for a lot of us here was we heard other schools within our district not being observed like we were, not having to meet like we were, nothing was consistent even within our district even though it was rolled out for everyone to hear. We would hear from other schools within our district, oh, I don't get observed like that. Or I don't have meetings every other week when I'm on that. So it wasn't even consistent within the district. So that I think became a little frustrating because I know at first we're like, well, this is what it is, let's just roll with it, right? And like anything with education, it's kind of fallen off. (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

As the years have passed, this sentiment has not abided.

So when you hear from other people in your district that it is not as rigid or the expectations aren't as much, then that's frustrating, but also it has to be a little customized because each school is different. So, it's kind of a catch-22 there. So I don't know what the answer is to that, but it is frustrating when you hear other people saying that I'm not getting observed every week, or I don't have to meet with my principal every other week. I don't have to turn that in. It's like, whoa, wait a second here. (Sandy, personal communication, May 17, 2023)

There was and is so much required that as Naomi noted, "...as the years went by, we kind of just did. Right. I hate to say that we stopped that deep understanding, which is a problem for new people as they came in, but we kind of were just like, okay, well, here's the process, you're just going to do the process" (Naomi, personal communication, May 10, 2023). Of course, this was never an espoused goal of the state of Wisconsin or DPI that teachers would be so overwhelmed, that they would no longer be physically able to engage deeply, but this sentiment recurred again and again.

Challenges for Specialists

Specialists, people like special education teachers, school counselors, or essentially any employee of a public school who is not a traditional classroom teacher, but is required to be evaluated under the EE System, often found themselves mired in even more confusing webs of multiple requirements, "I don't do the best on my SLO for my special education students because I'm more focused on their individualized goals that they have" (Naomi, personal communication, May 10, 2023). Students with special needs have statutorily required plans that must be followed, for a special education

teacher, they would be working with each student on their respective caseload—each with their own list of goals—plus whatever goal they had articulated in EE. However, when staff worked together, participants noted that the daunting task became more manageable:

This year, we involved a lot of our support staff who are available, our special ed, because they were at the meeting, too, which is helpful...So we took their STAR data and we looked at where do they need the most help? And that's how we grouped the kids. So that when we had those groups, each group was getting something different, but it was what they needed. It wasn't just the masses. So I felt was really targeted. And when I left the meeting, I had those plans. Like, we had things copied. We had, you know, and so you just—I was excited to get in there and do it, and that's what it takes. But you can't do that for every unit. And it was just like I felt growth. I saw growth. We all did, and we were all pumped about it. And when you're having our educational aides helping, we have to get them the plans. They don't have hours for that. We had time to do that. Otherwise you're just throwing them at them and say, do your best. (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Challenges for specialist's compound, but teaming and collaboration were noted as helpful. At the end of the day however, the EE system is a broad brush, and the challenges facing specialists are very specific, "...it's hard to track that in special education just because of the fact of there's so many factors as to why kids are growing or not growing that it becomes hard to truly track what they're doing" (Naomi, personal communication, May 10, 2023).

Time, Volume and Timeline Concerns

Every participant noted that the required timeline for key due dates, and time in general have frustrated teachers since the very beginning of EE:

...this is not just the educator effective system. This would be like the whole thing.

When you have students that you've targeted that time factor, if you could have more time to plan more meaningful lessons, or time in your schedule to adequately meet with them because you're also meeting with groups of a whole bunch of other people (Cathy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

There is never enough time, however, the compliance-based elements of EE have only compounded this longstanding observation:

...just the time alone, you know, like, if I sit down in a week, I teach so many hours a day. I'm going to get sassy. I have a family. I have to have a life. I have to have a family, and that gets put on the back burner because all my current needs get put on the front burner. As far as my IEPs, I have to write and my evaluations and my lesson plans to do for the day to day instruction. So some of that gets pushed off, and then all of a sudden it's like, oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, like, you need that constant to keep remembering to bring it forward. (Naomi, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Veteran teachers like Naomi noted how the requirements of EE can sneak up on you, versus being present every day, and veteran teacher Sandy shared how she's had to rely on experience to carry her through in the midst of ever expanding requirement:

But there are days, I'm going to be honest, I go in there and I'm winging it because I had no time to do this. Thank God for experience. I do not know how some of

these young teachers do it. I honestly don't know how. And I'm here at seven every day, and I'm here till five every night, and I take stuff home and I do stuff on the weekend. So honestly, I don't know how young teachers do it and young families. (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Given the draws on the finite resource of time, and the sheer volume, choices are made:

As a building, we have groups that do it individually, we have groups that do it together, we have groups that partner up, and we have people that just do what they feel is they need...And I think it's hard because when you choose at the beginning of the year, kids need change, your needs change. (Naomi, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Well intended teachers do things just to maintain and move forward:

And so then PPG just became something you did, like you didn't learn from it, you just do it because you're required to do it. And you choose the path of least resistance so that you can get it done and that you can get it done. (Naomi, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Naomi noted that she intends to be efficient, to work with her colleagues in teams and groups to address the many needs of her students, but at Regional Elementary School, as in every elementary school, kids grow and change as the pages of the calendar turn. Sometimes the student who needs an intervention during week two no longer needs that intervention moving through the year:

...when you look at the kids that we're targeting, a lot of times you go in thinking this is the reason why they're struggling. And you've picked these kids so early in the year. As you get to know them, you start to find, like, that isn't their challenge.

Like there's much more to this that I need to work on this and this before I can even address this. So I think sometimes it's just hard early in the year to really know what it is that kid needs. And so that's a challenge for me with that. (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

And new groups of students arrive each year, and the need to time does not subside:

So it's like a roller coaster. It's like, this is great, and then what happens is the next year a different group of kids, so it won't be that same goal. So maybe those lesson plans that you created don't match this particular group of kids. So you still need that time to do those things if you want to make it meaningful. (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

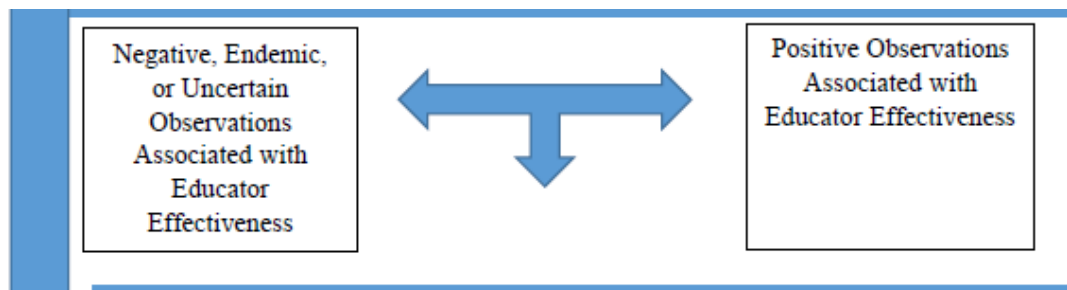
These challenges feel different to the teachers who are in different phases of their careers. For the veterans in the group, they have seen two or three different methods used for license renewal, but for a new teacher, this is the only system they have ever experienced:

I think too, sometimes newer teachers, because they didn't know any different, it was a little easier to, like, roll. Okay, it's my first year teaching, this is what we do. But for people who've shown their progress other ways over the years, it was like, okay, so now what do I need to do? (Cathy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

In sum, the participants wanted to do everything they could to address all requirements as well as they could, and serve each and every one of their students, but at some point, as Jessica shared, “I just think they realized it was not possible to do all of that...” (Jessica, personal communication, May 17, 2023).

Figure 4

Theme Three: Negative, Endemic, Uncertain, and Positive Observations Associated with Educator Effectiveness throughout the Life of the System



Negative, Endemic, or Uncertain Observations Associated with Educator Effectiveness throughout the Life of the System

In the early years of EE, when asked about the initial roll-out of the system, Sandy expressed a universal sentiment shared by all veteran participants in this case study, “Well, I feel like the evaluative system evaluates you, and I think people took it personal and a blow to their teaching, especially teachers have been doing it a long time” (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023). As noted in the Review of Literature, the implementation of the EE system marked a significant departure in how a teacher is evaluated in the State of Wisconsin. The system’s many technical, procedural, and compliance based elements also contributed to a sense of overwhelm, which Naomi describes here:

I hear the "take time for yourself, take a break." Yet when I take that break, then I come back and I'm more overwhelmed and more stressed, because the stuff didn't work. I was up until midnight, I was up at 4:00 this morning. I will be up until midnight tonight because I have zero time to complete my work and it's not because I'm ineffective. It's because you can't—teaching itself is a full-time job.

Planning itself is a full-time job and paperwork is at least a part-time job. So, put that together, that's two and a half jobs that you have to do in 191 days in a 7:00 to 4:00 time frame. It's just not possible. (Naomi, personal communication, May 17, 2023)

Participants noted that the EE system physically holds many of the elements subsumed by the Danielson Framework—essentially the buckets containing descriptors for the art and science of teaching—however, Naomi, Cathy, Sandy, and Jessica all remarked on the time, effort, and energy required to get evidence, documentation, or artifacts into the system. Only Kate, the newest to enter the profession, did not remark on the sheer volume of required elements.

Alternatively, when asked about outcomes for students, Cathy shared, “I guess the downside would be is when you have students that you meet with regularly and you try so hard to help them improve and you don't see the improvements...” (Cathy, personal communication, May 10, 2023). Nearly all participants noted the disappointment associated with targeting a student for intervention and not seeing the progress they had hoped for. EE can pull additional focus to students in need of assistance—participants see this attention as necessary, but a potential source of disappointment nonetheless.

The required reflections were also remarked upon as well, Jessica noted, “And I was just working on my end of my year reflection, and I have a whole page of things like, okay, this seemed to make a difference, I would do this with multiple classrooms. This didn't really seem to have an impact” (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023). Uncertain whether to qualify this comment as positive or negative, much like not seeing

the fruits of one's labor in the realm of student performance, participants sometimes concluded that a year's efforts may have been less effective than they had hoped.

The struggle for time to complete the many tasks required of a teacher today led to decision making, that under fewer constraints may not have occurred, "...we've all morphed our PPG to meet the school needs. It's not what we need personally, but we've just worked smarter, not harder and is that really reflecting personal growth?" (Sandy, personal communication, May 17, 2023). Sandy further described the loss associated with work-smarter-not-harder decision making:

And so the one year I did do the Kindness Club, I've always been wanting to start one, and so I used it as my PPG, right, because it's something I was passionate about. But then yet we had a separate goal rolling here, so I had to keep up with that, plus do my PPG. And it just got to be too much so someone said to me, work smarter, not harder, make your goal whatever the school's goal is, but for several years, it wasn't meaningful to me. It was just collecting data. One year, we came to the end and I looked at my principal and I said I hated this goal. I absolutely hated this goal. I feel like I failed it. (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

And beyond feeling strapped for time, or making decisions based on necessity, Sandy, a veteran teacher with a great depth of experience in the field expressed the following sentiment:

I guess being in education for so long, I just keep seeing the pendulum go this way, this way, and we're always like, okay, what's it going to be now? What are they going to throw at us now? And especially elementary level, I feel like we

just roll with it. It is what it is. Let's just keep rolling to a fault sometimes, because I feel like we sometimes feel powerless to say, what do we need to make things better? (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Change is a constant; Sandy has seen three different systems of license renewal in her years as a teacher. Cathy as well, and when asked about the changes she has observed throughout the life of the current iteration, she shared the following:

...it still is a lot, but not as much as it was before. And it was just very confusing in the beginning, like the directions and how you were supposed to go, or what evidence could be used for what part was not always clear. So now it's a little clearer. (Cathy, personal communication, May 17, 2023)

Time constraints, feelings of powerlessness, actual student growth contrasted with expectations for student growth, confusion, feelings of judgment, and feeling forced to leave things one is passionate about behind due to overwhelm are contrasted by observations of a more positive nature.

As Cathy noted, Naomi also shared that, "Evaluation at that time was not as stringent as it is now, and maybe that's the way to put it. But you kind of had to just prove that you had done the sections that you wanted to do" (Naomi, personal communication, May 10, 2023). With time, the feelings of required compliance, or required proof of skill, have eroded for the participants in this case study. Jessica shared:

...when it started out, it felt like an extra and just a lot of busy work, and it wasn't super meaningful. Now, it's much more meaningful to me. And I don't know if I've just changed too, with just my reflection in looking back at how I do things

and how did this impact the group, but I do find it meaningful now. (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Positive Observations Associated with Educator Effectiveness throughout the Life of the System

Additionally, Kate noted how she feels students have benefited from the implementation of the EE System:

...I think that students have had a very great outcome with it. I think that students with the SLO, especially, they're getting the extra group time, you're really focusing in on their data. You're really looking at them to make their scores and make them jump. And it kind of as a teacher, when you're so overwhelmed with everything throughout the day, you can have that time with them and seeing that growth is very, very special. So they're getting more of group time, more of everything, and it keeps you as a teacher, especially with everything going on throughout the day, it keeps you grounded into knowing what that goal was and keeping yourself and your students on track to achieve that goal. (Kate, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Naomi shared a very similar sentiment regarding student growth during the years of the EE System:

...from that aspect, the kids benefit. They benefit in the part that we are pushing them forward. And force is not the right word, but it allows for the structure in which we are going to make sure that they are growing. It also allows for us as teachers to look at different ways to approach stuff. (Naomi, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

The collaboration contributing to collective school growth at Regional Elementary School is reflected in observations from participants as well, “So I feel like our school is very collaborative, and we've become more collaborative, I think, with actually the EE in its current reiteration” (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023). Regional Elementary School has elevated significantly on the state report card in recent years, which is a source of pride for all the participants in this study. Collaboration was sighted by every participant as a positive, supported by EE—perhaps not because of EE—but supported by EE. As Sandy shared, “...did EE do that for schools? Because I feel like that was a system we were already moving towards with our principal” (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023). Kate further illustrated a key element of this collaborative culture:

...we draft collaboratively at the beginning of the year, and we meet every few months to talk about it, how it's going, give each other ideas on what we can do. And even, like, the fourth grade teacher when we met was giving me good ideas for my second graders, and I was helping her out with her fourth graders, so it's really nice to collaborate with each other. (Kate, Personal Communication, May 10, 2023)

These team meetings have the effect of bringing focus back to school goals and team targets. Jessica remarked, “Had I not had that as a focus, I wouldn't have tried all these different things and sort of found some things that sort of clicked for them” (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023). Kate further illustrated the effect, “And you don't have to choose something that relates to the school improvement plan, but I've noticed after coming here that a lot, a lot, a lot of teachers do because the data is

very clear and you're working toward the whole school” (Kate, personal communication, May 10, 2023). Regional Elementary School has an embedded culture of working together, and they celebrate their achievements:

And we've really seen the fruits of that labor because now we are "exceeds expectations" on our state report card, which is awesome. But I think for a while there, the stress level was so high that I don't think we were effective at all. It's like, is this doing what it's supposed to do? Because effective and being told, it kind of got like a wall. Like, I'm not going to do this because they tell me to do this kind of thing. So I feel like it's gotten better. (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

There are key assessments in every elementary school, but Regional Elementary School practices a specific pattern, or system to review those measures of student performance; while EE does not drive the existence of those assessments, in Regional Elementary School, many of those assessments are ultimately represented in EE, redundantly. Jessica notes:

So we have, as a school, a data wall now. And so grade levels, we have certain pieces of data that we're looking for. Some of them are like the STAR testing that we do, but it's also like the phonics assessment. We track to see how they are moving along at their reading levels. And we use the Fountas and Pinnell leveling system. We have some math checkpoints that we use, like a math running record and things like that. So we are very aware of who are the kids that are making the progress that we want and who are the concerned kids. (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Regional Elementary School has a system that existed before EE, one that Naomi describes here:

I've been in a variety of schools within this district for a variety of different reasons, and it was the same thing. I mean, data has been being tracked for various reasons for a number of years previous to it being part of an SLO. And in fact, when we talk about data, I would say 90% of the time, nobody even says, well, my SLO data indicates, I mean, it's all—well no, this indicates or that indicates. Like we don't—unless we're specifically focused on our SLO and those three times a year, making sure we have our data for that, it's not a driving force. (Naomi, personal communication, May 17, 2023)

None of the participants ultimately attribute their collaborative success entirely to EE, only going so far as to say it supports, or supplements an existing practice. Collaboration generally is referred to as, “Going from a very isolated place to a much more collaborative place” (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023), but again, no one said that this culture of collaboration is in response to the EE System.

When participants were able to dial in their focus on a PPG that they selected, which they felt passionately about, Naomi shared a response that was affirmed by the other participants:

I would really, truly say for the PPG portion, like, me honing in on a skill has really benefited my kids in the long run because it's made me better-- it's given me different approaches. I don't want to say it's made me a better teacher, but it's given me different approaches, and it's allowed me to stay current with the current approaches of education. (Naomi, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

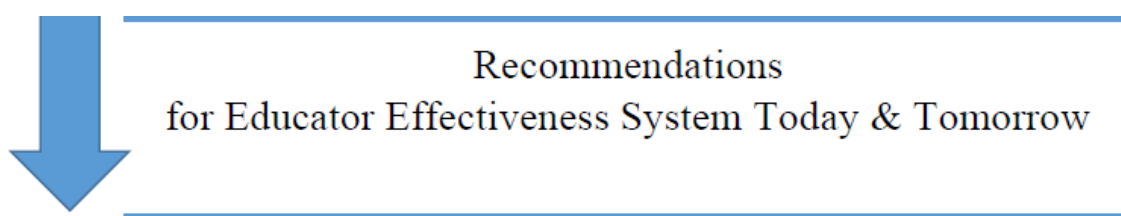
In sum, Jessica shared an insight that reflected where Regional Elementary School has arrived, in terms of how they approach complying with the requirement of the EE System:

I felt like that's the way it should have been because it just made it more meaningful where you have the opportunity to dive into an area that's important to you or that you think you just want to have a little more background in. And it wasn't as high stakes, I guess. You felt like you could make mistakes along the way and learn and grow and change, and you didn't have to have this perfect product in the end. (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

The data suggest Regional Elementary School has reached a place where they can take reasonable risks, select a group of individual targets, work collaboratively or alone, and do it all with the support of peers and an engaged principal.

Figure 5

Theme Four: Needs and Recommendations for the Educator Effectiveness System Today and Tomorrow



Recommendations for a Changing Profession

When asking the teachers in this case study about maintaining the positive elements of the EE System and improving the system going forward, each participant remarked on the intricate challenges of the teaching profession:

...teaching is a unique job, because it starts over every year and every week you're starting to plan on Wednesday for the following week and that you can't just—nowadays you just can't plan ahead like we used to in the old days, because we individualize so much that it's not like we're going to be on page 59 on November 6, because that doesn't work that way. And so that's how the dynamic has absolutely changed, which I think has increased the workload for a lot of us at home, evenings, and weekends. (Sandy, personal communication, May 17, 2023)

Universally, the veteran teachers in the case study agreed that the profession has changed. Participants relayed how children arrive with individually challenging circumstances and standards are high both in Regional Elementary School and in general.

Recommendations Reflecting a Passion for Learning

The teachers who had experienced the system of taking classes and earning credits that led to renewing a license noted the ability to focus on an area they cared about and increase their depth of knowledge in that area:

I would say, I mean, even when you go all the way back to before there was the educator effectiveness and you had to take so many credits to renew your license and stuff, I mean, I guess it depends on the individual person. But I always tried to take classes that would help the students that I had or that I knew were coming next, or just something that I wasn't as proficient at, like EL strategies or something like that, that you didn't have a lot of background on. (Cathy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Participants remarked that the PPG has a similar call to choose a passion area, but because of the choice to align their PPGs with school or team goals, that option has

largely gone away. Sandy shared that despite the convenience of the system of lifetime licensure that currently exists in Wisconsin that change has come with a cost:

My personal opinion on, do I like having a lifetime license? Yes, but also that undervalues teaching, because I feel any person could do it, then you got a lifetime license. I feel like when we did have to have those classes and things like that, I felt like you were growing professionally in that way, in your own way.

(Sandy, personal communication, May 17, 2023)

The thought of taking classes at this point—given all that participants have noted has changed over the years—the participants agree that that time-consuming system is no longer feasible.

Recommendations Regarding Job-Embedded Time to Complete Requirements

The state of Wisconsin's historical system of accruing credits to renew one's license was hardly the only reference to time. Time, or lack thereof, was remarked upon again and again by every participant. Kate shared:

I think that in education with anything, time. Giving teachers more time during PD days or just throughout the school year of having that time to develop lessons regarding your PPG and SLO, and time to gather materials for small groups, or plans to address SLO needs in our groups, I think that our PD is great and PD days are really helpful for us. But also just getting half a day of learning of what we have to do and then getting the other half to actually go in there and address those needs. And having time to talk with colleagues of this is what I'm doing and it's working, you could try this or this isn't working for me, what do I have to do?

So with anything in education, I would just say more time. (Kate, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Professional development at its core is intended and designed to help teachers improve their craft; however, case study participants continually noted how the volume of professional development obligations can actually detract from the core work or teaching—adding data that suggests reaching a point of diminishing returns. When asked if schools should allot specific amounts of time to address the requirements of the EE System, Sandy noted that, “...when we do have that time, we've come up with some amazing plans” (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023). Participants expressed pride in the processes they were able to develop when they dedicated time to practices, but expressed overwhelm and stress when the time needed to be found. Cathy described this sentiment here:

I think that the important part is that we don't want to be adding additional, like just because we want additional time to work on, it doesn't mean we want additional time necessarily at night. Our district has added on some meetings from that four to five time for grade level, but also some PPG work has been done in there too, and that's hard. Now you've extended your day and you're exhausted. So I think that has to be noted that it's not just, don't now require me to be there for an additional two hours at night or something in order to do it. I think it's using that time or using my ability when I'm capable, not at 4:00 at night. (Naomi, personal communication, May 17, 2023)

No one wanted to add hours to the day or to the year.

Additionally, the year-bound nature of the EE System—the fact that a goal, self-reflection, and PPG are all attached to a given year—then must be repeated, but not duplicated, was a source of stress and concern. Jessica remarked:

So just the fact that it's a one year thing, and it might just be me personally, because I have to learn first--I'm not good at learning, doing, learning, doing. I'm like, I have to learn enough before I feel comfortable doing. And sometimes I feel like it is too late, not too late, but it's later in the year, and I would like to continue it for another year. Or modify it and continue with the same idea the next year and not have to pick something completely different. (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Cathy agreed that when an individual finds something they'd like to try, maybe, "...then try it the following year either the same way, a different way, tweak a little to see if what you really learned work or to make it your own" (Cathy, personal communication, May 10, 2023), as opposed to starting from scratch.

Recommendations for New Teachers

New staff are in a different situation than veteran staff; however, requirements are largely the same. Naomi remarked:

One of the things we need to take in is that you can't do it all at one time. You have to make sure that it is in small, manageable chunks even for the new people. And I think that it's important as we went through the process that sometimes the new people hadn't been educated, because you kind of just expected that they would know it. So, I think it's continuing to make sure to evaluate and educate is

the system working and what do we need to do to help continue it from working.

(Naomi, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Two powerful, universally agreed upon recommendations emerged near the end of the interview. Sandy remarked, “I also feel like these policymakers should be educators. I’m not sure who they are, but they need to be educators to keep it realistic. I think that’s part of the problem” (Sandy, personal communication, May 17, 2023).

Sandy’s note was greeted enthusiastically by the other four participants, all nodding heads as she spoke. Moments later, as we concluded the session, Jessica made an assessment that was met with the most enthusiastic agreement of any sentiment expressed in the entire case study, she remarked:

I think too, whoever is looking at this really needs to look realistically at the demands that a teacher today has, because you can only do so much. And again, kids have changed, things have changed, I can only divide myself so many ways and learn about so many things and actually do it. (Jessica, personal communication, May 17, 2023)

Concluding with recommendations for the future was cathartic, and even emotional at times. It was evident how much each participant in the study cared about their work, and the future of their profession. The gravity—how professionally and diligently the research study participants expressed their hopes for future iterations of supervision and evaluation systems—was notable, data speaking to the importance that the decisions made in the implementation and continuation of the EE System, and the systems here to come.

Summary of Results

The preceding pages reviewed common themes revealed through the interview and focus group process described in the methodology section. Each interview question was designed to address the research question. The purpose of this case study was to describe how teachers perceived the outcomes of their participation in the EE system, specifically, how that participation impacted their perception of professional development and learning outcomes for their students. Based on the preceding presentation and summary of data generated by the study, a summary of findings is as follows.

Were you to observe a teacher for any duration of time, nearly everything you observed during and surrounding the school day could be bucketed within the four domains of The Danielson Framework for Teaching. Case study participants described numerous practices within Regional Elementary School that clearly were encompassed within the Danielson Framework. From that baseline, local decisions were made that allowed Regional Elementary School to localize requirements. Most importantly, the role of the principal as evaluator and leader was discussed.

The EE System has existed in the state of Wisconsin since 2012. Much has changed. Case study participants remarked on concerns that they have had—for the veterans—since the first days of the system’s implementation: the ambiguity and overwhelm they felt in the early days, how specialists did not seem to fit into the model as elegantly as traditional classroom teachers, the ever-present need for time, the fact that the system is year-bound, and concerns associated with the sheer volume of requirements in the midst of an evolving profession with more requirements attendant than any of the participants could recall in their entire careers.

As the years passed, participants in the case study watched the EE System change around them. Negative, endemic, or uncertain observations accumulated, but so did positive observations like increased collaboration and instances of positive outcomes for students. Ultimately, participants shared mixed feelings about their time engaging with the system.

Notably, after having lived through years with the EE System, each participant offered recommendations for the future. First and foremost, participants noted that the profession has changed and any system of evaluation should reflect those changes. The bar has moved, but the hours in the day have remained static, and everyone agreed that job embedded time to complete requirements is absolutely essential. Passion for learning should not be neglected, even in the face of potential efficiencies gained by aligning processes and looking to streamline practices. And finally, the EE System's requirements are substantial, and new staff needs to be trained in a way that is not overwhelming and allows individuals to learn at a pace participants deem as reasonable and responsive to the scope of responsibilities assigned to a new teacher.

Forecast to Chapter Five

In Chapter Five, the researcher will use the theoretical framework to more deeply address the findings. What follows is the researcher's best effort to describe the key takeaways, lessons for leaders, and recommendations for anyone in a position to improve the state of a school, district, or the system writ large.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview

This chapter serves as a summary of this single site case study. Outcomes addressing the four research questions are reviewed in detail. Both the review of literature and the theoretical framework are used to bring additional clarity and depth in addressing the four research questions. Findings or lessons are also included, as are implications for future researchers or policy makers.

Review of Study

This study investigated the experience of five Wisconsin teachers at Regional Elementary School in their work with the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System and explored how their participation in this state required process affected perception of outcomes in their professional development and their perception of learning outcomes for their students. These five professional educators were interviewed individually and together participated in a focus group. The stories of these five individuals are their own; however, there are parallels between the experience of these five teachers and teachers across the state and country—readers will recognize in these participant voices, the voices of teachers with similar experiences—their struggles, their triumphs, and their hopes for the future. The EE System is ubiquitous in the state of Wisconsin by design and that shared requirement has resulted in a shared social experiment across the state. In sum, Chapter One detailed a high-level overview of the historical landscape, both nationally and in the state of Wisconsin, in terms of the road to the EE System, which served as background for the statement of the problem and the significance of this study. These interviews gave way to addressing whether these teachers' felt the technical

elements required within the Educator Effectiveness System and the related professional development they experienced contributed to changes in their teaching practice which ultimately led to improvements in learning outcomes for their students.

Chapter Two includes the theoretical framework of the study through the Danielson Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2013). This framework was one of two approved frameworks for the EE System in Wisconsin, and the one employed at Regional Elementary School. The framework is like a system of buckets that contain nearly all the descriptions one could derive for the bits and pieces that make up a teacher's lived experience in a given school. There is, however, more to the story, which required additional elements to be added to the framework. Chapter Two is a review the literature but could also be called a historical retrospective related to the features of the accountability movement, subsequent state required systems of teacher evaluation both in Wisconsin and elsewhere, the system of accountability preceding the Wisconsin EE System, the implementation of the Wisconsin EE system, and the arrival of the EE system at the site of the case study, Regional Elementary School. Ultimately, the review of literature is the story of how a government accountability measure moves into schools in all our communities.

Chapter Three details the qualitative case study methodology used, and the data collection tools, process, and questions that were included. This was a single site case study employing both individual interviews and a focus group. One-on-one interviews were conducted with interview questions developed using the Danielson Framework as a primer, then the responses to those questions were used to draft focus group questions. The responses to both the individual interviews and the focus group were coded manually

in a codebook. Chapter Four shared the results of the study, which provided background, understanding, and explanation regarding the assumption that the EE System—a government mandate—has resulted in unintended consequences for professionals in the field. Responses were presented through a theoretical model with four key areas: 1) a nexus of elements of the Danielson model's four domains, key decisions made locally, and the role of the supervisor, 2) concerns recounted throughout life of the Educator Effectiveness System, 3) negative, endemic, uncertain, and positive observations associated with Educator Effectiveness throughout the life of the system, and 4) needs and recommendations for the Educator Effectiveness System today and tomorrow.

Chapter Five will discuss the findings of the study and the conclusions drawn along with potential applications for educational leaders in the field. In sum, the state of Wisconsin has made a considerable investment in the EE System, as have individual districts in operationalizing those mandates. This research through the theoretical framework of Danielson (2013), rooted in data analysis, holds implications for leaders working to leverage their systems for improved student outcomes. This chapter details both lessons learned and recommendations for the future in terms of both further research and policy decisions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to describe how teachers perceived the outcomes of their participation in the EE system, specifically, how that participation impacted their professional development and learning outcomes for their students. The following related research questions were explored:

1. How do teachers describe their experience with the EE process?

2. How do teachers describe their experience with both the Student Learning Objective and Professional Practice Goal elements of the EE process?
3. How has participation in the EE process impacted teacher professional development?
4. How do teachers describe the learning outcomes for their students as affected by their participation in the EE process?

Interview protocols for both the individual interviews and the focus group were developed using these questions.

Research Questions: Comparison to Study Findings

A significant cost has been paid in the State of Wisconsin in exchange for the implementation and continuation of the EE System (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2014). Five individuals who have worked within this mandate shared their stories for this research. Teachers play an essential role in society, and the teachers who do that critical work have done so under the umbrella of the EE System since 2012 in the state of Wisconsin. The teachers at Regional Elementary School who participated in this case study shared numerous observations and accounts. Much of what they shared is echoed in the literature (Bui, 2019; Dvorak et al., 2021; Jones, 2017; Sixel, 2013). The EE System starts with a noble premise, to help teachers improve their practice so students achieve at high levels. However, when operationalized, the scale of this undertaking is enormous, affecting every public educator in Wisconsin, and so it is with many things, there are successes, and there are opportunities for improvement. This system has had profound effects on those it has touched as evidenced by the stories of the participants of

this and other studies (Bui, 2019; Jones, 2017). As leaders and policy makers cannot relive the past, only seek to learn from it, so too are the lessons learned here.

Description of Experience with the EE Process

The key theme evident from the data in this case study was that overwhelming, burdensome requirements impact nearly every facet of the EE System; this finding exists in other examples from the literature as well (Dvorak et al., 2021; Jones 2017). This simply could not have been the intended outcome. Most of the data responsive to research question one was coded in theme 1) A nexus of elements of the Danielson Model's Four Domains, key decisions made locally, and the role of the supervisor; this is where the heart of teaching and learning exist. Notably, when describing their experience with the EE process, according to the case study participants, uncertainty was pervasive, particularly in the early years. Cathy shared:

I remember it being confusing at some points. And things that people felt would be beneficial for them, not knowing where it would fit in, where could you use it, I want to do this, but where would it best fit, or can I use this for this, or do I have to use it for that piece of evidence, so, like, confusion. (Cathy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

The magnitude of examples of stress, feeling overwhelmed, instances of decisions made for the sake of survival or expedience as opposed to being rooted in best practice, is evident in each layer of analysis and throughout the pattern codes in all the data. Sandy noted broadly the overarching sentiment which returned repeatedly in the answers of her fellow case study participants:

I guess being in education for so long, I just keep seeing the pendulum go this way, this way, and we're always like, okay, what's it going to be now? What are they going to throw at us now? And especially elementary level, I feel like we just roll with it. It is what it is. Let's just keep rolling to a fault sometimes, because I feel like we sometimes feel powerless to say, what do we need to make things better? (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

The scale of the system, and the time it takes to address all the required elements takes a great deal of effort and energy. The required technical elements, the SLO and PPG, required significant attention throughout the year.

Description of Experience with SLO and PPG Elements

The Danielson Model's Four Domains subsume so much of the day-to-day practice of an educator. Where Regional Elementary School set itself on a positive trajectory is in their unique local choices and the fact that the school has a strong principal who is respected by their staff. Where Regional Elementary School made a unique iteration on the EE System was their choice to align school improvement practices and the SLO and PPG EE System elements. Much of the data addressing research question two was noted under the second main theme, which was 2) Concerns recounted throughout the life of the Educator Effectiveness System. The EE System is not fundamentally different from prior iterations of other tools used elsewhere discussed in the literature (Sixel, 2013); there have been reservations throughout the life of the EE system that endure to this day. Naomi describes a long standing concern here:

I hear the "take time for yourself, take a break." Yet when I take that break, then I come back and I'm more overwhelmed and more stressed, because the stuff didn't

work. I was up until midnight, I was up at 4:00 this morning. I will be up until midnight tonight because I have zero time to complete my work and it's not because I'm ineffective. It's because you can't—teaching itself is a full-time job. Planning itself is a full-time job and paperwork is at least a part-time job. So, put that together, that's two and a half jobs that you have to do in 191 days in a 7:00 to 4:00 time frame. It's just not possible. (Naomi, personal communication, May 17, 2023)

The area where Regional Elementary School was able to address research question two in a way that attempted to make work more manageable for teachers, particularly teachers struggling with the issues Naomi identified, was in combining the SLO and PPG in a way that consolidated effort and help align professional development and school improvement processes. Cathy described the process of consolidation of the PPG and SLO elements here:

We are encouraged, and not like with a forceful hand encouraged kind of thing, but to, if possible, tie our PPG Pluses into school improvement with the whole thought process, like work smarter, not harder kind of thing, because there is a lot of work that we have to do with the school improvement. (Cathy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

When teachers come together in collaboration, as noted by Cathy, technical elements become more manageable. The consolidation process Cathy describes is a facet unique to Regional Elementary School and is not the method used to address the PPG and SLO requirement across the state of Wisconsin.

Description of EE Process Impact of Professional Development

Ultimately research participants offer a generally positive assessment of local professional development, particularly collaboration between staff, as noted here by Naomi:

I think that the important part is that we don't want to be adding additional, like just because we want additional time to work on, it doesn't mean we want additional time necessarily at night. Our district has added on some meetings from that four to five time for grade level... Now you've extended your day and you're exhausted. So I think that has to be noted that it's not just, don't now require me to be there for an additional two hours at night or something in order to do it. I think it's using that time or using my ability when I'm capable, not at 4:00 at night. (Naomi, personal communication, May 17, 2023)

There simply is not enough time to accomplish all that they would like, nor is the time available when it is needed most.

In theme 3) Negative, endemic, uncertain, and positive observations associated with Educator Effectiveness throughout the life of the system, there are good, bad and uncertain elements of the EE System at Regional Elementary School. The good, bad and uncertain are long standing and help illustrate how these teachers feel about the core of the research question, which is how they feel about both their local professional development. At Regional Elementary School, case study participants did not offer criticism of the PD they experienced, in fact, they noted how when they have time to do the work, they create excellent plans or offered examples of how with more time, they'd address other self-identified issues, improve intervention or their use of their existing

data. Sandy noted that, "...when we do have that time, we've come up with some amazing plans" (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023).

It is not that the PD is lacking, it's that the time dedicated to PD is not enough. Case study participants also noted that a realistic review of the modern constraints and expectations placed upon teachers is vital. When Jessica said, "I think too, whoever is looking at this really needs to look realistically at the demands that a teacher today has, because you can only do so much. And again, kids have changed, things have changed..." (Jessica, personal communication, May 17, 2023), every other participant unanimously agreed. Perhaps the amount of time allotted to PD was adequate in the past, but for these teachers, at this moment in time, it is most certainly not enough.

Description of EE Process of Student Learning Outcomes

Student performance is aided by the good use of performance data, which EE requires, but in the presence of an existing, strong system for the analysis of student performance data, which Regional Elementary School has, it is uncertain as to whether or not one can attribute positive student outcomes to EE. Kate noted how she feels students have benefited from the implementation of the EE System:

...I think that students have had a very great outcome with it. I think that students...they're getting the extra group time, you're really focusing in on their data. You're really looking at them to make their scores and make them jump. And it kind of as a teacher, when you're so overwhelmed with everything throughout the day, you can have that time with them and seeing that growth is very, very special. So they're getting more of group time, more of everything, and it keeps you as a teacher, especially with everything going on throughout the day,

it keeps you grounded into knowing what that goal was and keeping yourself and your students on track to achieve that goal. (Kate, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Naomi shared a very similar sentiment regarding student growth during the years of the EE System:

...the kids benefit. They benefit in the part that we are pushing them forward. And force is not the right word, but it allows for the structure in which we are going to make sure that they are growing. It also allows for us as teachers to look at different ways to approach stuff. (Naomi, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

The EE System draws a focus to students who are struggling, which as identified by study participants, is a positive attribute of the EE System resulting in a benefit to students.

In theme 4) Needs and recommendations for the Educator Effectiveness System today and tomorrow, we see some of the key features research participants identified as ways to further improve the EE System, and it's impact of student learning outcomes moving forward. Teachers need time. Reboots of the EE System or other similar models should have teacher voice incorporated into their development. Significant concerns were raised by teachers regarding various elements and requirements of the EE system, uncertainty around expectations, and the need for more time has been noted in prior research (Bui, 2019; Dvorak et al., 2021; Jones, 2017), and a realistic review of modern constraints and expectations placed upon teachers is vital (Dvorak et al., 2021). These

four themes addressing the research questions are each represented in the literature and align within the Danielson Framework, and subsequently developed Theoretical Model.

Reviewed Literature: Comparison to Study Findings

At the nexus of the elements of the Danielson Model's Four Domains, of the key decisions made locally, and the role of the supervisor, exists the core of how a school addresses the requirements of the EE System. Kroner (2017) remarked that, "When an individual is trained on how to use the Educator Effectiveness System as a platform for growth, it may become very meaningful and influence every aspect of the teaching task" (p. 97). The impact of training staff using the Danielson Framework to address the key work of the school has the potential to be, as Kroner notes, *very meaningful*, but only if that training is done well. Given the draw of responsibilities each year and the turnover of staff from year to year, that training must also be done annually. A slow progression of the culling of what evolved to be less important requirements of the system was observed by several participants in this case study. Jessica succinctly remarked upon this phenomenon:

Well, I've been here from the get-go with that. And I just remember when it first started, it was extremely overwhelming because you just had all these statements and we had to have evidence to share for each one. So we would create these huge binders and have to give it to our principal, and it just seemed like it went nowhere and it was an incredible amount of work... It's very different now. Now it's much more manageable and more meaningful, I think, too. (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Elements that were once a priority slowly became a part of the landscape. An afterthought is less meaningful. The EE System requires prioritization. It was designed to be used as framework or skeletal system for the other core work of a school.

Prioritization of the Danielson or Stronge Frameworks, the heart of the EE System, must start early, in pre-service training. At Regional Elementary School, data analysis is a weekly, if not daily occurrence. Naomi describes the staff's use of data here:

...I mean, data has been being tracked for various reasons for a number of years previous to it being part of an SLO. And in fact, when we talk about data, I would say 90% of the time...making sure we have our data for that, it's not a driving force. (Naomi, personal communication, May 17, 2023).

Like the findings of this study, Farley et al. (2018) urges planners of teacher preparation programs to promote continuous improvement practices, familiarity with the use of data dashboards tracking multiple measures of growth, and practice receiving coaching as realistic supports for a future where they are required in the teaching workplace. Data analysis is what new teachers will encounter when they join the ranks of professional educators. Each local school district, right down to individual schools, begin making choices from the moment of implementation to the last day of school when teachers complete year-end evaluations. There is so much freedom within the EE System to make local decisions, those decisions can supersede EE itself in importance to the teacher experience. For example, if a school requires each teacher to draft a student learning objective in isolation, or whether teams of teachers are encouraged to collaborate on design, intervention, and data tracking together those are markedly different expectations and can feel dramatically different (Jones, 2017). The key local architect who facilitates

feelings of being overwhelmed or efficacy is the school principal or whoever is tasked with supervising and evaluating each staff member (Dodson, 2015; Jones & Gilman, 2018).

Jones and Gilman (2018) highlight the power a principal has to provide teachers with efficient feedback. This is not easy. At Regional Elementary School, as in many elementary schools, principal is a lonely job filled with responsibilities. As Sandy shared, “The principals are busy. That was one added thing for them to do” (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023). However, when a good leader finds a way to manage expectations and requirements, the school staff have a better chance managing the many responsibilities before them and working to help their students achieve the best possible outcomes. As Doherty and Jacobs (2013) write, “Leadership is key. Regardless of laws and regulations on the books, the strongest states are those providing solid state models for statewide or district adoption” (p. vi). Doherty and Jacobs’ example showcases that explicit direction must be tempered by professional freedom to execute in a way that fits each application. Too much choice can create opportunities for ambiguity, but choice can also create the context for an environment of support and tailored application of a given system or rule, in this case, how a given school addresses the EE System’s many requirements.

Since the first stirrings of implementation of the EE System, there have been concerns abounding regarding the Educator Effectiveness System. In the literature, the researcher reviewed two preceding systems by which a Wisconsin educator could renew their license. Concerns and noted opportunities to improve existed with each of those prior models and endured with the EE System. Potential improvements endure with this

model. Study participants continue to note the need for time, training, and tailored supports for new staff. Prior iterations of other tools also required intensive training, and periods of roll-out and ongoing support. Kroner (2017) remarked, “The Educator Effectiveness System is extensive, and comprehensive. Therefore, teachers who have not been formally trained may feel overwhelmed and use it more as a check-off system than as a growth tool” (p. 97). In support, years later within a new model are Sandy’s remarks:

...we got the whole packet of all of the domains, and we were to write something for each one, evidence for every single domain, which took me hours. So I remember being very overwhelmed. It was the end of the year, and I thought, oh my God, what the heck is going on here? And that did not come with a whole lot of instruction. It was just, this is what we're doing, fill it out, and provide evidence, and that was it. (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

The data reflect that when faced with burdensome requirements during implementation periods and throughout the years, the teachers in this case study by necessity found themselves checking off requirements, as opposed to engaging deeply, as the framers originally designed.

Negative, endemic, uncertain, and positive observations associated with Educator Effectiveness have existed throughout the life of the system (Bui, 2019; Jones, 2017). The data from this study reflected that staff, especially in the early days, could feel judged, or that they needed to prove that they were doing a good job, regardless of how long they had been in the classroom, or how dedicated they were to their craft. For example, Jessica shared, “...when it started out, it felt like an extra and just a lot of busy

work, and it wasn't super meaningful...And I don't know if I've just changed too..." (Jessica, personal communication, May 10, 2023). And Cathy noted, "...it was just very confusing in the beginning, like the directions and how you were supposed to go, or what evidence could be used for what part was not always clear" (Cathy, personal communication, May 17, 2023). Dodson's (2015) research indicated that teacher performance ratings may be detrimental to professional growth. However, in this study the rating system was less of an issue in this single site case study; the feedback, evidence, and artifact procurement and submission process preceding the rating system was more often remarked upon by participants. Regional Elementary School has multiple opportunities for collaboration built into their existing systems and practices. Teachers are invested in the professional learning community model which at its core asks staff to come together in collaboration.

Local professional development at Regional Elementary School looks like Best and Winslow's (2015) recommendation that schools, "...link data from accountability systems to provide educators with targeted professional development opportunities and identify areas of professional need..." (p. 5). Repeatedly in the data, participants noted times when staff would come together around a strategy or practices that linked to the school's plan for growth. Participants noted progress on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Report Card as a source of great pride. Participants were able to both address requirements of the EE System and address the school's improvement, or growth plan. This success was not something any participant attributed wholly to the EE System, but instead they pointed to the school's efforts to align interventions and practices around a common plan, one that fit in EE, but they insisted would exist without it.

Time to plan, time to study, and time to collaborate was common among both the literature and participant experience. Designing the systems employed to bring about improved student outcomes did not include enough time to accomplish all that research participants would like, nor was the time available when it is needed most. Jones' (2017) research of Wisconsin's EE system implementation at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Research Partnership (WEERP) suggests that not enough allocated time for teachers to engage with EE...can actually detract from teacher efforts to improve their practice. Jones notes, "...many teachers felt they did not have enough time/resources available to them to complete the steps of EE" (p. 6). Jones' 2017 publication precedes the pandemic and reflects much of the sentiment expressed by research participants in the early years of implementation of the EE System. After the pandemic, multiple research subjects noted that they really started to focus on what actually mattered, and some of the compliance-based elements were deprioritized. In the post-pandemic world, for example, no one noted that they struggled to find and reflect on artifacts, or that they agonized over their beginning of the year self-reflection. Conversations between teachers and one another, and teachers and supervisors, now more often reflected how they would collaborate on the school plan, or how they would align efforts. In their words, they became more focused on what really mattered, as was suggested in Sixel's (2013) work as well.

Participants in this case study offered assessments of needs and recommendations for the Educator Effectiveness System today and tomorrow, much like what can be found in the literature. As referenced several times prior, teachers need time. As Hirsch (2008) reminds us, a well-known, common challenge facing school leaders is in providing

teachers with high quality, relevant professional development, where teachers have time to collaborate and plan. The day and the year are defined by agreement. Published calendars and established hours of operation are ubiquitous features of public education both in Wisconsin and elsewhere throughout the country. Within those days and hours, district and building leaders work to provide professional development and design collaboration time to help staff work together to improve student learning. Despite those efforts, most teachers still believe that professional development is lacking (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014).

Any reissue or reboot of the EE System or other similar model should have teachers' voices incorporated into its development. As Mielke and Frontier (2012) note, in writing about systems of evaluation generally, "Only by empowering teachers as the central users of comprehensive teaching frameworks can we ensure that the evaluation system improves teacher effectiveness, rather than merely measuring it" (p.13). Today's EE System is not the end-all of supervision and evaluation systems. What comes next must be learned from what is prologue. Wisconsin, or any state or system working on what is next, should endeavor to avoid what Dodson's (2015) research suggests in Kentucky that the new evaluations systems brought forward in recent history are incomplete improvements over what has come before. As noted by the participants in this case study, and in the work of others like Jones and Gilman (2018), Wisconsin education practitioners have been through something significant in this period of work with the EE System; the lessons are many, and can be incorporated into what is next.

Danielson Theoretical Framework: Comparison to Study Findings

Public schools in Wisconsin were required to implement the EE System underpinned with either the Danielson Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2013) or the Stronge Performance Standards (Stronge, 2007). Regional School District and Regional Elementary School selected the Danielson Model which, therefore, served as the theoretical framework for this case study. The Danielson framework is designed to address all phases of a teacher's practice, and Teachscape, the digital platform which accompanies the Danielson Model contains digital forms for goal setting and measuring student growth. The Danielson Framework (2013) for teaching includes four domains, each with additional indicators: Planning and Preparation, Learning Environments, Learning Experiences, and Principled Teaching. Both the question protocol for the individual interviews and the focus group were drafted utilizing the Danielson Framework as a primer, and the framework is at the heart of the organization of the research findings, serving as the first layer of organization. Findings in the data align directly to the four domains of the Danielson Framework.

Danielson Framework (2013) Domain 1, Planning and Preparation, indicator (1a) *applying knowledge of content and pedagogy* and indicator (1f) *designing and analyzing assessments* are evident throughout the participant's experience. Time and time again, research subjects described processes for teaching and learning and for evaluating assessments. These processes were conducted within teacher teams and utilized Professional Learning Community tools employed by Regional Elementary School. Teams come together at strategic and organic moments for the purposes of planning and preparing for instruction; these practices underpin the work of Regional Elementary

School. Danielson Framework (2013) Domain 2, Learning Environments, specifically (2c) *maintaining purposeful environments*, was most evident in the data when participants described both the dynamics of teacher teams and in developing plans for interventions. Additionally, when incorporating classroom aides into the teams that plan for instruction, evidence of domain 2 was evident in the data. Danielson Framework (2013) Domain 3, Learning Experiences, specifically (3d) *using assessment for learning* and (3d) *responding flexibly to student needs*, can be seen in the production of data walls, in documentation addressing students targeted in Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), and serving as the central data points for team processes. Each student targeted for intervention can be viewed as a teacher responding flexibly to student needs. Danielson Framework (2013) Domain 4, Principled Teaching, specifically (4b) *documenting student progress* and (4e) *growing and developing professionally* are demonstrated through the myriad descriptions of various monitoring practices evident at Regional Elementary School and in building professional development plans and practices documented in the data.

There are several domain elements not represented in this case study; each presents an opportunity for continued study. The Danielson Framework (2013) subsumes the elements of teaching, in this case study for the purpose of reviewing and analyzing the data, viewing participant experiences through the Danielson Framework made analysis practicable.

Descriptive Model: Teachers' Perception of the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness
System's Effects on Professional Development and Student Learning Outcomes

The purpose of this case study was to describe how teachers perceived the outcomes of their participation in the EE system, specifically, how that participation impacted their professional development and learning outcomes for their students. EE has been a massive undertaking, and the intent was to understand how teachers who lived using this system felt about two very specific areas of what they experienced. A case study was designed to investigate the research question and sub-questions. Based on the data collected through both an individual interview and a focus group, the researcher organized the data into four major thematic areas, each building upon a common theme: when EE was mandated, the results for these research study participants had intended, and mixed and negative consequences.

Figure 6 represents the participant experience for the five research subjects. A mountain looms large, and the ice and snow that forms thereupon melt and affect those who live below, sometimes in powerful ways. This descriptive model is yet another way to view the effect of a significant piece of legislation on those who work under the mandate.

Figure 6:

Teachers Perception of the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System's Effects on Both Professional Development and Student Learning Outcomes



Note the two central metaphors, the mountain and the river. The mandate for EE was driven by legislation, perhaps driven by this history of the accountability movement

in United States education. The river is the path that the water, or way the mandate, made its way from the mountain to the classrooms of each participant in this study. At the heart is the teacher's practice, subsumed by the Danielson Framework, immediately followed by local choices for implementation and the role played by the supervisor. Here the river forks, and the experience for each participant is altered anew. A strong relationship with a supervisor and/or supportive local implementation practices, can make a world of difference in terms of the teacher's experience. Concerns abound, everything from ambiguity within the platform itself, to hurdles for specialists not experienced by traditional classroom teachers, to time and timeline concerns, to the sheer volume of requirements. Next the river forks again and participants note negative, endemic, or uncertain associations all the way down to the core, whether participants would attribute student success to EE, which they did not affirm. Participants note positives too, like growth for targeted students, collaboration, and alignment of disparate parts of a system either for the sake of student success or to avoid duplication of efforts. In the end, you find a needs and recommendations assessment because even when the river flows to the sea, the process must begin anew and so will the system of supervision and evaluation in Wisconsin public education.

Discussion of Implications

The findings of this study further inform educators regarding the implications for teachers they serve associated with those teacher participation in the EE System. You cannot unring a bell; the EE System has changed the field of education in the state of Wisconsin. For new teachers entering the profession, for mid and late career teachers, how they perceive the vital work that they do, the EE System has altered the field. Study

findings have implications for practice and research, as well as related leadership, learning, and service.

Implications for Leadership

In what capacity do teachers, educational leaders, or policy makers possess influence over the issue of teacher perceptions of how this or another system of evaluation and supervision is experienced in terms of professional development or student learning outcomes? If you are a teacher leader, the circle of influence is yours to define: your individual classroom, department or grade level team, perhaps a district committee of which you are a member. How can you influence the approach of your supervisor, the construction of the annual professional development schedule and topic list, or even how your team drafts SLOs and PPGs?

This research can inform how you advocate for informed choices in your circle. Like the participants in this study, work to deepen the critical relationship between the supervisor and the supervised, push for team data review practices, stress the need for job embedded time to accomplish tasks, and make the argument for stripping away what does not matter and focusing on the practices outlined here that are linked to positive perceptions of improved student learning outcomes and purposeful, useful, practical professional development. As noted in the La Follette study, Dvorak et al. (2014), any school staff could locally, "... conduct interviews or focus groups to gather more detailed qualitative information about program implementation and outcomes" (p. 19).

If you are a school or district administrator, how can you use this research to help improve the perceptions of your staff around EE's effect on both positive student learning outcomes, and professional development experiences? As Sandy said:

I guess being in education for so long, I just keep seeing the pendulum go this way, this way, and we're always like, okay, what's it going to be now? What are they going to throw at us now? And especially elementary level, I feel like we just roll with it. It is what it is. Let's just keep rolling to a fault sometimes, because I feel like we sometimes feel powerless to say, what do we need to make things better? (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

The goal should be for staff to experience the EE requirement as useful and practical, not as another new, extra thing that only burdens teachers further. EE is required in the state of Wisconsin, but leaving a staff feeling confused, over-taxed, or worse still yoked with unreasonable burdens is not. Regional Elementary School eliminated non-required elements, aligned school and individual goals, worked together in teams as a matter of course, and had a principal who understands what is and is not necessary and by research subject's accounts, treats people fairly. Sandy put it best,

The principals are busy. That was one added thing for them to do. And knowing the principal that we have, she always wants to do things right and in a way that is going to make us grow. And that's kind of where I had to change my mindset, because also getting to know her as a principal, too, is really realizing she wasn't doing it to spy on us. She was doing it to make us grow, which I liked. (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

These factors undoubtable contribute to better perceptions of the EE requirement and are well within the control of leaders.

Implications for Learning

Improved student learning outcomes should sit at the center of each individual school's mission. After all, why do schools fundamentally exist? EE within its confines

and structures has the scaffolding of a targeted student learning intervention system, and as Naomi shared:

...the kids benefit. They benefit in the part that we are pushing them forward. And force is not the right word, but it allows for the structure in which we are going to make sure that they are growing. It also allows for us as teachers to look at different ways to approach stuff. (Naomi, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

It is, however, not only the students who should be learning and growing. Adults in the education system must also hone their craft. EE has the potential to be the central tool for continuous improvement. EE is cyclical in nature; the year begins and ends with self-reflection, and during the year, student performance data, and teacher intervention practices, or mid-year modifications are noted. Regional Elementary School is dedicated to Professional Learning Communities, and within those PLCs data teams come together EE supplements this practice. Case study participants would not go so far as to credit EE with the existence of the data review practices employed at the research site. They credited the PLC and existing school practices, but in the absence of such school-wide strategies, EE could be the glue a given school uses to implement and maintain such practices. There needs to be a degree of teacher voice and choice in the selection of goals and targets. DuFour and DuFour (2009) explicitly note that the PLC process requires collaboration. The EE System can also be used to support PLC processes, as is evident in Regional Elementary School, or help facilitate collaboration in the absence of an existing PLC system.

EE required great learning for each school and individual teacher when it was rolled out. New staff must learn how to engage with the system. Educators and schools could fall victim to common pitfalls, repetition, and complacency. Ten years of EE could be leveled up with each successive year, or it could be ten years of compliance on repeat. Learning, individual and systems, is how such a costly misallocation of energy and resources could come to pass, and teachers need time to do their work and that time needs to be job embedded; such assertions are also supported by the literature on PLCs (DuFour & DuFour, 2008). An organization leader should not add without subtracting. Perhaps given the current needs observed through the data, a school calendar could be adjusted to build regularly recurring time into the year.

Implications for Service

Teaching has been described as one of the helping professions. If we learned anything during the pandemic, it should have been that schools serve broader society in ways that we may have taken for granted. Teachers by and large derive a great deal of pride from their work and use the term ‘teacher’ to describe themselves in a way members of other employment classifications may not; teaching may be more akin to a calling than many other lines of work. We trust teachers not just with the education of our children, but in an increasingly dangerous and uncertain world, their very safety. In this study, we read the stories of dedicated teachers, who are committed to each other, their craft, and to the students in their care. But what can be done in their service...in the service of those who serve?

As Jessica remarked:

I think too, whoever is looking at this really needs to look realistically at the demands that a teacher today has, because you can only do so much. And again,

kids have changed, things have changed, I can only divide myself so many ways and learn about so many things and actually do it. (Jessica, personal communication, May 17, 2023)

The education many of us experienced in our formative years does not look like education looks today. And yet, we ask teachers to perform ever increasing acts of service. In some cases, schools feed and clothe, supply medication and health intervention and treatments, intervene to teach social and emotional skills, provide safe and stable environments, and facilitate learning. Schools, as is now commonly and all the more frequently reported, are struggling to attract and retain the very people asked to accomplish these many tasks.

In service to the profession of teacher, the systems of evaluation and supervision maintained, iterated upon, or developed in the years to come must take into consideration the scale of responsibilities placed upon teachers and be a realistic, practical tool to help improve the landscape of the work. Goal setting with voice and choice, structured job-embedded time to accomplish the work, and training for teaching staff in completing the requirements in any such system should be prioritized. The training of principals must emphasize clearly articulated expectations for teacher's work, and the importance of partnering with teachers within these systems of accountability. As Sandy shared, "...our principal has done a really good job staying consistent. But she's also realized the expectations in the beginning were unreasonable on her, on us...she gets it and turned it to be having you growing as an educator" (Sandy, personal communication, May 10, 2023).

Implications for Research

This was a small single site case study. There are over 400 school districts in Wisconsin and over 1,000 elementary schools. This case study was conducted at a single Wisconsin elementary school with five teachers. For anyone familiar with the inter-workings of schools, in the voices of these research participants, you hear the voices of other teachers you have known. That said, this research cannot be applied universally beyond the bounds of this case study. In the future, research could be conducted examining the other Danielson Domains in greater depth and detail. A state-wide qualitative study could be conducted, soliciting more voices through a broader net cast throughout the state. A survey question prompt soliciting EE System strengths and areas for growth could garner voluminous data. More qualitative research could be conducted in different parts of the state, or different levels, for example, middle and high school sites. A pure focus on student outcomes or specific successful or unsuccessful practices could be defined and explored. More research can and should be conducted and used to inform future iterations of either the EE system or what is to come next in the world of systems of accountability in Wisconsin education. Teachers need to be involved in additional research and development leading to changes in the existing Wisconsin EE System or subsequent systems. This topic affects thousands of teachers; their voices matter.

Concluding Remarks

This case study challenged the researcher's assumptions about the EE System. As noted earlier, the researcher has worked as a school administrator in the state of Wisconsin for over ten years. The researcher also served as Effectiveness Project Implementation Coach for several years and as a school administrator evaluating teachers

in the first years of EE System implementation. Those experiences made a lasting impression upon the researcher. This case study, however, allowed for an entirely different learning experience. The narratives shared by the research participants were powerful, emotional at times, and deeply impactful. The data changed how the researcher approaches engagement with the EE System in his professional capacity. As an individual who leads and manages an organization with hundreds of teachers, the effects of this research project have been powerful. The sense of loss expressed related to having to make choices to survive versus self-selecting areas of study, was profound. In Wisconsin, during the era of accruing credits to renew a license or when Professional Development Plans were required or now where professional practice goals could be independently generated, choice was and is important. We cannot be so burdened by requirements that we eliminate the ability for teachers to learn about something they are passionate about, which has the ability to help them improve their craft and help guide their critical work.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent Form

Dear Potential Participant,

Re: A Case Study on Teacher Perceptions of the Wisconsin State Educator Effectiveness Requirement

My name is Dan Unertl, and I am a doctoral student at Cardinal Stritch University. I am conducting a study about how teachers have perceived the impact of partition in the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System—specifically, perceived impacts to professional development and student outcomes. As part of this study, I am seeking teacher volunteers to participate in an interview and/or a focus group, with the goal of learning about your experiences throughout the time you have participated in the Educator Effectiveness System.

Specifically, data for this study will be gathered primarily through teacher interviews, either one-on-one, or in a small focus groups. The interviews/focus groups will be held at your school in a quiet location or via phone. Questions will focus on your direct experience with educator effectiveness. I will ask about your experience with the technical elements--like the SLO and the PPG, and how participation has changed over time—and ultimately, how you perceive the system's effects on student learning. The interviews will be digitally recorded with your permission. You may also elect not to be recorded. This interview and/or focus group should take no longer than one hour. The focus group would take place following the interviews.

This study will take place in the spring and early summer of 2023. There are no known risks associated with your participation in this study. Possible benefits are that the sharing of your experience could contribute to the research body—one that has limited personal, individual accounts of participant experiences—that may be used to both update the current system, or may ultimately aid in the design of a later iteration, in this or other states.

The data collected will be kept confidential. All audiotapes and transcripts of tape-recorded interviews will be kept in the office of the researcher. Audiotapes will be erased after transcription is completed. The transcripts will continue to be kept in a locked file cabinet for the duration of the project and will remain there. Data will likely be published in a dissertation, and may be published in professional journals or presented at conferences. Participants will retain their anonymity. No real names of the research participants will be included in any written report or article about this study. Participant's identity will be kept confidential. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. There is no penalty for withdrawing. No monetary payment will be rendered for participation, but I do intend to present you with a token of appreciation—a

gift card—in appreciation for your participation. You are entitled to keep a copy of this consent form.

If you have any questions, please contact me.

Appendix B: Agreement to Participate

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

A. I have received an explanation of this study and agree to participate. I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

Participant Name (Please print) _____

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

B. I agree to participate in (PLEASE MARK X):

___ **1) Individual interview (TAPE RECORDED)**

Signature for audiotape permission

___ **2) Individual interview (NOT TAPE RECORDED)**

If you have any complaints or any other questions about your experience or this research project, please call or write:

Dr. Darnell Bradley --IRB Administrator

Professor at Cardinal Stritch University

6801 N. Yates Road, Milwaukee, WI 53217

262-229-5086

djbradley@stritch.edu

Although the Human Protections Administrator will ask your name, all complaints are kept in confidence.

This research project has been approved by the Cardinal Stritch Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects for one full year.

Appendix C: Participant Information

Participant Information

Name

Years of Teaching Experience

Total

Time at Present School

High School

Middle School

Elementary School

Administrative or Other Central Office

Level(s) or Courses Taught

Education

Undergraduate Degree

Advanced Degree(s)

Leadership Position(s)

Athletics or Activities Coaching Experience

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Dan Unertl and I am conducting a case study as a part of my work toward an advanced degree with Cardinal Stritch University. Thank you for coming. You are one of several research participants from here at your school who has been asked to talk about your experience with the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System. Over the course of the next hour or so, I will ask a series of questions related to your work with both the technical elements of the EE System and your perception of student outcomes within the context of the system.

The purpose is to get a sense of how you have perceived the experience of working with the EE System. There are no right or wrong answers, and any experiences you want to share are welcome. I will focus on asking questions, and on note-taking.

Consent to record

To confirm verbally: do I have permission to record this interview?

(If no): Thank you. There will be no audio recording, so I will make notes while we are speaking together.

(If yes): Thank you. I'll verify the recorder is working before we start. I will also take notes, to serve as a backup.

Record the following:

Participant ID:

Time and date:

Location:

Questions

Q1. Could you give me a sense of your background working with the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System?

Probes: This could mean when you first heard about the platform (for example, at a staff training or onboarding); changes over the years; duration of your participation.

Response:

Follow-up question and response:

Q2. How does your school use the EE System?

Probes: This could mean as part of school improvement, with small groups of colleagues or grade-level teams, as a HR tool, as a means to record classroom visits by your supervisor.

Response:

Q3. Thinking about your work with the Student Learning Objective (SLO), how have you used the SLO historically and presently?

Probes: Have you drafted the SLO with a team before? How has your supervisor or perhaps a teacher coach used or interacted with your SLO? What does data review look like for you?

Response:

Follow-up question and response:

Q4. Thinking about your work with the Professional Practice Goal, how has the PPG changed over time, and how do you use it presently?

Probes: Do you discuss the PPG with your team, supervisor or anyone else? How do you draft the PPG? Has it ever been drafted for you?

Response:

Follow-up question and response:

Q5. In what ways, if any, is professional development impacted by the EE Process?

Probes: linked to school improvement planning; grade level team discussion; curriculum implementations or other new tools; anything related to both teaching and learning?

Response:

Follow-up question and response:

Q6. How have students been impacted by the EE System?

Probes: Consider students targeted through SLOs or PPGs, what about kids who may receive interventions listed in various elements of the EE System.

Response:

Follow-up question and response:

Q7. Tell me about a success or challenge you experienced with your students in the context of the EE System (through any of the elements you discussed with me here today)?

Probes: (Refer back to previous answers to prompt for either a success if they noted a challenge or a challenge if they noted a success)

Response:

Follow-up question and response:

Q8. In the context of the EE System, what do you think could improve learning outcomes for students in the future?

Response:

Follow-up question and response:

Appendix E: Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

Good morning. Thank you for agreeing to come back and meet as a focus group, and continue contributing to this case study. As you know, you are the research participants from here at your school who have agreed to talk about your experience with the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System. Over the course of our time together here this morning, I will ask a series of questions related to what was shared during your individual interviews, both for confirmation and elaboration.

There are no right or wrong answers, and any experiences you want to share are welcome. I will focus on asking questions, and on note-taking.

Consent to record

To confirm verbally: do I have permission to record this interview?

Could you say your name before responding to the recording accurately reflects the speaker?

Record the following:

Participant ID(s):

Time and date:

Location:

Questions

Q1. Think back to your first year with EE and compare that memory to today; many of you noted how much clearer, or better things have become, to what might you attribute this change?

Response:

Q2. Nearly all of you who taught prior to the EE requirement noted how challenging this system was at the start, and how it improved over time. What lessons should we take in terms of supporting new teachers?

Follow-up question and response: **What lessons should policy makers take in terms of implementing new initiatives?**

Q3. Many of you shared how your school and district has made this processes its own. Would you view this degree of customization, or flexibility as a positive element of the Wisconsin EE requirement?

Response:

Probe: Most of you noted that things are not the same district to district. Would you consider that a flaw, a strength, a necessary evil...? EXAMPLES
Follow-up question and response:

Q4. Nearly all of you noted the need for more job-embedded time...time to collaborate, time to reflect, time to address required documentation...do you think that a standard allotment of time should be noted, recommended or required across Wisconsin public schools?

Response:

Follow-up question and response: **How could this be accomplished?**

Q5. Nearly all of you noted the linkage between the school improvement plan and the EE requirements. Is this choice a key factor in making the process manageable? Should it be universally required? Has it come at the cost of choosing to focus on something you might be more passionate about?

Response:

Q6. Many of you noted the level of support here—several of you highlighted collaboration between groups of staff, or the influence of the principal--what do you like best about how EE has been used in this school or in this district? Are these the key factors, or are there other elements?

Response:

Q7. One of you noted that in terms of student performance, the EE System allowed for the structure to track performance data. What thoughts do you have on this observation?

Response:

Q8. Suppose you had an opportunity to advise a design team on how the EE system could be improved for future iterations, what would you say?

Response:

Q9. What have we missed? Is there something else here that we haven't discussed?

Response

