

Perceptions of the Value of Participative Decision Making
from a Nebraska School District

by

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Abstract

Participative Decision Making (PDM) refers to the concept of allowing those involved with the work to be contributing members in the decision-making process. This study uncovers how one Nebraska district uses PDM in their Professional Learning Community (PLC) collaborative time. The purpose of this study was to examine teacher and administrator perception of the value, and perceived effectiveness of the use of PDM within PLC programs. Furthermore, to discover how administrators and teachers differ in their perception of value, use, and necessity of PDM within the district.

Keywords: Participative Decision Making (PDM), Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Distributed Leadership

The management of schools is typically centered on a few individuals tasked with running an effective district. Traditionally, this management has been conducted in a top-down fashion, where ‘bosses’ make decisions and expect their subordinates to adhere to and carry out decisions, thus creating a transactional leadership style where leaders and subordinates simply conform to their traditional role (Johnston, 1996). Furthermore, school district management is evolving in a manner where leadership is distributed (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). The distributed leadership paradigm contends an effective district should cultivate a myriad of leaders and rely upon specific leadership talents to make more informed decisions about educational practice (Spillane, 2005). Effective districts are those that work as fluid cohesive units striving for a common goal instead of individuals striving for individual goals (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

Participative Decision Making (PDM) is a strategy that can be used to support and promote the distributed leadership framework. Lowin (1968) defines PDM as “a mode of organizational operations in which decisions as to activities are arrived at by those various persons who are to execute these decisions” (p. 69). According to research, PDM is advantageous because, giving workers an opportunity to be involved could ultimately result in more focused outcomes. It is argued that the worker has a more in depth knowledge of their surroundings as compared to those that manage a greater portion of an organization (Miller & Monge, 1986).

PDM is a formal name for a common practice of distributing leadership responsibilities. It is important to recognize these practices have many forms and vary in their nomenclature. Collaboration, distributed leadership, and shared leadership are examples of names given to the process of allowing subordinates to be involved in the decision-making process. For the purpose

of this study the term PDM will be used when referring to the process of shared responsibility in decision-making.

Many schools have been using facets of PDM regularly, but often rely upon an indirect and informal procedure and practice because of the pace and set-up of school organizations. Districts are continually striving to allow staff to work collaboratively to increase the performance of their practice (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). The dynamics of school systems are too complex to allow leaders to make decisions without properly involving those that are directly affected by the decisions being made; working in isolation will not bring about the sustainable change needed in schools (Fullan, 2008). Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings are one place where PDM practices take place at the school level and without incorporating this component PLCs may not be effective (Kilbane, 2009). The PLC is a cyclical process where educators work collaboratively to collect data and conduct site-based research in order to better inform the practice of teachers and those that serve students (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010).

Leadership styles and current best practice ideologies contend that sharing the work with those who are actually doing the work produces more efficient and effective practices at the school level (Harris, 2013; Lumby, 2013; Spillane, 2005). Professional Learning Communities are also a practice well known within the school setting and research has found the proper use of PLCs aide in the promotion of school improvement (DuFour et al., 2010). Unfortunately, few studies show how those employing PDM practices, formally or informally, feel about the effectiveness and value as related to decision-making. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine how teachers and administrators use the PLC process to practice PDM, and to

determine how teachers and administrators perceive the value and effectiveness of PDM practices. Additionally, the following research questions guided the inquiry:

1. What is the perceived value of implementing and using Participative Decision Making (PDM) in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)?
2. What is the perceived effectiveness of the PDM processes at a midsized Nebraska school district?
3. How do teachers and administrators perceptions of the value of PDM differ?
4. Do teachers believe decisions made through the PDM process are used and valued by administrators?
5. Do administrators believe information gathered during the PDM process is valuable?

This research could potentially be significant for teachers and administrators using the PLC practice in a K-12 public school setting. With the adoption of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and other high stakes state and federal accountability requirements, school administrators are forced to do more with less (Groen, 2012). Having an effective process for using PDM could potentially result in a more efficient use of time and resources in the face of ever-increasing demands. Furthermore, by allowing teachers to be involved in decision making practices and incorporating a distributed leadership style of management, districts may see an increase in teacher morale, involvement, and engagement of practice (Bush & Glover, 2012). The cultivation of teacher leaders united in the vision and mission of the school is paramount to the success of the organization.

Districts with similar characteristics may also benefit from this research and use it to implement a PLC process that incorporates components of PDM. This study will offer insights to

PDM previously unavailable to school districts. Additionally, the findings could affect how PLC time is structured in order to ensure the process is mutually beneficial between teachers and administrators. The proper implementation of PLCs should lead to shared leadership that promotes creativity, positive culture, and cultivates an environment based on shared values and vision related to the practice of education (Hord, 1997). These attributes, especially shared leadership as related to PDM, will be explored throughout this study and will give interesting insight on how to better capitalize on the collaborative nature of PLCs.

Finally, the significance of this study lies in its ability to add to a limited body of research associated with the perception of the value of PDM practices in the school setting. While distributed leadership practices are well documented (Gorton & Alston, 2012; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001) the specificity of how those employing PDM practices feel about its effectiveness is not well documented in research, especially in regards to a school setting (Hulpia, Devos, & Van Keer, 2011). This study could start conversations between educational leaders regarding the value of PDM as school leadership and management practices.

Definition of Terms

Participative Decision Making (PDM). “A mode organizational operations in which decisions as to activities are arrived at by those various persons who are to execute these decisions” (Lowin, 1968, p. 69)

Professional Learning Community (PLC). “An ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (DuFour et al., 2010, p.11).

Distributed Leadership. “The principal shares authority and power; teachers take leading roles, assume responsibility, and act independently as individuals or group” (Gorton & Alston, 2012, p. 19).

Literature Review

Participative Decision Making (PDM) is a management strategy where those doing the work are involved in the decision-making process (Lowin, 1968). Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are structured teams where participants have guaranteed time to discuss students, data, and other school-based components to ensure all students are receiving high-quality instruction in an effort to improve outcomes (DuFour et al., 2010).

This literature review will first explore PDM and PLCs in isolation to better understand the components of each system, and will uncover how these systems can impact teachers and administrators. Additionally, the connections between PDM, PLCs, and public school education will be explored to understand the gaps in literature and recognize the need for further inquiry regarding the subject. The review of the literature will build a foundation to address the research questions associated with this study.

Participative Decision Making

Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary (n.d.) defines participation as “the state of being related to a larger whole” and decision-making as “the act or process of deciding something, especially with a group of people” (search of terms at <http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/decision-making>). PDM is what results when these two major concepts intersect. As a result of this intersection, PDM differs from the process of delegation. Delegation can include components of sharing the decision-making responsibilities, but it does not often include collaboration and participation by all involved (Conway, 1984). PDM is the process in which an organization, and

specifically those individuals in charge, allow staff members to be involved and influence decision-making in hopes of creating a more efficient and effective system (Lowin, 1968).

The management style of PDM cannot be easily defined because of the lack of standardized use within organizations. (Conway, 1984; Dachler & Wilpert, 1978; Leana, Locke & Schweiger, 1990; Lowin, 1968). Early studies confirmed that PDM takes on many forms and is processed differently within each individual organization. For example, PDM can be mandated or voluntary, formal or informal, and/or direct or indirect, and any combination of the previous forms (Dachler & Wilpert, 1978). These complexities of PDM have historically made it difficult to conduct studies that build upon each other to create a standardized method or definition of PDM (Melcher, 1976). Conway (1984) noted the acceptance of PDM practices seems to have relied more upon the feelings of those employing the practices rather than the results of specific studies. To further this point, Conway (1984) completed an extensive review of the research pertaining to PDM prior to the 1980s, including Lowin's works. He found the research did not support the notion that higher quality decisions were made because of the use of PDM or that using PDM resulted in more support from staff. However, much of the research did suggest PDM leads to increased feelings of self-worth and self-confidence.

Despite these early findings, PDM has survived and can be a valuable management style because of the focus it brings to the decision-making process (Somech, 2010). Arguably, the value pertains to allowing those who are affected by the decision at hand to participate or somehow influence the outcome (Miller & Monge, 1986). Democratic values in organizations have helped to promote the use of PDM practices.

PDM in Schools

As schools continually evolve so must the leadership styles of those in formal leadership positions (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). School leaders should be in constant pursuit of the perfect balance of effectiveness and efficiency. Research suggests empowering an organization full of leaders will aid in striking that perfect balance. Fullan, Cuttress, and Kilcher (2005) state:

Change knowledge, then, means seeking leaders who represent innovativeness—the capacity to develop leadership in others on an ongoing basis. We need to produce a critical mass of leaders who have change knowledge. Such leaders produce and feed on other leadership throughout the system. There is no other driver as essential as leadership for sustainable reform (p.57).

The use and relevance of PDM in the school setting emerged at a time where school leadership was experiencing a shift from an authoritative style of leadership to a more democratic style of leadership. Historically, schools implemented a top-down management style where those in charge made decisions and those that worked at the schools implemented the decisions with no input (Hallinger, 1992). More recently, schools have moved away from this top-down management style to a more shared leadership style of management (Lindelow, 1989). Studies in the 1980s found it was imperative for schools to allow a more participatory role to those working in the schools in regards to the decisions being made about the practice of education (Conway, 1984; Lindelow, 1989). Moreover, at a fundamental level, allowing participation in decision-making supports the democratic process of schools and serves as a positive model for students and educators (Lindelow, 1989). PDM practices have allowed schools to move in this important direction.

More recently, a five year longitudinal study focusing on PDM and instructional outcomes was conducted (Smylie, Lazarus, & Brownlee-Conyers, 1996). This study reported on outcomes related to schools that employed high participatory programs as well as on outcomes related to schools with low participatory programs. Smylie et al. (1996) discovered the following about schools with high levels of participation in decision-making:

- Teacher participation is frequent, regular, and inclusive.
- Decision-making is collaborative and consensus-driven. Decisions seem “co-constructed”.
- Focus includes school mission, curriculum and instruction, staff development.
- Leadership is shared between principal and teachers. Both take initiative. Both assume responsibility (p.193).

Alternatively, the following was found about schools that had low levels of participation in decision-making:

- Teacher participation is sporadic and non-inclusive
- Decision making is by majority opinion. Decisions reflect prevailing points of view.
- Focus mainly on decision-making procedures, school management.
- Leadership is mainly from the principal. Teachers do not take initiative nor assume substantial responsibility (p. 193).

These findings suggest that PDM, when implemented correctly, has the ability to bring staff together and make schools more efficient and effective. These findings offer a rubric of sorts to assess if PDM is being used effectively in a certain organization.

Literature associated to PDM in schools is similarly situated in the notion that the research is often difficult to decipher because the complex nature of the practice. When answering the question of ‘Should schools use PDM?’ Hoy and Tarter (1993) offered a very ambiguous answer of “it depends” (p.4). Their research suggests that PDM should be used in schools when it is relevant, and maybe more importantly, PDM will not work in every situation. The theory offered by Hoy and Tarter suggests there are many factors that should be addressed before deciding to use PDM, and they suggest PDM practices should be situational, not universal. Additionally, they believe those being asked to participate should have three requirements: relevance, expertise, and commitment. Consequently, the decision needing to be made must be relevant to the participant’s practice, the participant must have level of expertise in the area of the decision at hand, and finally, the participant must be committed to the process of PDM and to the decision-making process in general.

Furthermore, after deciding to employ PDM, leaders must consider under what conditions and to what extent employees should be involved, as well as consider the purpose for their involvement. Additionally, leaders must make decisions about the structure of involvement and what roles leaders and subordinates will assume (Hoy & Tarter, 1993). This work suggests that PDM practices must be constructed intentionally and systematically in order to arrive at desired results.

Distributed Leadership and PDM

Distributed Leadership refers to the distribution of leadership responsibilities throughout an organization instead of containing responsibilities to the major players typically in charge (DuFour, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Seashore-Louis, Mayrowetz, Smiley, & Murphy, 2009). A distributive leadership style is a common practice in schools in pursuit of school

improvement (Mayrowetz, Murphy, Seashore, & Smylie, 2007). The practice of PDM logically falls under the umbrella of distributed leadership because of common themes of sharing the work and identifying informal leaders throughout an organization. PDM can be categorized as a component of distributed leadership not necessarily as an independent phenomenon. Teacher teams are a good example of how PDM is incorporated throughout a school building and this practice suggests a trending realignment of roles pertaining to decision-making processes (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007). The use of distributed leadership and PDM are examples of how schools are moving away from the top-down method of management. PDM as a management style is not appropriate for every situation. Many districts use teacher teams to operationalize their PDM practices. In recent years, teacher teams are more universally labeled as Professional Learning Communities or PLCs.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Community (PLC) strategies have been in place in many districts and have been used as part of school improvement initiatives. A PLC can be defined as a cyclical process where educators collaborate to arrive at more effective outcomes for students (DuFour et al., 2010). PLCs must be committed to fostering an environment where educators work collaboratively to meet the needs of every student, arrive at well informed decisions, and cultivate a collection of educators committed to using tangible evidence to drive continuous improvement (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

PLCs incorporate a myriad of conditions and according to Hord (2015) there are essential components necessary to be effective in the PLC setting. PLCs must first have a structural component where teams can meet uninterrupted in comfortable accommodations. Furthermore, effective PLCs must include a collegial environment where participants respect each other and

agree upon shared values and school vision. Additionally, PLCs should be a time for intentional group learning where peers are supporting peers in order to achieve better outcomes for students. Finally, and most importantly, PLCs can only be effective if shared leadership is incorporated where PLC participants feel empowered to contribute in the decision-making process (Hord, 2015).

Additionally, distributed leadership techniques must be used in order to fully engage in the process of effective professional learning communities. Spillane (2009) agreed when critical work involves more than one person it is imperative to have a framework in place that allows those with designated leadership positions and those without to take ownership of the work being done. He believes this framework is necessary to ensure the group is working as a whole instead of individuals working in isolation. In order for shared leadership to occur common language, expectations, and norms must first be addressed.

Finally, it is believed that PLCs must go beyond being superficial work teams to be effective. That is to say, these groups must be committed to genuinely engaging in reflective practice where the status-quo is challenged. These teams must incorporate collaborative systems that promote student and teacher growth as well as balance the leadership paradigm between the group's participants (Owen, 2016).

PDM and PLC Connections

Harris and Jones (2010) found in their pilot study of PLC implementation that the following components must be present for PLCs to be effective:

- Respect and trust among colleagues at the school and network level;
- Possession of an appropriate cognitive and skill base that enable effective pedagogy and leads to effective learning;

- Supportive leadership from those in key roles and shared leadership practices;
- The norms of continuous critical inquiry and continuous improvement;
- A widely shared vision or sense of purpose;
- A norm of involvement in decision-making;
- Collegial relationships among teachers;
- A focus upon impact and outcomes for learners (p.179).

When comparing this list to the work of Hoy and Tarter (1993) obvious connections are present. Understanding how and when to implement PDM with staff and possessing the attributes from the previous list are instrumental in navigating the many dynamics of successful collaboration. The PLC process is a natural platform for the use of PDM. These learning groups, by their definition, are created purposefully and already contain the components necessary to participate in decision-making. In order for PLCs to be effective the leader must be able to foster a shared leadership environment where others are encouraged to take on some decision-making responsibilities (Hord, 2004).

This literature review provided an explanation of both PDM and PLC practices and how they impact the decision-making in schools. Furthermore, the majority of the literature connected to PDM practices focus on the outcome, whether it is effective or not, and does not offer results as to the perceptions of those involved in this decision-making process. Understanding how participants of this practice interpret its effectiveness is important to understanding the relevance of PDM in the school system.

Method

For this research, a quantitative study was conducted to examine the perceptions of both teachers and administrators in regards to the value and effectiveness of the use of Participative

Decision Making (PDM) within the Professional Learning Community (PLC) format. The study aims to answer the following questions about teachers and administrators: 1) What is the perceived value of implementing and using Participative Decision Making (PDM) in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)? 2) What is the perceived effectiveness of the PDM processes at a midsized Nebraska school district? 3) How do teachers and administrators perceptions of the value of PDM differ? 4) Do teachers believe decisions made through the PDM process are used and valued by administrators? and 5) Do administrators believe information gathered during the PDM process is valuable?

School District Context

In order to understand the method it is important to understand how the district studied uses PLCs. Currently this school district employs PLCs at every building in the district. Elementary level PLCs consist of grade level groups as well as grades K-3 and grades 4-5 groups. At the middle level PLCs are grouped by grade-level teams incorporating all content areas. Finally, at the high school level, PLCs are grouped by content area. Other committee groups are also considered PLCs in this district. These groups include but are not limited to; building leadership teams, calendar committee, school improvement committee, and others. All PLC groups are expected to focus on learning, collaboration, and results.

Participants

The school district studied is a mid-sized district located in Western Nebraska. All teachers and administrators involved in a PLC in this district were asked to participate in the study. The district covers an area of nearly 215 square miles and includes a community of approximately 15,000 people (United States Census, 2010). The district serves roughly 3,000 students in ten facilities including; one pre-school, five elementary schools (grades K-5), one

middle school (grades 6-8), one senior high school (grades 9-12) and two high school-level alternative programs.

A convenience sampling method was used to conduct this study and did not include random sampling as the entire population was eligible to be included in the study. The reasons for this were twofold; the population is small and the numbers are needed to address validity and reliability, and the study aims to address how one district uses PDM, and information from all involved was desired. Teachers and administrators from each of the ten facilities were asked to participate in the study. There were 247 possible teacher participants as well as 20 possible administrator participants. There was no incentive for participation.

Instrumentation

A survey designed by the researcher in connection with the research literature was used to determine the perceptions teachers and administrators hold about the value and effectiveness of the use of PDM in the PLC format. The instrument used to gather data was an online survey. This survey was created using current literature about PLCs and PDM. Furthermore, content experts reviewed the survey and offered professional feedback to address content and face validity.

Additionally, a pilot study was conducted with teachers not eligible for the expanded study to test the psychometric properties of the survey. The researcher sought feedback from participants of the pilot study in regards to the accessibility and comprehensiveness of the survey in order to create a solid tool for the expanded study. The data collected from the pilot study was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Cronbach's Alpha was used to ascertain reliability of the instrument (see Appendix C). Based on this information, the survey was adjusted for the expanded study.

After the completion of the pilot-study data analysis, a link to the survey was sent through email to those who had been selected to participate in the study. Questions regarding perceptions of the value of PDM were rated on a four-point Likert Scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4) (See Appendix A). In addition to the Likert Scale items each person completing the survey was asked to provide two short answer responses as well as demographic information such as age, gender, job title, years in current position, years in education, and educational degrees completed.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from a midsized school district in Nebraska and were required to be either a certified teacher who attends a regular PLC group, or an administrator involved with a PLC program(s). The superintendent of schools signed a permission form after receiving an overview of the study and subsequently, University of Wyoming IRB approval was received (see Appendix B). After this approval, teachers and administrators were first contacted via school email as to the specifics of the study, and about their possible participation. After initial contact, the same teachers and administrators were given a formal letter with a consent form to sign and return. This formal letter and subsequent consent form were also delivered via email with an option of filling out the consent form electronically. Only those who returned the consent form were given the survey to complete.

Surveys were completed online using the University of Wyoming Survey Tool. Participants were sent an email with a link to the survey. Detailed instructions on how to complete each section were included on the survey. In an effort to increase response rate, reminder emails were sent periodically during the identified survey completion time.

Data Analysis

Survey responses were downloaded from the University of Wyoming Survey Tool and transferred to SPSS for data analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the survey items. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample based on the answers to the demographic questions included within the survey. Descriptive statistical tests such as mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize, organize, and simplify the data.

Furthermore, independent t-tests were used to determine the differences in perceived value of PDM between teachers and administrators. The t-tests were utilized under the following assumptions; the dependent variable (the value of PDM) is normally distributed, the two groups being compared have approximately equal variance on the dependent variable, and the two groups are independent of one another.

Results

This section presents the results of the study conducted to identify the perceptions of teachers and administrators at a midsized Nebraska school district in regards to participative decision making (PDM). After describing the characteristics of the respondents, analyses are organized by the research questions. Means, standard deviations, percentages, and significance are reported.

Description of Respondents

Emails were sent to all teachers (N=247) and administrators (N=20) employed at a midsized school district in Nebraska. A total of 122 teachers responded, accounting for nearly 50% of the population. Nineteen of the twenty administrators responded, accounting for 95% of the population. There was an overall response rate of 57.1%. Aside from demographic data all survey questions were answered on a four point likert scale (1), Strongly Disagree (2), Disagree

(3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree. Table 1 displays these survey questions as well as means and standard deviations.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Survey Questions

Survey Question	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
It is important to allow teachers to be part of the decision making process at the school level.	3.74	0.58
It is important to allow teachers to be a part of the decision making process at the district level.	3.55	0.64
Shared leadership is a necessary component between teachers and administrators to make schools successful.	3.55	0.62
I attend the majority of PLCs (or team meetings).	3.48	0.66
By involving staff in the decision making process, administrators are better able to do their job.	3.41	0.52
During PLCs (or team meetings) participants are asked to make decisions pertaining to the school as a whole.	3.21	0.56
It is effective to use PLC time to share the responsibility of decision making.	3.19	0.56
I have an opportunity to give input on decisions being made specific to my position.	3.14	0.66
Opinions about the practice of education is valued within the PLC (or team meeting) group.	3.14	0.58
Administrators ask for opinions because they value teachers as professionals.	3.12	0.64
PLC time (or team meeting time) is a good avenue to allow teachers to give input affecting decision making processes.	3.10	0.66
I attend a PLC (or team meeting) at least once every two weeks.	3.03	0.90
Administrators value the opinions of teachers.	3.01	0.65

Administrators trust in PLC Groups (or teams) to arrive at meaningful decisions.	2.97	0.70
During PLCs administrators request the opinions of others about decisions that need to be made.	2.97	0.62
An administrator is present during PLC (or team meeting time).	2.91	0.89
PLCs (or team meetings) are a time when opinions of teachers are requested about decisions that need to be made.	2.90	0.49
Administrators honor the decisions made by others during PLCs (or team meetings).	2.88	0.60
When teacher input is requested in regards to decisions that need to be made it is because there is intent to use those opinions to make decisions.	2.86	0.59
There are opportunities for teachers to give input on decisions needing to be made about the operations of schools.	2.85	0.56
When input is requested about decisions that need to be made it is subsequently used to make that decision.	2.80	0.59
When opinions about decision making are requested it is not just for show.	2.79	0.68
When input is requested it is then used to make decisions.	2.79	0.64
Our district has an effective process for allowing participation of teachers in decision making processes.	2.68	0.64
Administrators and teachers feel the same about the usefulness of sharing in the decision making process.	2.63	0.64
The opinion of teachers is valued by central office administrators.	2.59	0.71
During PLCs (or team meetings) participants are asked to make decisions specific to their discipline or grade level.	2.55	0.66
Our district effectively shares decision making responsibilities between administrators and teachers.	2.54	0.72
During PLCs (or team meetings) participants are asked to make decisions pertaining to the district as a whole.	2.09	0.72

Administrators should be solely responsible for decisions making. 1.51 0.61

Note: All questions were answered on a four-point likert scale: (1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Agree (4) Strongly Agree.

Demographic data was collected from all participants. Data collected included gender, age, level of education, number of years in current position, number of years in education, and the number certifications held. Descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages were used to describe the sample.

The mean age of the participants was nearly 37 years old with a majority of them being female (68.8%). Well over half of the participants have a master's degree or higher (68%) and more than half (67.3%) hold two or more certifications. Around half (56.8%) of the participants have been working in education for ten or more years and around a quarter (25.5%) of the participants have been working in their current position for ten or more years. Table 2 displays demographic details for study participants.

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Information

Characteristic	N	(%)
Position		
Administrator	19	13.5
Teacher	118	83.7
No Response	4	2.8
Level of Education		
Bachelor's Degree (s)	41	29.1
Master's Degree (s)	91	64.5
Doctoral Degree (s)	5	3.5
No Response	4	2.8
Gender		
Male	40	28.4
Female	97	68.8
No Response	4	2.8

Number of Years in Current Position

1-5	67	47.6
6-10	25	17.7
11-20	26	18.4
21+	10	7.1
No Response	13	9.2

Age

24-34	35	24.7
35-45	44	32.2
46-56	34	24.1
57+	11	8.0
No Response	17	12.0

Years as an Educator

1-5	13	9.2
6-10	35	24.8
11-20	43	30.5
21+	37	26.3
No Response	13	9.2

Number of Certifications Held

0	1	0.7
1	29	20.6
2	58	41.1
3	32	22.7
4+	5	3.5
No Response	16	11.3

Value of Using PDM during PLCs

The findings to the first research question, “What is the perceived value of implementing and using Participative Decision Making (PDM) in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)?” are included below. Nearly all teachers and administrators (94.3%) agree PLCs are an opportune time to share in the decision-making processes in schools ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.56$). However, nearly a quarter of the participants (22%) believed there were limited or no opportunity for teachers to be involved in the decision-making process ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.56$). A majority of participants (87%) believe they have ample opportunity to be involved in decision-

making specific to their positions ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 0.66$). Furthermore, 96.4% of the participants agree by incorporating PDM practices into schools, administrators are better able to do their jobs ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.52$). Additionally, nearly three-quarters of the participants (73%) think input is requested because it will be used to make decisions ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.59$) and 81% of the respondents believe administrators trust PLC groups to arrive at meaningful decisions ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 0.70$).

Effectiveness of PDM

The findings to the second research question, “What is the perceived effectiveness of the PDM processes at a mid-sized school district in Nebraska?” are included below. Just over half of the participants (56.5%) believe this district effectively shares decision-making processes between teachers and administrators ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 0.72$). Additionally, 65.3% of participants believe this district has an effective process to facilitate participation in decision-making ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 0.64$).

In order to better gauge how teachers and administrators perceive their district's effectiveness in sharing in the decision-making two open-ended questions were asked; 1) What are the greatest strengths in regards to allowing the participation of teachers in decision-making processes in your district? and 2) What recommendations do you have to improve the system of sharing the responsibility in decision-making in your district? Responses were analyzed and themes were identified by grouping similar responses. Four themes were discovered for each of the two open-ended questions.

The first open-ended question, “What are the greatest strengths in regards to allowing the participation of teachers in decision-making processes in your district?” yielded a wide array of responses from participants. Strengths communicated varied from answers dealing with the

opportunity to be on planning committees, “teachers are invited to have input in the calendar adoption process as well as in new curriculum that is being adopted” to being involved in professional development decisions, “we are given time to discuss issues pertaining to our department and to discuss matters of importance through staff development and professional days”. After analyzing the responses dealing with the strengths of the school district, four themes emerged. The four themes are listed below followed by Table 3 which displays sample responses connected to each theme.

- **Common Planning:** Guaranteeing grade level and departmental planning time. Allowing teachers with mutual interests to be involved in the decision-making processes more valuable decisions are reached.
- **Committee Participation:** There are many opportunities for committee membership which results in teacher participation in decision-making.
- **Superintendent Meeting:** Superintendent holds yearly small group (usually by department or grade level) meetings to discuss the direction of the district and gives teachers an opportunity to voice concerns.
- **Teacher Expertise:** Teachers are well equipped to share in decision-making processes because of their high level of professionalism.

Table 3

Strengths of the District

Theme	Example Response
Common Planning	<p>Set times for meetings and common planning is designated for our departments.</p> <p>Team and grade level meetings. Math and reading content area specialist meetings. Team leader meetings. Curriculum planning times. The structure of teams in the master schedule.</p>

Committee Participation	<p>There are a lot of committees, leadership teams, grade level meetings, as well as department meetings that allow conversations to make decisions in our district.</p> <p>Our district's greatest strengths is having leadership teams, PLCs, and other committees throughout our building/district that communicate cooperatively.</p>
Superintendent Meeting	<p>Our superintendent takes time to meet with all staff at least once each year to ask and answer questions and give input.</p> <p>I like that there is opportunity for teachers to meet with the superintendent and voice their concerns. I'm not sure if these conversations directly relate to the decision process, but I know that some action is taken out of the conversations.</p>
Teacher Expertise	<p>We have a new clientele each year, so as new situations arise, teachers are usually first to see it/hear about it in the class. They are on the front-lines so usually their feedback or solutions hold weight.</p> <p>The greatest strength is the first hand experience that teachers bring to helping make decisions that directly affect what they do every day.</p>

The second open ended question, "What recommendations do you have to improve the system of sharing the responsibility in decision-making in your district?" also yielded a wide array of responses from participants. Respondents communicated areas in which their district needs improvement ranging from human resources, "the superintendent needs to change his perception and philosophy. We need to spend more money on teachers than administrators. If we had smaller class sizes, more contact with students the schools would run much smoother" to giving teachers less responsibility in decision-making, "to be honest, sometimes I would like the administrators to make more decisions and be firm, I feel that they ask teacher opinions too often". After analyzing the responses dealing with the areas of improvement of the school

district, four themes emerged. The four themes are listed below followed by Table 4 which displays sample responses connected to each theme.

- **Transparency:** More transparency is needed between administrators and teachers in regards to decision-making.
- **Vertical Planning:** More opportunity is needed for teachers to meet with different grade level (or ability level classes) in order to make more informed decisions that impact a larger population of students.
- **Honor Decisions:** Input of teachers should not be requested if there is no intent to use the input.
- **District Level Participation:** More opportunities for teachers to be involved in district wide decision making processes are needed.

Table 4

Areas of Improvement

Theme	Example Response
Transparency	<p>Sometimes we as teachers are not given the rationale behind major decisions. (i.e. schedule change, programming change, testing dates/methods, etc.) If a major decision is made and the administration comes to us as the teachers and can show that it was well thought out and will be a positive impact for most students, we can help support that decision.</p> <p>With some issues, I think our district needs to be more transparent and tell teachers what is going on. I also think that administrators need to listen to teachers about the day to day classroom stuff.</p>
Vertical planning	<p>I think working together with teachers from other schools more often would aide in greater understanding and consistency in our district at the elementary level. If every teacher at every grade level has the same concerns or ideas, decision-making would be more of a shared</p>

responsibility.

More district meetings with teachers that allow them to visit with teachers of like grades or grades above and below to discuss what students need and what teachers are doing and need to be doing.

Honor Decisions

Actually honor what teachers say. Far too often our opinions are asked for, disregarded, and when we ask about decision we are told, well, you had input. That is the biggest problem I see with asking for opinions.

Right now, it seems like administration asks for our opinions, and then make the decision regardless of what we said.

District Level Participation

I think that there needs to be more teacher input at the district level. I think that the building level collaboration is growing and I believe that the district level decision-making would be more effective if teachers were a part of that process.

I still feel sometimes Central Office makes decisions that teachers and building administrators do not agree are best for kids. The building teachers and administration know the kids better than anyone. We are in the middle of it every day and have a very realistic view and perspective.

Teacher and Administrator Differences

The findings to the third research question, “How do teachers and administrators perception of the value of PDM differ?” are included below. Independent t-tests were used to assess the differences in teacher and administrator perception on all survey questions. An analysis of how teachers and administrators differ in perception of the value of PDM will be discussed followed by an explanation of other differences found. Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations disaggregated by administrators and teachers.

Table 5

Teacher and Administrator Perception

	Administrators		Teachers	
	M	SD	M	SD
It is important to allow teachers to be part of the decision making process at the school level.	3.74	0.45	3.74	0.61
Administrators ask for opinions because they value teachers as professionals.	3.74	0.45	3.02*	0.60*
Shared leadership is a necessary component between teachers and administrators to make schools successful.	3.63	0.50	3.53	0.64
By involving staff in the decision making process, administrators are better able to do their job.	3.61	0.61	3.36	0.50
I have an opportunity to give input on decisions being made specific to my position.	3.53	0.51	3.08*	0.66*
Administrators value the opinions of teachers.	3.47	0.51	2.93*	0.64*
PLC time (or team meeting time) is a good avenue to allow teachers to give input affecting decision making processes.	3.42	0.51	3.03*	0.67*
It is important to allow teachers to be a part of the decision making process at the district level.	3.42	0.51	3.55	0.66
During PLCs (or team meetings) participants are asked to make decisions specific to their discipline or grade level.	3.39	0.61	3.19*	0.54*
I attend a PLC (or team meeting) at least once every two weeks.	3.37	0.68	2.97	0.94
Administrators trust in PLC Groups (or teams) to arrive at meaningful decisions.	3.37	0.50	2.90*	0.71*
Administrators honor the decisions made by others during PLCs (or team meetings).	3.33	0.49	2.80*	0.57*

An administrator is present during PLC (or team meeting time).	3.28	0.67	2.82*	0.89*
It is effective to use PLC time to share the responsibility of decision making.	3.26	0.56	3.15	0.55
Opinions about the practice of education is valued within the PLC (or team meeting) group.	3.26	0.45	3.10	0.59
There are opportunities for teachers to give input on decisions needing to be made about the operations of schools.	3.22	0.43	2.78*	0.56*
PLCs (or team meetings) are a time when opinions of teachers are requested about decisions that need to be made.	3.22	0.43	2.84*	0.47*
When teacher input is requested in regards to decisions that need to be made it is because there is intent to use those opinions to make decisions.	3.21	0.54	2.79*	0.57*
During PLCs administrators request the opinions of others about decisions that need to be made.	3.21	0.42	2.92	0.62
I attend the majority of PLCs (or team meetings).	3.16	0.77	3.52*	0.65*
When input is requested about decisions that need to be made it is subsequently used to make that decision.	3.16	0.50	2.74*	0.58*
When input is requested it is then used to make decisions.	3.11	0.46	2.72*	0.64*
The opinion of teachers is valued by central office administrators.	3.06	0.42	2.51*	0.71*
When opinions about decision making are requested it is not just for show.	3.05	0.62	2.74	0.68
Our district has an effective process for allowing participation of teachers in decision making processes.	2.95	0.52	2.63*	0.64*
During PLCs participants are asked to make decisions pertaining to the school as a whole.	2.89	0.66	2.48	0.64

Our district effectively shares decision making responsibilities between administrators and teachers.	2.84	0.60	2.48*	0.72*
Administrators and teachers feel the same about the usefulness of sharing in the decision making process.	2.79	0.42	2.60	0.67
During PLCs (or team meetings) participants are asked to make decisions pertaining to the district as a whole.	2.32	0.75	2.03	0.70
Administrators should be solely responsible for decisions making.	1.74	0.73	1.47	0.59

Note: The asterisk denotes a statistically significant difference between teachers and administrators at the $p < 0.05$ level.

All survey questions were analyzed using independent t-tests to describe the differences in teacher and administrator perception. Over half of the questions asked (57%) resulted in a statistically significant difference between teacher and administrator perception (see Table 5). Of the thirty questions asked, twelve were used to describe the difference between teacher and administrator perception specifically regarding the value of PDM.

Five of the twelve survey items (42%) resulted in statistically significant differences in perception. Additionally, administrators had a higher rate of agreement than teachers in all cases where a statistical difference was found. Significant differences in teacher and administrator perception include: opportunity to give input on decisions specific to an individual's position, $t(135) = 2.85, p < 0.05$; agreement that PLC time is a good avenue to involve teachers in decision making, $t(133) = 2.40, p < 0.05$; the belief that administrators trust PLC groups to arrive at meaningful decisions, $t(132) = 2.73, p < 0.05$; the belief that administrators honor decisions made by others, $t(130) = 3.79, p < 0.05$; and the belief that administrators value the opinions of teachers, $t(130) = 3.53, p < 0.05$.

The remainder of significant differences in perception found lie in the effectiveness of the school district in regards to the use and implementation of PDM processes. The findings discussed below suggest a difference in perception regarding how PLC time is used to involve teachers in the decision-making process and how they perceive administrators valuing teacher opinion. Specifically, the following statistically significant differences in perception were found between administrators and teachers. In every case listed below administrators were found to have a higher level of agreement than teachers.

- Administrators are present during PLCs
- Administrators ask for opinions because they intend to use them.
- Administrators ask for teacher opinion because they value teachers as professionals.
- Opinions are asked during PLC time.
- Teacher opinion is valued by central office administrators
- The district effectively shares the decision-making processes between teachers and administrators.
- The district has an effective process in place to distribute decision-making responsibilities.

Seven of the twelve questions (58%) resulted in no significant difference. Teachers and administrators generally feel similarly in regards to the value of using PDM in schools. Teachers and administrators feel involving teachers in the decision-making process at both the school and district level is important (School-based involvement: Administrators, $M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.45$; Teachers, $M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.61$; District-based involvement: Administrators, $M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.51$; Teachers, $M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.66$). Additionally, while teachers and administrators agree that

PLCs are times where school-based decisions are made (Administrators: $M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.61$; Teachers: $M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.54$) both groups disagree that district-based decisions are made during that same time (Administrators: $M = 2.32$, $SD = 0.75$; Teachers: $M = 2.03$, $SD = 0.70$). Both groups also disagree that an administrator should be solely responsible for decision-making (Administrators: $M = 1.74$, $SD = 0.73$; Teachers: $M = 1.47$, $SD = 0.59$) and believe shared leadership is a necessary component of successful schools (Administrators: $M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.50$; Teachers: $M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.64$). Interestingly, both teachers and administrators are not completely convinced that two groups feel the same about the usefulness of PDM in schools (Administrators: $M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.41$; Teachers: $M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.67$).

Value and Use of Decisions

The findings to research questions four, “Do teachers believe decisions made through the PDM process are used and valued by administrators?” and research question five, “Do administrators believe information gathered during the PDM process is valuable?” are included below. Most participants (93%) believe opinions expressed during PLC time are valued by the group and a majority of the participants (86%) agree that administrators ask for opinions because they value teachers as professionals ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.64$). A slightly lower percentage (75.8%) however believes administrators will then honor the decisions made during PLC time ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.60$). Nearly a quarter of respondents (25.5%) do not believe when opinions are asked of teachers they are then used to make decisions ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.64$) and a similar portion of respondents (26.3%) believe that opinions are asked of teachers just to placate their desire to be involved ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.68$).

Discussion

This study was conducted to examine teacher and administrator perception regarding the value of using Participative Decision Making (PDM) in schools. Specifically, five research questions were used to guide the inquiry: 1) What is the perceived value of implementing and using Participative Decision Making (PDM) in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)? 2) What is the perceived effectiveness of the PDM processes at a mid-sized Nebraska school district? 3) How do teachers and administrators' perceptions of the value of PDM differ? 4) Do teachers believe decisions made through the PDM process are used and valued by administrators? 5) Do administrators believe information gathered during the PDM process is valuable? The findings are summarized below.

On the surface, participants agree that there is value in allowing teachers to be a part of the decision-making processes at schools. Furthermore, participants agreed that the PLC setting is an effective place to conduct PDM processes. This finding lends further support to the work of Scribner et al. (2007) suggesting that a realignment of leadership roles is necessary to make schools successful. Furthermore, this finding reinforces the belief that successful schools cultivate an environment where leadership is not assigned to a select few but distributed throughout a system to better inform practice (Spillane, 2005).

Approximately half of participants agree that this district effectively shares the decision-making responsibilities between administrators and teachers. According to Spillane (2009) a specific framework is necessary in order to effectively allow those with formal leadership positions to involve those without formal leadership positions. Without establishing this framework common language, expectations, and norms cannot be created. Furthermore, without these components the goal of generating more effective and efficient practices cannot be reached.

(Harris, 2013; Lumby, 2013; Spillane, 2005). Smylie et al. (1996) found that one of the most telling components of high participatory schools was the distribution of leadership among teachers. They found these types of institutions regularly and inclusively share the leadership responsibilities where both teachers and administrators take initiative. The findings of this study do not seem to support this notion. Teachers expressed their desire to be involved in this manner. Additionally, teachers and administrators expressed their beliefs that this type of system is valuable, however, a large portion of the participants did not believe this district has an effective system for accomplishing these practices.

One of the more prominent findings was the difference in administrator and teacher perception in regards to the value of incorporating PDM. Over half of the components analyzed regarding teacher and administrator perception resulted in a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Interestingly, of all the significant differences found, administrators had a higher level of agreement than teachers. That is to say, administrators generally agreed more than teachers that the practice of PDM was being successfully implemented and used during PLC time. The idea behind involving teachers in the decision-making a process is to create a system with more involved, engaged, and focused leadership style (Bush & Glover, 2012). The findings of this study suggest that administrators in this district would agree with this sentiment but perhaps, at least in the minds of the teachers, are falling a bit short.

Participants generally feel their opinions are valued however fewer feel those opinions are subsequently used to make decisions. This is an interesting finding because participants agreed; PDM was a valuable tool, PLCs are a good avenue to practice PDM, and that administrators ask for opinions of teachers because they are valued as professionals. There is an interesting, however small, disconnect between those findings and the findings about how

decisions are used once they are given. Nearly a quarter of all participants believe that decisions made by others are not subsequently honored by administrators.

Limitations

Online survey research has limitations that have to be accounted for. According to Granello and Wheaton (2004) major limitations connected to online survey research include; representativeness of the sample, response rates, measurement errors, and technical difficulties. Additionally, specific to this study, limitations were two-fold: 1) surveys were self-administered by participants resulting in a lack of observation of participant behavior, and 2) Survey results were limited to one district. Responses may not apply to other districts due to differences in use and implementation of both PLCs and PDM.

Implications

The results of this study provide implications for teachers, administrators, and school districts as a whole. The practice of education is far too complex to allow decision-making to occur in isolation (Fullan, 2008). Educators must be committed to engaging collaboratively to ensure increased performance (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). Additionally, the results of this study seem to support the notion that teachers agree they have ample opportunity to participate in decision-making when the decisions at hand are central to their position. However, this agreement seems to decline when participation transitions from position-based to school-based and from school-based to district-based. It is important to recognize this finding does not necessarily confirm the district is failing to involve teachers. Rather, it might suggest, as decisions become broader in scope PDM practices become less advantageous. This reaffirms the belief that shared decision-making is not appropriate in every situation and can even become counterproductive if over-utilized (Hoy & Tarter, 1993).

Teachers could use these findings to reflect on their role in PLCs and their role in PDM practices. It is important for teachers to understand the reasons for using PDM as well as the limitations associated with the practice of sharing in the decision-making process. The more invested teachers are in the decision at hand the more contentious the feelings could become if they believe their voice was not heard. Conversations about how and when PDM is appropriate will only further the effectiveness of the practice.

School-based administrators can benefit from this study by recognizing the beliefs of their subordinates. While many studies focus on the outcomes of a particular program, this study offers direct insight on how employees feel about the process of PDM. Administrators can use this information to better inform the setup of their own PLC groups. Administrator presence and participation in PLC groups is paramount to the success of the group. Administrators should be active participants that facilitate discussions with collaboration being the focus (DuFour et al., 2010). Furthermore, they should operationalize PDM in manner that is clear and provides staff with appropriate expectations of their level of participation (Hoy & Tarter, 1993). These findings can also be used to start a dialogue on the importance of shared leadership and the best ways in which to achieve high results using a framework such as PDM. Administrators might also use these findings to better understand how and why, teachers and administrator perception differs. These conversations might lead to increased trust and respect among colleagues and morph into creating a norm of involvement in decision-making, thus creating a more effective PLC practice (Harris & Jones, 2010).

School districts with similar characteristics to the district studied could benefit from the findings. A similar study could be run to discover teacher and administrator perception or these districts could use this information to conduct an action research project to gauge if and how

PDM is being used in their schools. Additionally, the findings of this study could be used to better structure PLC time to ensure decision-making processes are being effectively shared between teachers and administrators.

Finally, these findings add to a very limited body of research studying teacher and administrator perception of PDM. These findings could be a jumping point for further inquiry on how and why teachers and administrators feel PDM is effective or is not effective. These further studies could ultimately lead to an understanding of why PDM is a good management and leadership technique.

Recommendations for further research would include expanding the study to more than one district. It might be relevant to study administrators and teachers in isolation, as more position specific questions could be asked. It might also be beneficial to see how elementary and secondary institutions differ. A mixed methods approach might also give better insight on the perceptions of individuals. Interviews with participants could potentially offer important components not available through survey research.

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APPENDIX A

Survey

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Opinions about the practice of education is valued within the PLC (or team meeting) group.				
2. I have an opportunity to give input on decisions being made specific to my position.				
3. PLC time (or team meeting time) is a good avenue to allow teachers to give input affecting decision making processes.				
4. It is important to allow teachers to be part of the decision making process at the school level.				
5. It is important to allow teachers to be a part of the decision making process at the district level.				
6. Administrators trust in PLC Groups (or teams) to arrive at meaningful decisions.				
7. It is effective to use PLC time to share the responsibility of decision making.				
8. Administrators should be solely responsible for decisions making.				
9. Shared leadership is a necessary component between teachers and administrators to make schools successful.				
10. Administrators and teachers feel the same about the usefulness of sharing in the decision making process.				
11. I attend a PLC (or team meeting) at least once every two weeks.				
12. An administrator is present during PLC (or team meeting time).				
13. During PLCs (or team meetings) participants are asked to make decisions specific to their discipline or grade level.				
14. During PLCs (or team meetings) participants are asked to make decisions pertaining to the school as a whole.				
15. During PLCs (or team meetings) participants are asked to make decisions pertaining to the district as a whole.				
16. During PLCs administrators request the opinions of others about decisions that need to be made.				
17. When input is requested it is then used to make decisions.				

18. When opinions about decision making are requested it is not just for show.				
19. Administrators ask for opinions because they value teachers as professionals.				
20. Administrators honor the decisions made by others during PLCs (or team meetings).				
21. Administrators value the opinions of teachers.				
22. I attend the majority of PLCs (or team meetings).				
23. When input is requested about decisions that need to be made it is subsequently used to make that decision.				
24. PLCs (or team meetings) are a time when opinions of teachers are requested about decisions that need to be made.				
25. The opinion of teachers is valued by central office administrators.				
26. When teacher input is requested in regards to decisions that need to be made it is because there is intent to use those opinions to make decisions.				
27. By involving staff in the decision making process, administrators are better able to do their job.				
28. There are opportunities for teachers to give input on decisions needing to be made about the operations of schools.				
29. Our district effectively shares decision making responsibilities between administrators and teachers.				
30. Our district has an effective process for allowing participation of teachers in decision making processes.				

31. What are the greatest strengths in regards to allowing the participation of teachers in decision making processes in your district?

32. What recommendations do you have to improve the system of sharing the responsibility in decision making in your district?

Demographics

1. My current position:

Administrator

Teacher

2. Number of years in my current position _____ years.

3. My gender:

Male

Female

4. My age: _____ years old

5. The number of years I have been working in Education: _____ years.

6. The highest level of education I have achieved:

Bachelor's Degree(s)

Master's Degree(s)

Doctoral Degree(s)

7. The number of certifications I hold: _____ certifications.

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval

UNIVERSITY
OF WYOMING

Vice President for Research & Economic Development
1000 E. University Avenue, Department 3355 • Room 305/308, Old Main • Laramie, WY 82071
(307) 766-5353 • (307) 766-5320 • fax (307) 766-2608 • www.uwyo.edu/research

January 4, 2017

Bree Rock
Student
Professional Studies
University of Wyoming

David Hvidson
Assistant Professor
Professional Studies
University of Wyoming

Courtney Mckim
Assistant Professor
Professional Studies
University of Wyoming

Protocol #20170104BR01416

Re: IRB Proposal "*Perceptions of the Value of Participative Decision Making from a Nebraska School District*"

Dear Bree, David and Courtney:

The proposal referenced above qualifies for exempt review and is approved as one that would not involve more than minimal risk to participants. Our exempt review and approval will be reported to the IRB at their next convened meeting January 19, 2017.

Any significant change(s) in the research/project protocol(s) from what was approved should be submitted to the IRB (Protocol Update Form) for review and approval prior to initiating any change. Per recent policy and compliance requirements, any investigator with an active research protocol may be contacted by the recently convened Data Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB) for periodic review. The DSMB's charge (sections 7.3 and 7.4 of the IRB Policy and Procedures Manual) is to review active human subject(s) projects to assure that the procedures, data management, and protection of human participants follow approved protocols. Further information and the forms referenced above may be accessed at the "Human Subjects" link on the Office of Research and Economic Development website: <http://www.uwyo.edu/research/human-subjects/index.html>.

You may proceed with the project/research and we wish you luck in the endeavor. Please feel free to call me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Esther Seville
Esther Seville
IRB Office Associate
On behalf of the Chairman,

APPENDIX C**Cronbach's Alpha**

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.906	.909	28