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Lesson Study Policy and Practice in Florida

Findings from a Statewide District Survey

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 4 |
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 5 |
| METHODOLOGY | 6 |
| DISTRICT POLICY ON LESSON STUDY | 7 |
| FUNDING FOR LESSON STUDY..... | 10 |
| DISTRICT SUPPORT AND TRAININGS ON LESSON STUDY..... | 11 |
| EVALUATION OF LESSON STUDY IMPLEMENTATION..... | 13 |
| LESSON STUDY AND TEACHER EVALUATION..... | 14 |
| SUSTAINING LESSON STUDY..... | 15 |
| DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS..... | 16 |
| REFERENCES..... | 18 |
| BIOGRAPHIES OF RESEARCHERS..... | 19 |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENT..... | 20 |

TABLE AND FIGURES

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 1: Comparison of District Characteristics: Participating Districts and All Districts..... | 6 |
| Figure 1: Types of Schools Required to Implement Lesson Study..... | 7 |
| Figure 2: District Requirement on Frequency of Lesson Study Implementation..... | 8 |
| Figure 3: Methods of Schedule Modification Required or Encouraged by Districts..... | 9 |
| Figure 4: District Funding on Lesson Study..... | 10 |
| Figure 5: Designated Lesson Study Facilitator..... | 11 |
| Figure 6: Trainings on Lesson Study..... | 12 |
| Figure 7: District Activities for Facilitating Lesson Study Implementation..... | 12 |
| Figure 8: Evaluation of Lesson Study Implementation..... | 13 |
| Figure 9: Lesson Study and Teacher Evaluation..... | 14 |
| Figure 10: Sustaining Lesson Study..... | 15 |

INTRODUCTION

Lesson study is a teacher professional development model in which a group of teachers work collaboratively to plan a lesson, observe the lesson in a classroom with students, and analyze and discuss the student work and learning in response to the lesson (Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004; Lewis, 2002; Lewis & Hurd, 2011; Stepanek, Appel, Leong, Mangan, & Mitchell, 2007). Lesson study was imported to the United States from Japan in the late 1990s after an international video study revealed that in comparison to U.S. math lessons that focus on lower-level mathematics skills, Japanese math lessons focus on promoting students' conceptual understanding (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). This study found lesson study to be the driving force that enabled Japanese teachers to practice student-centered, inquiry-based instruction.

Florida is the first state to promote lesson study as a statewide professional development model for implementing the Common Core State Standards and improving instruction and student achievement using part of the \$700 million Race to the Top (RTTT) grant. The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) specified a state requirement on Lesson Study in 2010 stating that "A local education agency (LEA) with a persistently lowest-achieving (PLA) school will modify these schools' schedules to devote a minimum of one Lesson Study per month for each grade level or subject area" (Florida Department of Education, 2010, p6). Despite the increasing number of districts and schools implementing lesson study in Florida and across the country, there have been few systematic studies of the district policy and implementation of lesson study (Hart, Alston, & Murata, 2011).

In order to fill this knowledge gap, the project team at Florida State University led by Dr. Motoko Akiba conducted an online survey of 56 Florida districts in 2013 to examine the district policies and practices for promoting implementation of lesson study. Understanding the characteristics of district policies and practices across the state will inform the Florida Department of Education in examining the influence of the state policy on lesson study and to provide necessary support to promote successful implementation of lesson study. In addition, this report will inform the district administrators about the policies and practices of other districts across the state, which may be useful for further promoting the current policy and support structures or for revising them to improve school and teacher practice of lesson study.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An online survey of district policy and practice on lesson study was sent to all 72 districts in Florida in summer 2013. A total of 56 districts participated in the survey, with a response rate of 78%. District characteristics of the participating 56 districts were similar to the state average, showing that the results are likely to be generalizable to the entire state.

The survey asked the districts to report on the policies and practices on lesson study the district implemented during the 2012-2013 academic year. The results are organized by six topics, as listed below.

District Policy on Lesson Study: Thirty-four districts (62%) out of the 56 districts reported that they require at least one type of schools to implement lesson study. Of these 34 districts, 13 districts (23%) required all schools in the district to implement lesson study. Twenty-nine districts (52%) further specified the frequency of lesson study implementation, and 31 districts (55%) required or encouraged schools to use common planning time to implement lesson study.

Funding for Lesson Study: Twenty-six districts (46%) provided funding for substitutes for teachers to participate in lesson study during the contract hours and 14 districts (25%) provided professional development funds. However, only 6 districts (11%) provided stipends for teachers to participate in lesson study outside the contract hours.

District Support and Trainings on Lesson Study: Districts provided various types of support and trainings on lesson study during the 2012-2013 academic year. A total of 16 districts (29%) reported that the district had a designated lesson study facilitator. Thirty-five (63%) districts provided training on lesson study for teachers, 22 districts (39%) provided training for school administrators and instructional coaches or facilitators, and 17 districts (30%) did so for district staff. Furthermore, 43 districts (77%) provided professional development credit to teachers who participated in lesson study and 39 districts (70%) offered assistance or support to schools and teachers on how to implement lesson study.

Evaluation of Lesson Study Implementation: No more than half of the 56 districts evaluated the implementation of lesson study. The two most common methods of evaluation were: (1) having instructional coaches involved in the lesson study process (27 districts or 48%) and (2) making a site visit to observe the lesson study process (20 districts or 36%).

Lesson Study and Teacher Evaluation: About one third of the districts (16 districts or 29%) reported that lesson study was part of teacher evaluation during the 2012-2013 academic year. In these districts, teachers were evaluated on their participation in lesson study, instruction in a research lesson, or the lesson plan developed during the lesson study.

Sustaining Lesson Study: Thirty-seven districts (67%) reported that they plan to sustain lesson study after the 2013-2014 academic year when the Race to the Top (RTTT) funding ends.

METHODOLOGY

In early June, the link to the online survey, *Lesson Study District Survey*, was sent to directors of professional development or directors of curriculum and instruction in all 72 districts in Florida, except two special schools (Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind and Washington Special). They were asked to respond to the questions regarding the policy and practice the district implemented for promoting lesson study during the 2012-2013 academic year. Follow-up emails were sent and phone calls were made multiple times until the survey closed in mid-August. A total of 56 districts participated in the survey, with a response rate of **78%**.

Table 1 presents a comparison of the characteristics of the participating 56 districts and all 72 districts in Florida.

Table 1. Comparison of District Characteristics: Participating Districts and All Districts

| | Participating Districts (56) | All Florida Districts (72) |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Average District Enrollment | 38,731 | 37,048 |
| Average Number of Buildings | 51.3 | 48.0 |
| Poverty Level: Average percentage of Students with Free or Reduced Price Lunch | 58.6 | 58.2 |
| Ethnic Diversity Level: Average Percentage of Ethnic Minority Students | 42.2 | 42.8 |

The table shows that the average characteristics of the 56 participating districts are similar to the average characteristics of all 72 districts in Florida. Average enrollment size of the participating districts and average number of buildings are slightly larger than the state averages (38,731 vs. 37,048, 51.3 vs. 48.0). The poverty level measured by the average percentage of students receiving free or reduced price lunch was similar between the participating districts and all districts in Florida (58.6% vs. 58.2%). Likewise, the ethnic diversity level measured by the average percentage of ethnic minority students was similar between them; 42.2% compared to 42.8%.

Based on these similarities, we can say that the findings from the survey data in this report are likely to generalize to the population of the districts in Florida.

DISTRICT POLICY ON LESSON STUDY

District policy on lesson study was examined from three aspects: 1) district policy regarding the types of schools required to implement lesson study, 2) district requirement on the frequency of lesson study implementation, and 3) district requirement or encouragement of schedule modification to accommodate lesson study.

First, the district representatives were asked which types of schools were required to implement lesson study during the 2012-2013 academic year. The FLDOE requires districts with a persistently lowest-achieving (PLA) school to implement lesson study in the PLA school(s). Among the 56 participating districts, there were 53 PLA schools (or targeted schools) in 17 districts across the state identified by the FLDOE in the 2012-2013 academic year.

Figure 1 shows that, of the 56 districts that participated in the survey, a total of 34 districts (62%) required at least one type of schools to implement lesson study and 21 districts (38%) did not have any requirement for implementing lesson study. Five districts (9%) required PLA schools to implement lesson study, and eight districts (15%) required PLA schools and/or other low-achieving schools to implement lesson study. A total of 13 districts (23%) went beyond the state mandate and required all schools in the district to implement lesson study. Eight other districts required other types of schools (e.g., elementary schools only, designated pilot schools) to implement lesson study.

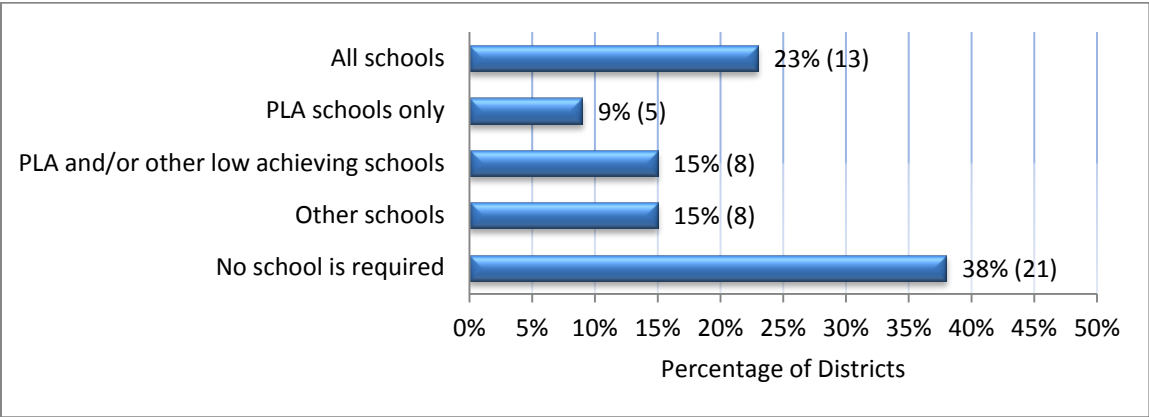


Figure 1: Types of Schools Required to Implement Lesson Study (2012-2013)

The survey also asked for the number of schools that are required to implement lesson study in each district. The number varied from 1 to 180, with a mean of 18 schools. These numbers add up to a total of 603 schools across 34 districts that were required to implement lesson study during the 2012-2013 academic year.

The second aspect of district policy on lesson study is the requirement on the frequency of lesson study implementation. The district representatives were asked how often these schools were required to implement lesson study during the 2012-2013 academic year. One cycle of

lesson study involves a group of teachers going through four stages of: 1) goal setting, 2) lesson planning, 3) teaching and observing a research lesson, and 4) discussing the student learning in response to the research lesson. One cycle of lesson study typically takes six to eight weeks if the group meets once a week, with face-to-face time of 10 to 15 hours in total.

Figure 2 shows that about half of the districts (48% or 27 districts) did not specify the frequency of lesson study implementation. One fourth of the districts (25% or 14 districts) required once or twice a semester, and another one fourth (23% or 13 districts) required once a year. Only two districts (4%) required an implementation of one lesson study cycle once a month.

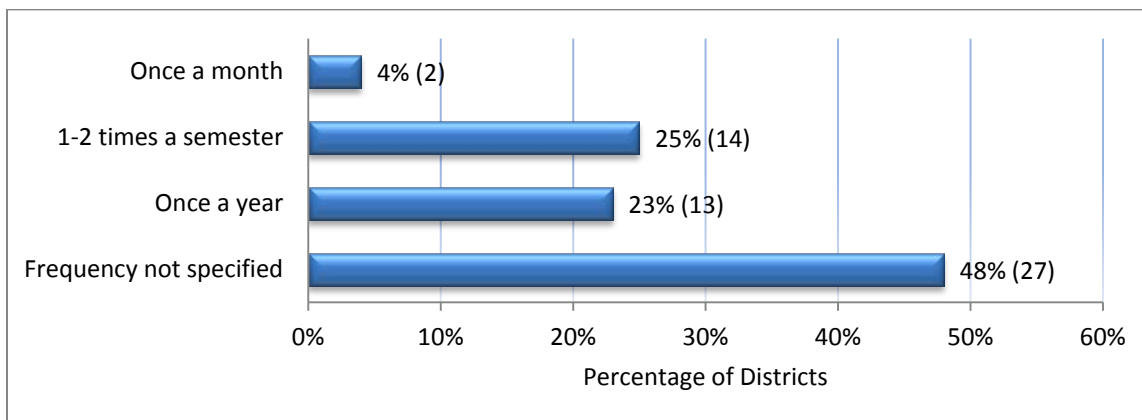


Figure 2: District Requirement on Frequency of Lesson Study Implementation

Because lesson study is a time-intensive professional development model, many districts also required or encouraged schools to modify their schedules to accommodate lesson study. The district representatives were first asked whether the district required or encouraged schools to modify their schedules during the 2012-2013 academic year. A majority of the districts (68% or 38 districts) answered “yes,” and they were further asked to report how schools were required or encouraged to modify their schedules from a list of methods of modification.

Figure 5 shows how districts required or encouraged schools to modify school schedule to allow teachers to practice lesson study. A majority of the districts (55% or 31 districts) reported that they required or encouraged schools to create a common planning time during the regular school hours so that teachers can meet to engage in the process of lesson study. Thirteen districts (23%) reported that the schools are required or encouraged to implement lesson study after school, and 12 districts (21%) reported implementation of lesson study before school. Nine districts required or encouraged the use of substitutes to provide teaching release time to teachers so that they can meet during the regular school hours. Only two districts chose to require or encourage schools to implement lesson study on the weekend.

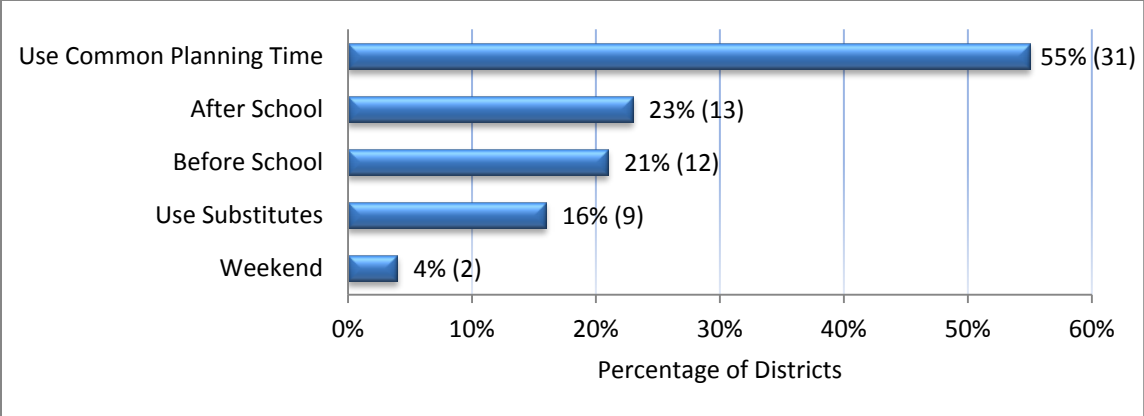


Figure 3: Methods of Schedule Modification Required or Encouraged by Districts

Note. Districts chose one or more methods with which they require or encourage schools to modify school schedule.

FUNDING FOR LESSON STUDY

Because of the time intensive nature of lesson study, financial support from the districts for schools and teachers to implement lesson study is essential. The survey asked the district representatives, “Did your district provide the following types of funding for implementation of lesson study during the 2012-2013 academic year?” with the four funding types listed in Figure 4.

About half of the districts (46% or 26 districts) provided funding for substitutes to provide teaching release time to teachers for participating in lesson study. Arrangement of substitutes is especially crucial for a lesson study group to conduct a research lesson during the regular school hours in which one group member teaches a research lesson and the other group members observe the lesson and collect data on student responses and learning.

One in four districts (14 districts) provided professional development funds for purchasing materials for lesson study, and one in five districts (11 districts) provided other types of funds, including travel funds to attend conferences on lesson study or special grants on lesson study. However, only six districts (11%) reported that they provided stipends for teachers to participate in lesson study. Considering that 21% to 23% of districts required or encouraged schools to implement lesson study before or after school as shown in Figure 3, a general lack of district funding for teacher stipends may cause difficulty in lesson study implementation.

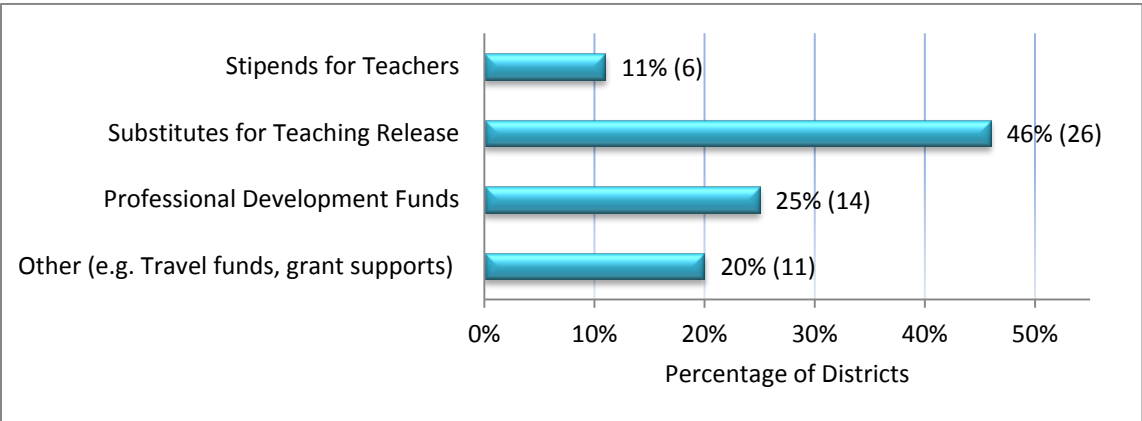


Figure 4: District Funding on Lesson Study

Note. Districts chose one or more funding types they provided.

DISTRICT SUPPORT AND TRAININGS ON LESSON STUDY

School districts provided various types of support and trainings in order to facilitate the implementation of lesson study during the 2012-2013 academic year. The survey asked the district representatives to report on three types of support and trainings: 1) designated district lesson study facilitator, 2) training on lesson study, and 3) district activities to promote lesson study implementation.

District representatives were asked if their districts have a designated facilitator or coordinator whose main responsibility is to facilitate lesson study¹ during the 2012-2013 academic year, with three answer choices as shown in Figure 5. Sixteen districts (29%) reported that they have a designated lesson study facilitator or coordinator. Twenty-five districts (45%) reported that, although they do not have a designated facilitator, the existing district staff are in charge of facilitating lesson study. The remaining 15 districts (27%) reported that no one is in charge of lesson study facilitation.

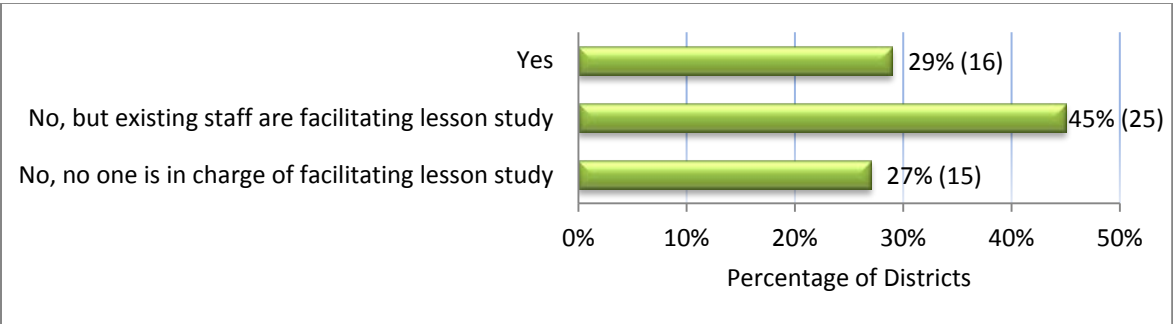


Figure 5: Designated Lesson Study Facilitator

Providing a training or workshop on lesson study is a natural first step for introducing the process of lesson study to the schools and teachers who are new to lesson study. The district representatives were asked if they offered workshops or trainings to the groups of individuals listed in Figure 6. Their responses showed that a majority of the districts (63% or 35 districts) offered a lesson study training to teachers, and about 40% (22 districts) offered training for school administrators and/or instructional coaches or lesson study facilitators. About one third of the districts (30% or 17 districts) offered a training or workshop for district staff.

¹ The designated facilitator or coordinator can hold a district-level position (e.g., Director of Staff Development, Coordinator of Curriculum), or school-level position (e.g., principal, site-based instructional coach).

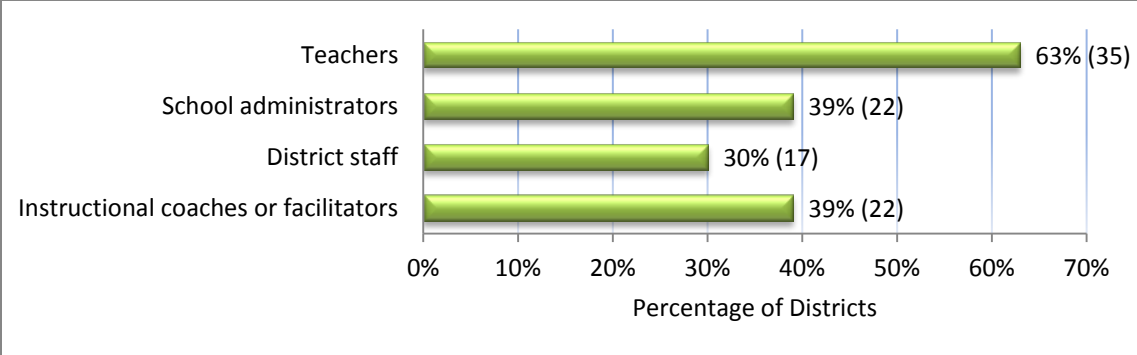


Figure 6: Trainings on Lesson Study

Note. Districts chose one or more types of training they provided.

In addition to having a lesson study facilitator and offering trainings, the survey responses showed that districts engaged in various activities to promote teachers’ implementation of lesson study during the 2012-2013 academic year. The most common activity in which 77% of the districts (43 districts) engaged in was to offer professional development credit or hours to teachers who implemented lesson study. Thirty-nine districts (70%) also offered assistance or support to schools and teachers on how to implement lesson study. About half of the districts (48% or 27 districts) provided web-based or paper materials and resources on lesson study. All of these activities would encourage and facilitate teachers’ practice of lesson study. Twenty-five districts (45%) studied the process and facilitation of lesson study. Since lesson study is new to most districts, their own understanding of lesson study would influence the quality of trainings and assistance they provide to schools and teachers. Working with external lesson study experts would also help enhance the district knowledge about the process and facilitation of lesson study. Twelve districts (21%) worked with a lesson study expert during the 2012-2013 academic year.

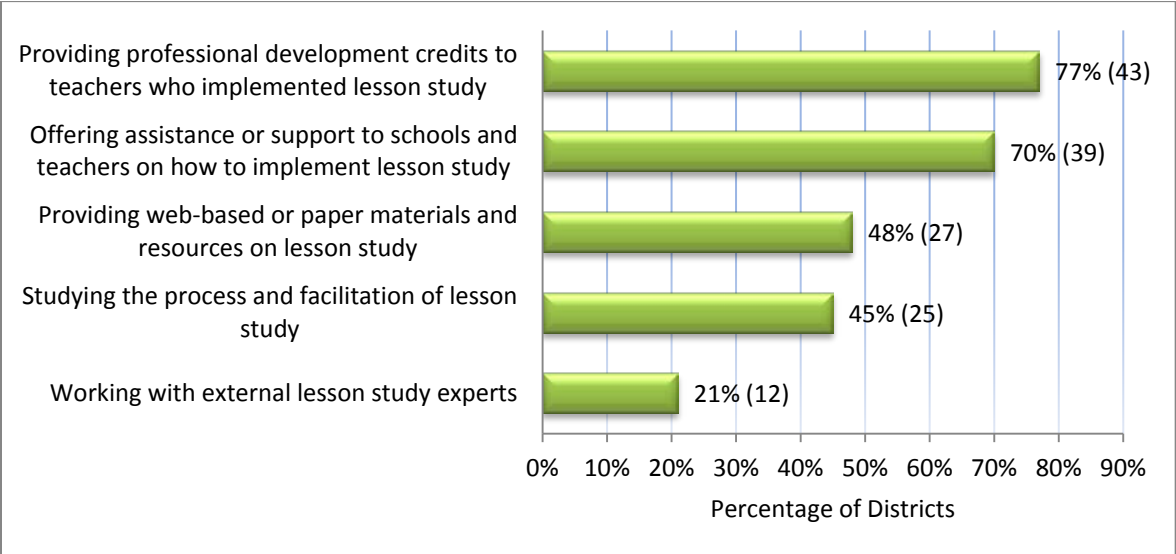


Figure 7: District Activities for Facilitating Lesson Study Implementation

Note. Districts chose one or more activities to facilitate the implementation of lesson study.

EVALUATION OF LESSON STUDY IMPLEMENTATION

Evaluation of lesson study implementation is important for districts to understand how lesson study is actually being implemented by teachers. The district representatives were asked how their districts evaluated the implementation (fidelity) of lesson study during the 2012-2013 academic year and the results are presented in Figure 8.

About half of the districts (48% or 27 districts) had their instructional coaches involved in the lesson study process², and 36% (20 districts) made a site visit to observe a lesson study process. One fifth of all districts (20% or 11 districts) conducted a teacher or principal interview or a focus group to ask them about their lesson study practice, and 16% (9 districts) conducted a teacher survey to ask them about their lesson study practice. Six districts (11%) reported using other methods of evaluation including having a researcher involved in the lesson study process and having teachers submit a report on lesson study implementation.

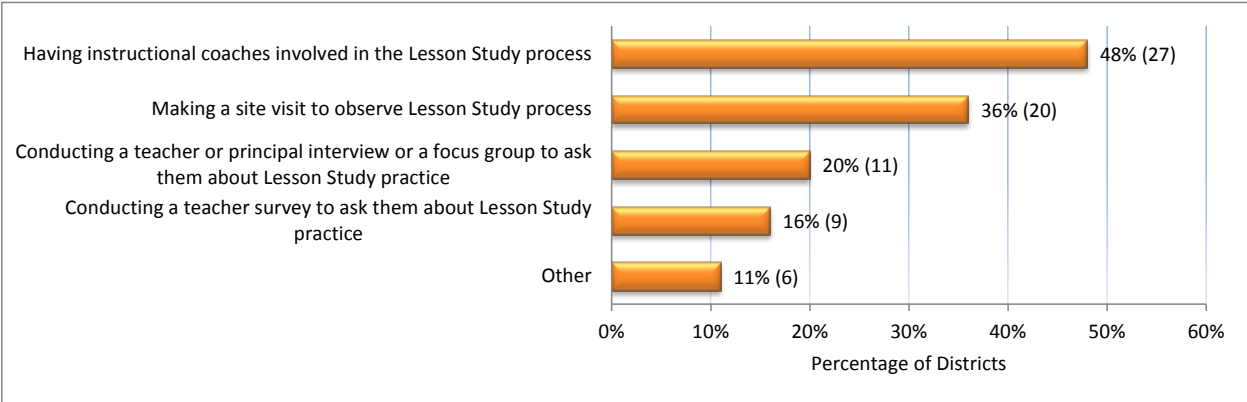


Figure 8: Evaluation of Lesson Study Implementation

Note. Districts chose one or more methods for evaluating lesson study implementation.

² These coaches may have evaluated the lesson study process or may have simply facilitated the process without evaluating it.

LESSON STUDY AND TEACHER EVALUATION

Teacher evaluation is a major focus of the RTTT grant and districts were establishing their teacher evaluation system while promoting implementation of lesson study. As a part of teacher professional development, teacher practice of lesson study may be considered as part of data for teacher evaluation.

The survey asked the district representatives if lesson study is part of teacher evaluation, and if so, how the district evaluates teachers' implementation of lesson study. Figure 9 shows that about one third of the districts (29% or 16 districts) reported that lesson study is part of teacher evaluation. Among these districts, four districts evaluate teachers' participation in lesson study, three districts evaluate instruction in a research lesson, and three districts evaluate the lesson plan developed from the lesson study. Six districts chose other methods to evaluate teachers on their lesson study practice.

Lesson study is a teacher-driven, collaborative process of instructional improvement. When lesson study practice is tied to teacher evaluation, teachers would focus on performance instead of the continuous improvement process. The individual nature of evaluation also does not fit well with this collaborative process of lesson study, as it undermines the culture of a professional learning community. Data collected on lesson study should be used for a formative assessment, which provides useful feedback for future improvement, instead of as a summative assessment that is often tied to high-stakes decisions such as tenure, merit raise, or promotion.

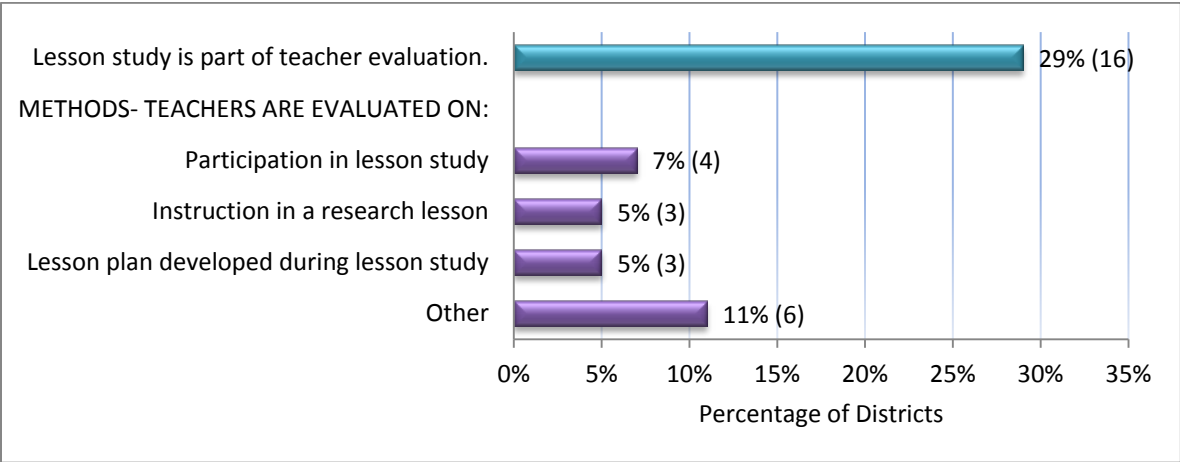


Figure 9: Lesson Study and Teacher Evaluation

SUSTAINING LESSON STUDY

The FLDOE used the RTTT fund as the major funding source for promoting lesson study across the state. With the RTTT grant ending in 2014, the question is raised as to whether districts will continue to promote lesson study after 2014 by allocating other professional development funds. If the districts will not promote lesson study after 2014, it will be difficult for schools or teachers to continue with lesson study practice without funding and support from the districts.

The district representatives were asked in the survey, “Does your district have a plan to sustain lesson study after the 2013-2014 academic year?” Figure 10 shows that a majority of the districts (67% or 37 districts) answered “yes.”

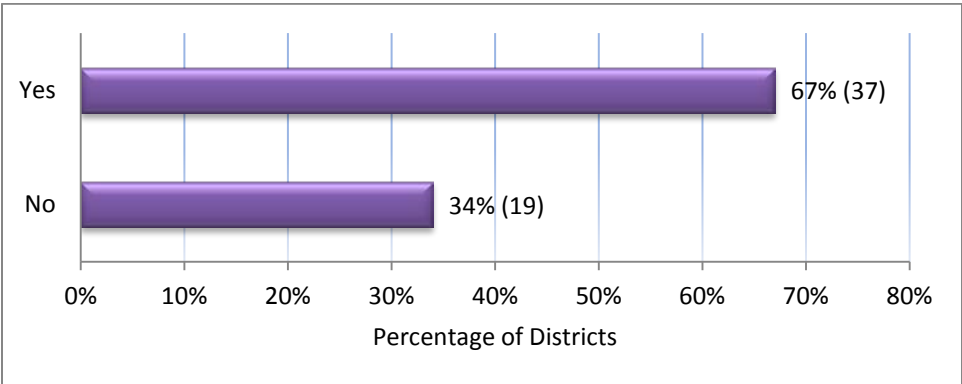


Figure 10: Sustaining Lesson Study

The district representatives who answered “yes” were further asked to explain how they will sustain lesson study after the 2013-2014 academic year. Among these 37 districts, the common methods of sustaining lesson study were: 1) continued training on lesson study for teachers, school administrators, and district staff and facilitators; 2) continued funding to support lesson study or seeking additional funding; 3) continued use of common planning time for lesson study. A small number of districts also reported that they will continue to require lesson study as part of teacher evaluation or the school improvement plan.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The statewide survey of 56 districts conducted in summer 2013 revealed the district policies and practices on promoting lesson study implementation during the 2012-2013 academic year. The results were presented on the following six topics: 1) district policy on lesson study, 2) funding for lesson study, 3) district support and trainings on lesson study, 4) evaluation of lesson study implementation, 5) lesson study and teacher evaluation, and 6) sustaining lesson study.

A majority of the districts (34 districts or 62%) required at least one type of schools to implement lesson study during the 2012-2013 academic year. Although the FLDOE required only the districts with a PLA school to implement lesson study which included 17 districts with a PLA school in the 2012-2013 academic year, 34 districts developed a policy to require lesson study implementation. Of these districts, 13 districts required all the schools to implement lesson study. Twenty-nine districts (52%) further specified the frequency of lesson study implementation, and 31 districts (55%) required or encouraged schools to use common planning time to implement lesson study. These data indicate a major influence of the FLDOE and RTTT funds in promoting district facilitation of lesson study.

Despite the widespread requirements on lesson study, the data on funding showed that less than half of the districts (26 districts or 46%) reported providing funding for substitutes for teaching release, and only six districts (11%) provided stipends for teachers to meet for lesson study outside the regular school hours during the 2012-2013 academic year. Because the most important stage of lesson study is a research lesson that is conducted during the regular school hours and observed by all the lesson study group members, the provision of substitutes is critical for conducting a research lesson. While the extent to which schools used their own substitute funding for lesson study is not known, lack of additional funding for substitutes for lesson study from the district likely poses a difficulty in implementing lesson study. Furthermore, stipends for teachers serve as a major incentive to participate in lesson study outside the regular school hours. Since about one fifth of the districts encouraged schools to implement lesson study before or after school, it is critical that teachers be paid for their time outside the contract hours to practice lesson study.

The survey data showed that most districts offered support and trainings on lesson study. About one third of the districts (16 districts or 29%) have a designated lesson study facilitator, and a majority of the districts (35 districts or 63%) provided trainings for teachers. Furthermore, 77% (43 districts) provided professional development credit to teachers who participated in lesson study, 70% (39 districts) offered assistance or support to schools and teachers on how to implement lesson study, and about 50% provided lesson study materials and resources and/or studied the process and facilitation of lesson study. All of these district activities provided supports and incentives for schools and teachers to implement lesson study.

Less than half of the districts conducted evaluation of lesson study implementation. The most common evaluation methods were “having instructional coaches involved in the lesson study process” (48%) and “making a site visit to observe lesson study” (36%). A lack of funding or capacity of districts may explain the difficulty of conducting a systematic evaluation of lesson study implementation.

Approximately one third of the districts (29% or 16 districts) reported that lesson study is part of teacher evaluation in their districts. In these districts, teachers are evaluated on their participation in lesson study, instruction in a research lesson, lesson plan developed during lesson study, or other methods. In order to encourage development of the culture of a professional learning community through a collaborative process of lesson study, the evaluation data on lesson study should be used for a formative assessment without high-stakes consequences such as tenure, merit pay, or promotion.

The sustainability of reform initiative such as lesson study as a process of instructional improvement is critical for enabling lesson study to improve teacher and student learning. It is encouraging to see that a majority of the districts (67% or 37 districts) reported that they plan to sustain lesson study after the RTTT funding ends in 2014.

In summary, it is clear that lesson study is considered a professional development model in most districts in Florida. Considering that most districts were new to lesson study in 2010 when the FLDOE implemented the policy on lesson study for districts receiving the RTTT funds, it is remarkable that a majority of the districts across the state developed a policy on lesson study requirements and provided support and trainings to facilitate the implementation of lesson study. Ongoing evaluation of lesson study implementation would be important for districts to assess the effectiveness of funding allocation and training and facilitation. At the same time, identification of successful lesson study sites and promotion of between-school learning process through public research lessons and discussions would further develop district resources and capacity for promoting lesson study.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF RESEARCHERS

Dr. Motoko Akiba is Associate Professor of Education Policy in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) at Florida State University. Dr. Akiba's research expertise is in teacher professional development, teacher policy and reform, and comparative education policy. Dr. Akiba received her dual-title Ph.D. in Educational Theory and Policy, and Comparative and International Education from Pennsylvania State University-University Park. She completed a post-doctoral training on lesson study with Dr. Catherine Lewis at Mills College. After serving as a senior researcher at Mid-continent Research on Education and Learning (McREL) and a faculty member at the University of Missouri, Dr. Akiba joined Florida State University in 2012. She published two books, *"Improving teacher quality: The U.S. teaching force in global context"* (Teachers College Press, 2009) and *"Teacher reforms around the world"* (Emerald Books, 2013) and published numerous journal articles on the topics including professional development, teacher evaluation, and compensation and performance-related pay. As part of her comparative research, she observed and studied lesson study practices in Japan over the past decade. Since moving to Florida, Dr. Akiba has been working with teachers in Florida to engage in lesson study process and has been studying lesson study policy and practice.

Laura Ramp is a doctoral student in education policy and evaluation in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) at Florida State University. Her research interests include accountability in education, professional development, and school administration. She earned a Master of Education Degree in Elementary Education from West Chester University of Pennsylvania.

Bryan Wilkinson is a doctoral student in education policy and evaluation in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) at Florida State University. His research interests include professional development and science education. He is a full-time high school teacher with 17 years of teaching experience. He earned a Master of Education Degree in Secondary Education from the University of North Florida.

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