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Lesson Study Policy and Practice in Florida

2014 Findings from a Statewide District Survey

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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 beginning 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 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 for 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, p. 6). Despite the increasing number of districts and schools practicing lesson study in Florida and across the country, there have been few systematic studies of district policies regarding lesson study practice (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 lesson study. The results were summarized in *Lesson Study Policy and Practice in Florida: 2014* (Akiba, Ramp, & Wilkinson, 2014). The project team conducted a similar survey in 2014 to understand the district lesson study policies and practices during the 2013-2014 academic year. This report is based on the survey conducted in summer 2014. The results are presented with seven sections: 1) District Policy on Lesson Study, 2) Leadership and Teacher Involvement, 3) Funding, 4) District Support and Training, 5) Evaluation of Lesson Study Practice, 6) Lesson Study and Teacher Evaluation, and 7) Sustaining Lesson Study.

Understanding the characteristics of district policies and practices across the state will inform FLDOE in examining the influence of the state policy on lesson study and to provide necessary support to promote successful practice 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 introducing new approaches to improve school and teacher practice of lesson study.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An online survey of district policy and practice of lesson study was sent to all 68 districts in Florida in summer 2014. A total of 58 districts participated in the survey, with a response rate of 85%. District characteristics of the participating 58 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 of lesson study that the district implemented during the 2013-2014 academic year. The results are organized by seven topics, as listed below.

District Policy on Lesson Study: Twenty nine (50%) of the 58 districts reported that they required at least one type of school (e.g., persistently lowest-achieving schools) to practice lesson study. Of these 29 districts, 9 districts (16%) required *all* schools in the district to practice lesson study. Twenty five districts (43%) further specified the frequency of lesson study practice, and 23 districts (40%) required or encouraged schools to use common planning time to practice lesson study.

Leadership and Teacher Involvement: Fifteen districts (26%) reported that they had a designated lesson study facilitator or coordinator, and an additional 28 districts (48%) reported that existing district staff members were in charge of facilitating lesson study. Slightly more than half of the districts (31 districts, or 53%) reported that there were assigned facilitators or coordinators of lesson study at the school level. A total of 28 districts (48%) reported that teachers were involved in making decisions regarding the lesson study process.

Funding: Twenty five districts (43%) provided funding for substitutes for teachers to participate in lesson study during contract hours, and 14 districts (24%) provided professional development funds. Only 8 districts (14%) provided stipends for teachers to participate in lesson study outside of contract hours.

District Support and Training: Districts provided various types of support and training on lesson study. Thirty six districts (62%) provided professional development credit to teachers who participated in lesson study, and 29 districts (50%) offered assistance or support to schools and teachers on how to practice lesson study. In addition, 24 (41%) districts provided training on lesson study for teachers, 25 districts (43%) provided training for instructional coaches, and 18 districts (31%) did so for school administrators.

Evaluation of Lesson Study Practice: No more than half of the 58 districts evaluated the practice of lesson study. The two most common methods of evaluation were (1) to involve instructional coaches in the lesson study process (28 districts, or 48%) and (2) to make a site visit to observe the lesson study process (21 districts, or 36%).

Lesson Study and Teacher Evaluation: Ten districts (17%) reported that lesson study was part of teacher evaluation during the 2013-2014 academic year. In these districts, teachers were evaluated on their participation in lesson study, the lesson plan developed during the lesson study process, or instruction during a research lesson.

Sustaining Lesson Study: Thirty four districts (59%) reported that they planned to sustain lesson study after the 2013-2014 academic year when Race to the Top (RTTT) funding ends.

METHODOLOGY

In early May 2014, the link to the online survey, *Lesson Study District Survey*, was sent to directors of professional development or curriculum and instruction in all 68 districts in Florida. The survey targeted regular districts, thus did not include the four districts that consist of university lab schools. Participants were asked to respond to the questions regarding the policy and practice for promoting lesson study during the 2013-2014 academic year. Follow-up emails were sent and phone calls were made multiple times until the survey closed in mid-August. A total of 58 districts participated in the survey, for a response rate of **85%**.

Table 1 presents a comparison of the characteristics of the participating 58 districts to those of all 68 districts in Florida.

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

	Participating Districts (58)	All Florida Districts (68)
Average District Enrollment	33,125	38,196
Average Number of School Buildings	41	51
Poverty Level: Average percentage of Students with Free or Reduced Price Lunch	47.0%	48.0%
Ethnic Diversity Level: Average Percentage of Ethnic Minority Students	40.5%	42.0%

The table shows that the average characteristics of the 58 participating districts are similar to the average characteristics of all 68 districts in Florida. Average enrollment size and average number of school buildings of the participating districts are smaller than the state averages (33,125 vs. 38,196, 41 vs. 51). This means that some of the largest districts in Florida did not participate in the survey. However, 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 (47.0% vs. 48.0%). Likewise, the ethnic diversity level, as measured by the average percentage of ethnic minority students, in the participating districts was similar to the ethnic diversity level for all districts (40.5% vs. 42.0%). Based on these similarities, we can conclude that the findings from the survey data in this report are likely to generalize to the larger population of all 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 practice lesson study, 2) district requirements regarding the frequency of lesson study practice, and 3) district requirements or encouragement of schedule modification to accommodate lesson study.

First, the district representatives were asked which types of schools were required to practice lesson study during the 2013-2014 academic year. This question was asked in order to examine the district-level requirement in addition to the FLDOE requirement for districts with a persistently lowest-achieving (PLA) school to practice lesson study in the PLA schools.

Figure 1 shows that, of the 58 districts that participated in the survey, 29 districts (50%) required some types of schools to practice lesson study. Six districts (10%) required PLA and/or other low-achieving schools to practice lesson study, while nine districts (16%) went beyond the state mandate by requiring all schools in the district to practice lesson study. Fourteen districts (24%) required other types of schools (e.g., elementary schools only or designated pilot schools) to practice lesson study.

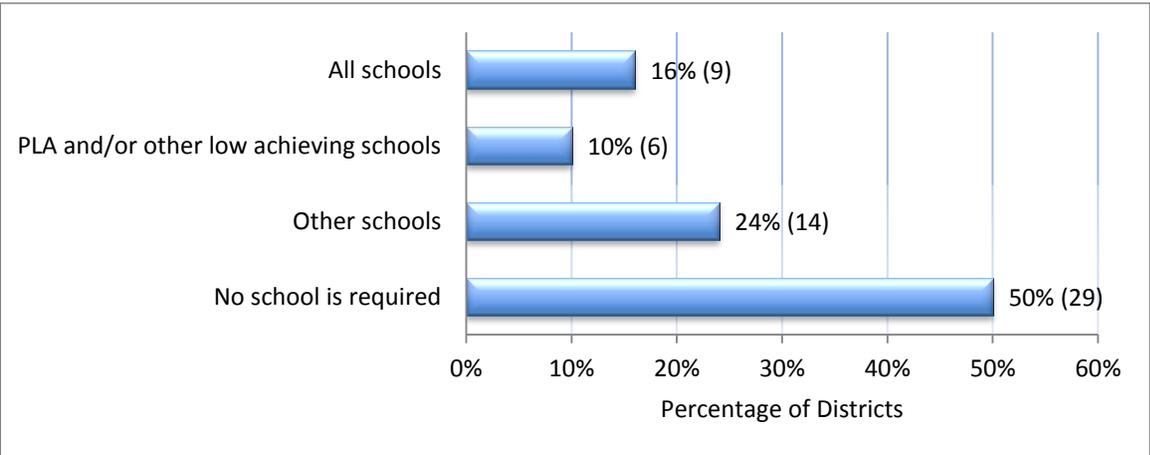


Figure 1: Types of Schools Required to Practice Lesson Study (2013-2014)

The survey also asked for the number of schools required to practice lesson study in each district. The number varied from 1 to 180, with a mean of 10 schools per district. In total, 561 schools across 29 districts were reportedly required to practice lesson study during the 2013-2014 academic year.

The second aspect of district policy on lesson study is the requirement on the frequency of lesson study practice. The survey asked these 29 districts how often schools were required to practice lesson study during the 2013-2014 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 10–15 hours in total.

Figure 2 shows that 15 districts (26%) required lesson study once a year, 9 districts (16%) required lesson study 2-4 times per year, and one district (2%) responded that lesson study is required once per month.

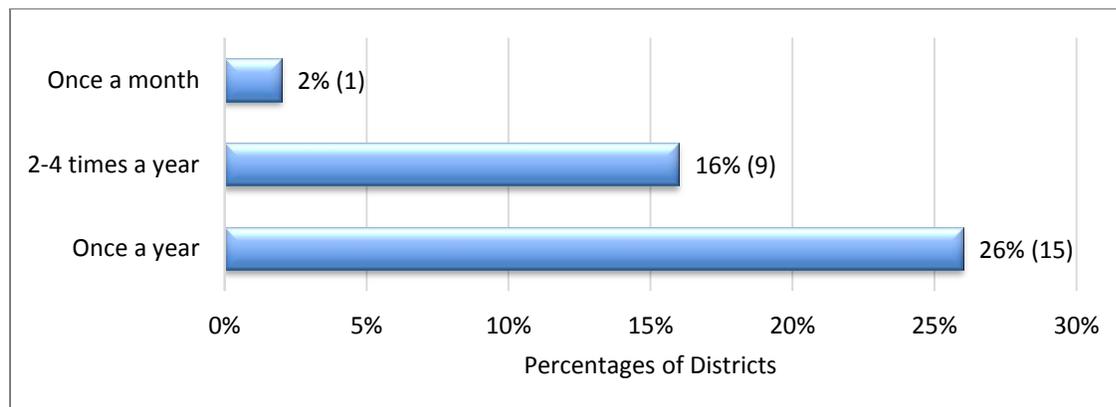


Figure 2: District Requirement on Frequency of Lesson Study Practice

The survey also asked the district representatives in what subject areas these schools were required to practice lesson study during the 2013-2014 academic year. A majority of the districts answered that they did not specify the subject areas for lesson study. A total of 11 districts (19%) required lesson study in mathematics and science, 10 districts (17%) required lesson study in English language arts, and 6 districts (10%) required lesson study in social studies.

Lesson study is a time-intensive professional development model, which may lead districts to require or encourage schools to modify their schedules to accommodate lesson study. The survey asked district representatives whether the district required or encouraged schools to modify their schedules during the 2013-2014 academic year. Fifty-three percent (31 districts) answered yes, and were then asked to choose from a list of methods of modification which method best explained how schools were required or encouraged to modify their schedules.

Figure 3 shows how districts required or encouraged schools to modify school schedules to allow teachers to practice lesson study. Because respondents could choose multiple methods for modifying school schedules, the percentages do not add up to 100%. Forty percent of all 58 districts (23 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. Eleven districts (19%) reported that schools are required or encouraged to practice lesson study before or after school. Of the six districts (10%) that responded “other,” four used the text box to specify that they used substitutes to accommodate lesson study, and two specified that they used early release days to practice lesson study.

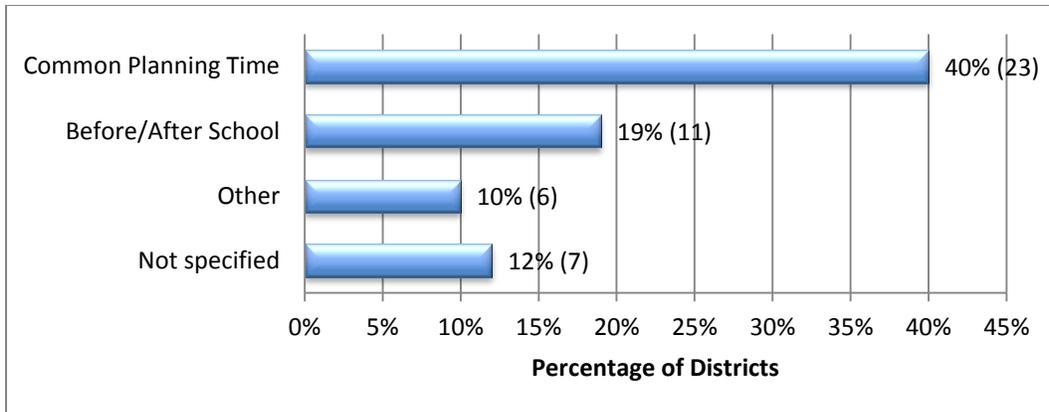


Figure 3: Methods of Schedule Modification Required or Encouraged by Districts

Note. Districts chose one or more methods with which they require or encourage schools to modify school schedule, thus the percentages do not add up to 100%.

The survey also asked the districts to report how many schools practiced lesson study during the 2013-2014 academic year regardless of whether they were required to do so. Their responses showed that a total of 658 schools across 45 districts (66% of all Florida districts) practiced lesson study during the 2013-2014 academic year.

LEADERSHIP AND TEACHER INVOLVEMENT

The district and school-level leadership play an important role in promoting and facilitating the process of lesson study. The survey asked district representatives if their district had a designated facilitator or coordinator at the district or school levels whose main responsibility was to facilitate lesson study during the 2013-2014 academic year.

Figure 4 shows district responses regarding the district-level facilitator. Fifteen districts (26%) reported that they have a designated lesson study facilitator or coordinator. Twenty-eight districts (48%) 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 (26%) reported that no one is in charge of lesson study facilitation at the district level.

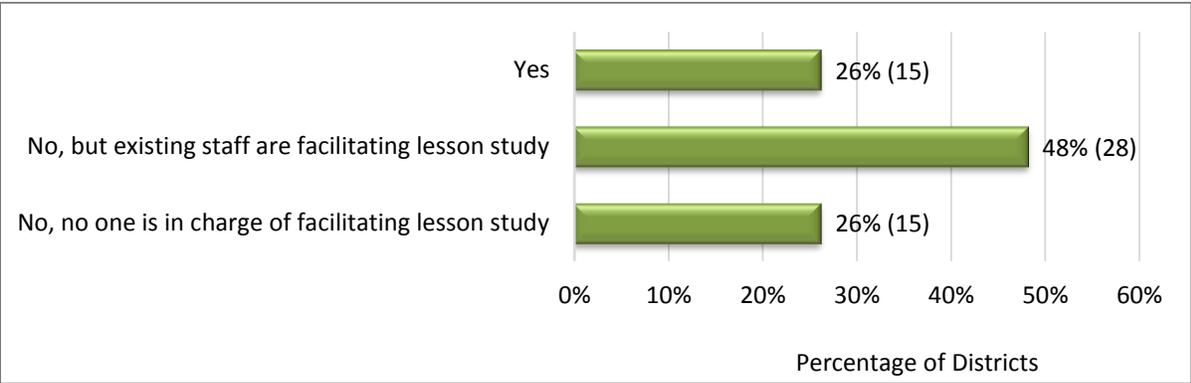


Figure 4: District-Level Facilitator of Lesson Study

The survey also asked if the district assigned facilitators or coordinators of lesson study at the school level during the 2013-2014 academic year. Slightly more than half of the districts (31 districts, or 53%) answered yes, as shown in Figure 5.

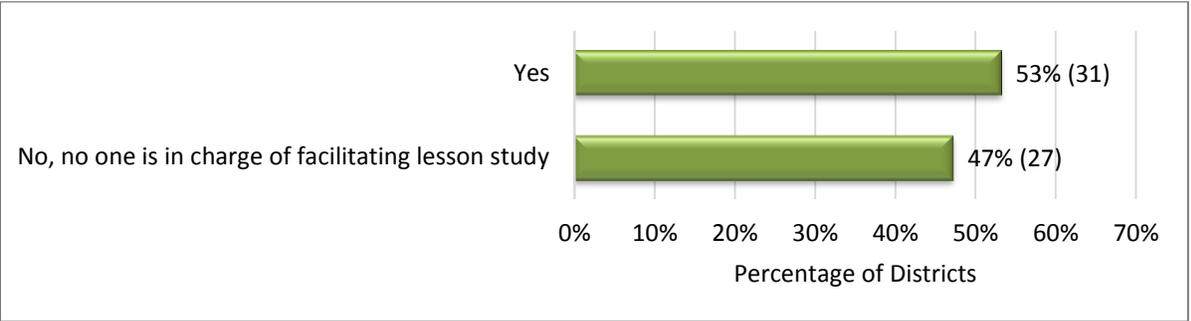


Figure 5: School-Level Facilitator of Lesson Study

School districts may also involve teachers in decision-making regarding lesson study as a way of supporting teacher leadership. The survey asked the district representatives, “Does your district involve teachers in the district-level decision making process regarding lesson study such as funding, scheduling, and lesson study topics? If so please explain how they are involved.”

A total of 28 districts (48%) responded yes and explained various ways they involved teachers, including teacher decisions on the subject, topic, and scheduling of lesson study, involvement in the grant-writing process for lesson study funding, sharing their ideas and needs through a district survey or needs assessment, and serving on a professional-development committee.

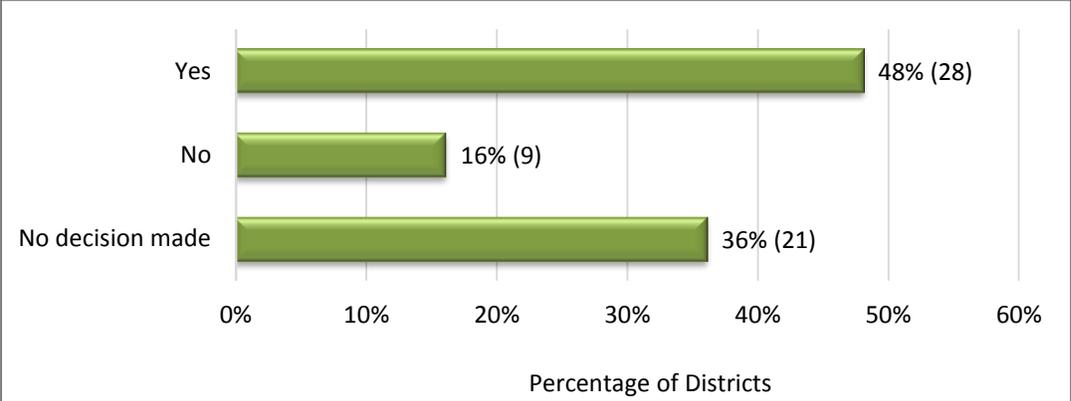


Figure 6: Teacher Involvement in Decision-Making on Lesson Study

FUNDING

Financial support from districts is critical for promoting lesson study because it is time-intensive. The survey asked the district representatives, “Did your district provide the following types of funding for lesson study practice during the 2013-2014 academic year?” Respondents selected from the four types of funding shown in Figure 4.

Arrangement of substitutes is especially crucial during the research lesson component of a lesson study cycle, in which one group member teaches a research lesson while the other group members observe and collect data on student responses and learning. Forty-three percent (25 districts) provided funding for substitutes to provide teaching release time for participation in lesson study.

Fourteen districts (8%) provided professional development funds for purchasing materials for lesson study, and seven districts (12%) provided other types of funds, including travel funds to attend conferences on lesson study or special grants on lesson study. Eight districts (14%) reported that they provided stipends for teachers to participate in lesson study. Approximately one-third of the districts (19 districts, 33%) reported that they did not provide any funding for lesson study during the 2013-2014 academic year.

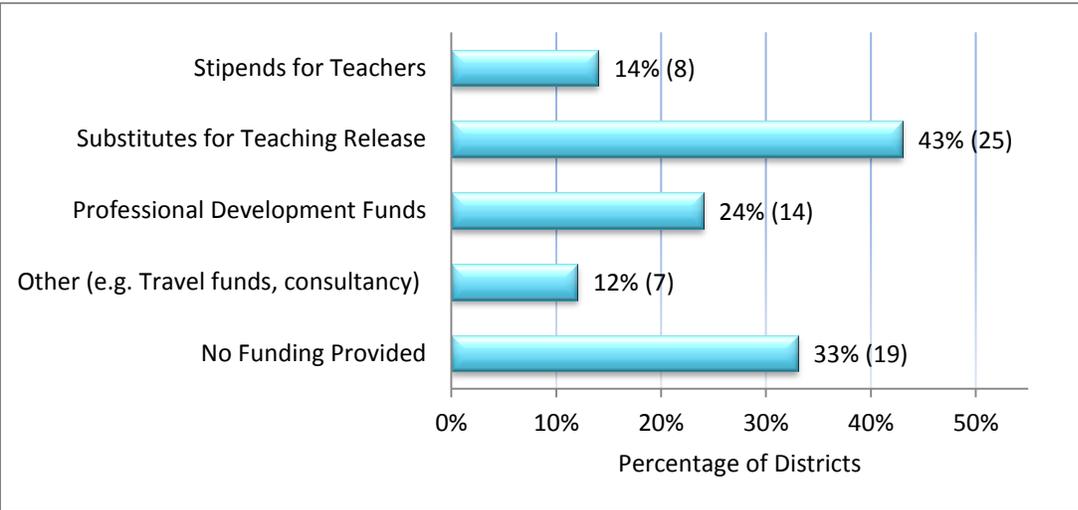


Figure 7: District Funding on Lesson Study

Note. Districts chose one or more funding types, thus the percentages do not add up to 100%.

DISTRICT SUPPORT AND TRAINING

School districts reported providing a variety of types of support and training for practicing lesson study during the 2013-2014 academic year. The survey asked the district representatives to report on two types of activities: 1) district support activities to promote lesson study practice and 2) training on lesson study.

Districts reported on their use of five types of activities to support practice of lesson study during the 2013-2014 academic year. As shown in Figure 8, the most common activity reported was to offer professional development credits to teachers who practiced lesson study, with 36 districts (62%) reporting this activity. Half of the districts (50%) offered assistance or support to schools and teachers on how to practice lesson study, and 38% (22 districts) provided web-based or paper materials and resources on lesson study. Eighteen districts (31%) studied the process and facilitation of lesson study. Ten districts (17%) worked with a lesson study expert during the 2013-2014 academic year.

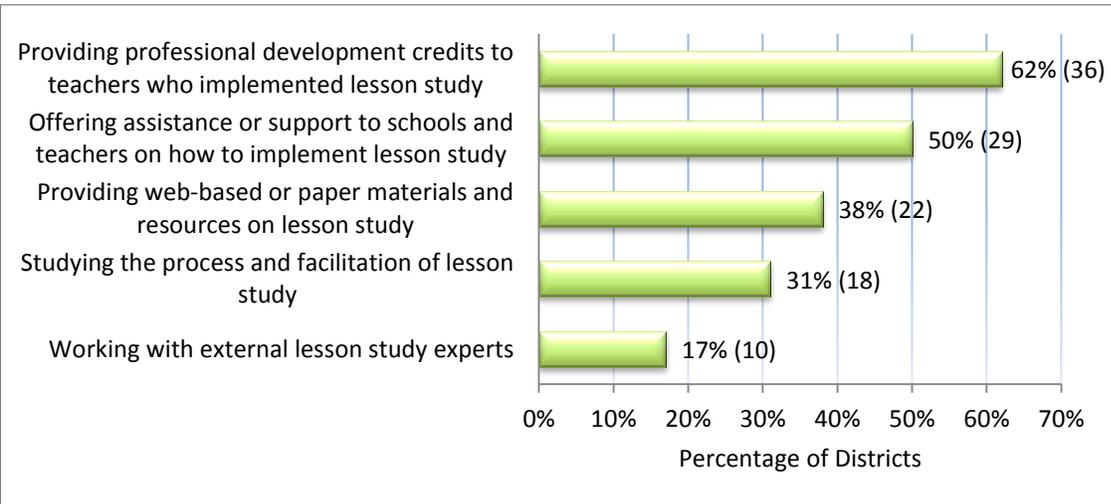


Figure 8: District Activities for Facilitating Lesson Study Practice

Note. Districts chose one or more activities to facilitate lesson study practice.

Training and workshops are another way that districts may choose to support lesson study practice. District representatives were asked if they offered workshops or training to the groups of individuals listed in Figure 9. Their responses indicated that 24 districts (41%) offered training to teachers, and 25 districts (43%) offered training for instructional coaches. Twenty-two percent (13 districts) offered training to school administrators, and 22% (13 districts) offered training to district staff. Four districts reported that they provided training to other groups of individuals such as school cadres and learning-team facilitators.

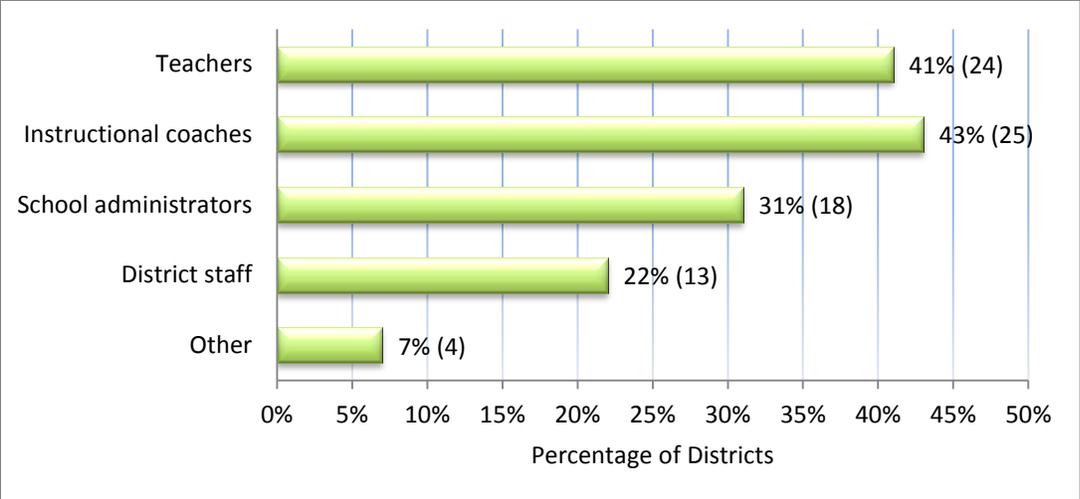


Figure 9: Training on Lesson Study

Note. Districts chose one or more types of training they provided, thus the percentages do not add up to 100%.

EVALUATION OF LESSON STUDY PRACTICE

Evaluation of lesson study practice allows districts to observe and understand how lesson study is actually being practiced by teachers. The district representatives were asked how their districts evaluated the practice (fidelity) of lesson study during the 2013-2014 academic year. The results are presented in Figure 10.

Approximately half of the districts (28 districts, 48%) had their instructional coaches involved in the lesson study process¹, and 36% (21 districts) made a site visit to observe a lesson study process. Twenty-eight percent (16 districts) conducted a teacher survey to ask them about their lesson study practice, and 19% (11 districts) conducted a teacher or principal interview or focus group. Five districts (4%) reported using other methods of evaluation such as collecting lesson study meeting agendas and reviewing lesson plans used for research lessons.

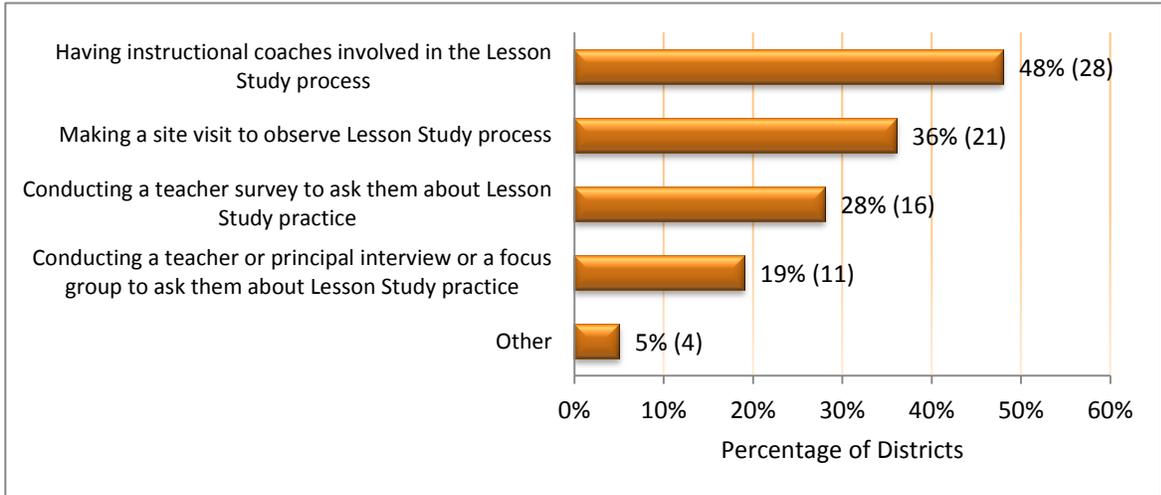


Figure 10: Evaluation of Lesson Study Practice

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

¹ 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 continue to establish and modify their teacher-evaluation systems. Because of the synchronicity of the lesson study and teacher-evaluation requirements, districts may consider teachers' practice of lesson study as part of data for teacher evaluation.

The survey asked the district representatives if lesson study was part of teacher evaluation, and if so, how the district evaluated teachers' practice of lesson study. Figure 11 shows that only 17% (10 districts) reported that lesson study was part of teacher evaluation. Among these ten districts, six districts reported that teachers were evaluated on their participation in lesson study. Three districts evaluated teachers based on the lesson plan developed during lesson study, and two districts evaluated teachers based on research lessons. Three districts reported that the evaluation was based on other criteria.

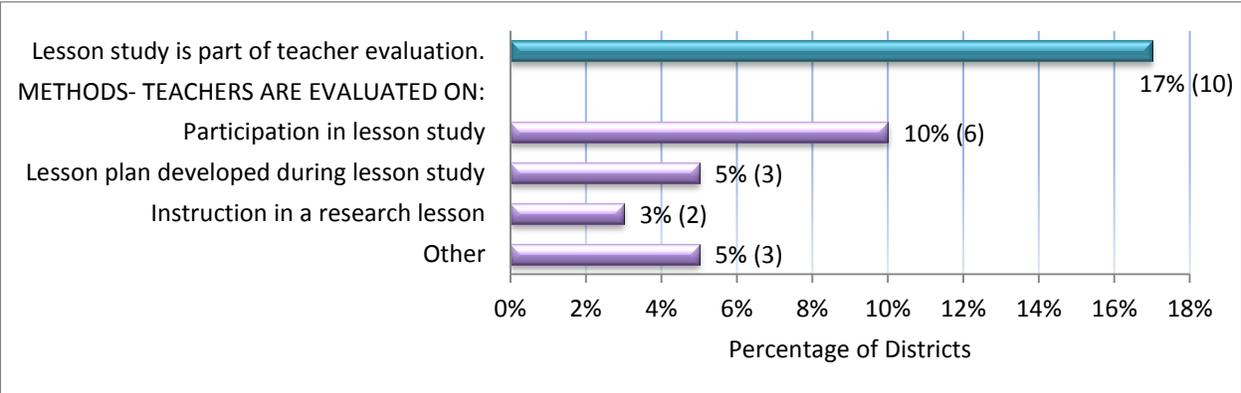


Figure 11: Lesson Study and Teacher Evaluation

SUSTAINING LESSON STUDY

The FLDOE used RTTT funds as the major funding source for promoting lesson study across the state. However, RTTT grant funding is set to expire in 2014, leaving districts to decide whether and how to fund lesson study. Lack of RTTT funding may be a significant threat to lesson study's sustainability in Florida.

The survey asked district representatives, "Does your district have a plan to sustain lesson study after the 2013-2014 academic year?" Figure 12 shows that a majority of the districts (34 districts, 59%) answered yes.

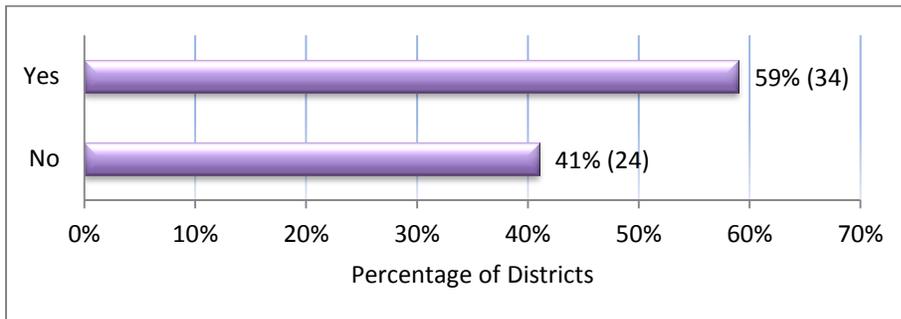


Figure 12: Sustaining Lesson Study

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 34 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; and 3) continued use of common planning time for lesson study. A small number of districts also reported that they planned to continue to require lesson study as part of their teacher-evaluation or the school-improvement plans.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The statewide survey of 58 districts conducted in summer 2014 revealed the district policies and practices concerning lesson study during the 2013-2014 academic year. This report presented results regarding the topics of district policy, leadership and teacher involvement, funding, district support and training, evaluation of lesson study practice, lesson study and teacher evaluation, and sustaining lesson study.

The overall findings show that lesson study is a major professional development model actively promoted in a majority of the surveyed districts. Most districts reported assigning designated lesson study facilitators at the district and school levels and providing assistance for the practice of lesson study. However, consistent with last year's survey finding, a limited level of funding was allocated for teachers to engage in a continuous process of lesson study.

Regarding the district lesson study policy, a total of 29 districts (50%) required at least one type of school to practice lesson study during the 2013-2014 academic year. Although the FLDOE required only 23 districts with a PLA school to practice lesson study, 29 districts developed a policy to require lesson study practice. Of these districts, 9 districts (16%) required all the schools to practice lesson study. Twenty-five districts (43%) further specified the frequency of lesson study practice, and 23 districts (40%) required or encouraged schools to use common planning time to practice lesson study. These data indicate a major influence of the FLDOE and RTTT program in promoting district facilitation of lesson study.

A majority of the districts had either a designated lesson study facilitator (15 districts, 26%) or assigned the existing staff to promote lesson study (28 districts, 48%). In addition, 31 districts (53%) assigned facilitators of lesson study at the school level. Furthermore, 28 districts (48%) involved teachers in the district-level decision making process regarding lesson study.

Despite the widespread requirements for lesson study and district and school leadership to promote lesson study, the survey responses on funding showed that less than half of the districts (25 districts, 43%) provided funding for substitutes for teaching release, and only eight districts (14%) provided stipends for teachers to meet for lesson study outside the regular school hours during the 2013-2014 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, a lack of district-level funding for substitutes for lesson study likely poses a challenge to the practice of 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 encourage schools to practice lesson study before or after school, it is critical that teachers be paid for their time outside of contract hours to practice lesson study.

Despite the lack of funding, the survey data indicated that most districts offered support and training on lesson study. A majority of districts (36 districts, 62%) reported that they provided professional development credit to teachers who participated in lesson study, and 50% (19 districts) offered assistance or support to schools and teachers on how to practice lesson study. About 40% of the districts offered training for teachers (24 districts, 41%) and instructional coaches (25 districts, 43%). All of these district activities provide incentives for schools and teachers to practice lesson study, and it is important for the districts to continue to provide these supports.

Regarding the evaluation of lesson study practice, the survey showed that less than half of the districts conducted evaluation of lesson study practice. The most common evaluation methods were “having instructional coaches involved in the lesson study process” (28 districts, 48%) and “making a site visit to observe lesson study” (21 districts, 36%). A lack of funding or capacity of districts may explain the difficulty of conducting a systematic evaluation of lesson study practice.

A total of 10 districts (17%) reported that lesson study was part of teacher evaluation in their districts. In these districts, teachers were evaluated on their participation in lesson study, instruction during a research lesson, the lesson plan developed during lesson study, or other methods. Lesson study is a teacher-driven, collaborative process of instructional improvement (Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004; Lewis, 2002; Lewis & Hurd, 2011). When lesson study practice is tied to teacher evaluation, teachers may focus on performance instead of the continuous improvement process. The individualized focus of evaluation does not fit well with the collaborative nature of lesson study, as it undermines the culture of a professional learning community. 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 initiatives such as lesson study is important for engaging in a continuous effort to improve teaching and student learning. There have been many professional development approaches that disappeared in a short time frame due to changes in reform priorities. It is encouraging to see that a majority of the districts (31 districts, 53%) reported that they planned to sustain lesson study after the RTTT funding ends in 2014. Whether a district can sustain lesson study in a format beneficial to teachers and students after the RTTT program ends depends on the district strategies to allocate funding and capitalize on district, school, and teacher leadership to support lesson study practice.

In summary, it is clear that lesson study is considered a major 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 and provided support and training to facilitate lesson study practice. Allocation of sufficient funding will be critical for teachers to engage in a continuous process of instructional

improvement through lesson study. In addition, ongoing evaluation of lesson study practice would be important for districts to assess the effectiveness of funding allocation and training and facilitation methods.

Finally, it would be beneficial to identify the lesson study groups that have been successfully practicing lesson study and to support these groups to conduct public research lessons in which district, school, and teacher leaders from various schools to come together to observe. Japanese teachers developed a shared understanding of what student-centered instruction looks like through numerous public research lessons observed by national, state, district, and school leaders and teachers (Akiba, in press). These learning opportunities would help to develop shared knowledge about effective instructional practice and student learning and to build a networked improvement community (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2011) —a community in which district, school, and teacher leaders collectively work toward achieving a common goal of improving education.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF RESEARCHERS

Dr. Motoko Akiba is an Associate Professor of Education Policy in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies 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 teacher 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 during the past decade. Since moving to Florida, Dr. Akiba has been working with district and teacher leaders in Florida to engage in lesson study process and has been studying lesson study policy and practice.

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