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EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP IN URBAN,

HIGH-PERFORMING, HIGH-POVERTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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by

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DEDICATION

This treatise is dedicated to my family whom supported me and encouraged me to pursue my dream.

I dedicate this work to my children Barbara, Coral, and Gabriel, who I love with all my heart. May this journey serve to continue to teach you that all is possible, and that dreams do come true. Thank you for your encouragement, love, and for never giving up on me.

To my beautiful grandson, Myka Gabriel, who is the love of my life. I am so sorry for missing your football games, and for being on the computer when you wanted to play games online. The computer is now all yours!

To my mother Angelina, who taught me the value of hard work and tenacity. Through your example; I learned to never give up even when times were tough. You have always been my role model and my admiration for you is endless.

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To Caban, my loving stepfather, who taught me the value of earning a college degree. I will always remember it was you who spoke to me about attending college and becoming a professional. You were always there for me, and I will be forever grateful to you.

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EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP IN URBAN, HIGH-PERFORMING, HIGH-POVERTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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This study considered the important role that principal leadership plays in the implementation of changes that are designed to close achievement gaps among student groups. A qualitative research approach and protocol was followed, and a multiple case study methodological approach was utilized. The data gathered consisted of interviews of three principals, three instructional coordinators, and three teacher leaders. A review of documents, artifacts, observations, field notes, and member check data were used to triangulate data. The data analysis applied the McRel Balanced Leadership conceptual framework and used three research questions to organize and guide the discussion and findings. These research questions are: (1) How did the principal implement research-based leadership responsibilities that led to the pursuit of high academic achievement for all students? (2) How did the principals implement a school-wide improvement framework that has resulted in sustained academic achievement growth for all students? (3) How did the principal implement the identified strategies that ensured high academic

achievement among all student populations?

Over the course of five months, data were gathered through individual interviews, observations, analysis of documents, and other artifacts. Several themes emerged as a result of data analysis. These included: (a) communicated ideals and beliefs, (b) challenged status quo, (c) culture of collaboration, (d) focus on learning, (e) data driven, (f) research based learning, (g) and curriculum alignment. The findings in the study suggest that the principals were instrumental in creating the conditions that helped the teachers build upon their collective capacity to support student success.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Leading high-performing, high-poverty schools in urban districts poses a series of

unique challenges and opportunities for the education community. Socioeconomic factors

influence academic achievement of students; therefore, to ensure *all* students learn,

educators should understand what can be done to minimize the effects of poverty in the

learning process (Jensen, 2009). In addition, school districts across the United States are

experiencing dramatic changes in demographics, such as culturally, racially, linguistically

diverse students, and students from low-income backgrounds (Howard, 2007).   These

changes are characterized by an increase of students who are encountering poverty

challenges that negatively influence their learning potential. Among the imperatives

gaining attention in recent studies is the need to develop school leaders capable of

exercising more vigilance over instructional processes, and developing a culture that

supports effective teaching practices (Augustine, Gonzalez, Schuyler-Ikemoto, Russell, &

Zellman, 2009). School principals acknowledge the challenge of providing every student

with an opportunity to succeed since they are ultimately held accountable for student

success (Portin, Knapp, Dareff, Feldman, & Russell, 2009). Thus, the journey of ensuring

academic achievement is a leadership challenge.

After the No Child Left Behind Act was enacted into law in January 2002 (U. S.

Congress, 2001c) subsequent data on specific sub-group categories of student

populations made it impossible to disguise the failure of federally funded programs,

especially those related to children of poverty, children of color, and children with

disabilities. Sizer (2004) argues there is a "gap between our articulated ideals and our

practice" (p. xi). Legal mandates, which are intended to provide equity and ensure all students are guaranteed with quality instruction, should result in high academic achievement for all. However, the intent of policy and the reality of poverty do not combine to promote a fertile ground for learning to take place (Muhammad, 2009; Noguera, 2003; Rothstein, 2004). In their book, *What Effective Schools Do,* Lezotte and Snyder (2011) state: "As a result of policy changes such as those reflected in the No Child Left Behind (2001), the goal of public education has become to remove the major consequences of being economically disadvantaged in America" (p. 12). However, the issue is problematic and requires careful analysis to ensure that the implementation of strategies and use of resources address the urgency to close the academic gap among students.

Changes in the public education system have generated attempts to reform education; however, a lack of understanding of what is needed has led such attempts into continuous failure (Muhammad, 2009). In his book, *Transforming School Culture*, Muhammad (2009) displays data that shows persistent gaps between white and other ethnic groups in areas such as income, health, and education. It is interesting to note that, regardless of policy intent, poor children of all ethnic backgrounds continue to receive a "poor education" (p. 6). This trend affects the economic viability of today's students. Students who do not receive an adequate education will likely continue to live in a cycle of poverty. Students who fail to achieve may have limited paths, or opportunities due to shifts in economic patterns (Mattos, 2008).

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Leadership and Change

Legal mandates such as those mentioned previously illustrate the urgent call for change at the federal, state, district, and school levels. Educational organizations are complex communities in which conflict and resistance to change can interfere with the journey to excellence. As a result, school systems are continuously changing to accommodate new policies and reforms. Moreover, Daggett (2005) contends: "An effective education system is one that is adaptable to change" (p. 1). However, facilitating such changes requires systemic processes to effectively engage leaders, educators, and systems at all levels (Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006). The focus on accountability and the urgency for improving the conditions of learning and equity, forces school systems to continuously find ways to ensure academic achievement for *all* children. Without a doubt the challenge of leading these efforts will require a leader capable of achieving and sustaining academic growth in an environment of constant change that supports continuous improvement.

Scholars agree that leadership is important for an organization to be effective. For instance, Sousa (2003) describes leadership as the person that will take the organization to a "new level of accomplishment and fulfillment" (p. 3). Leadership matters in effective schools and can significantly improve the lives of children of poverty if practice is based on action rather than intention. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) state that research has provided abundant evidence on instructional leadership strategies likely to result in improved student achievement. Despite the abundance of available research,

leaders continue to use counterproductive leadership strategies that fail to achieve the intended results (Reeves, 2007) and forsake translating research into practice.

Furthermore, an increasing body of literature is emerging that describes the school leader's role in addressing new challenges associated with academic achievement for all students (Leithwood & Reith, 2003; Fullan, 2004; Wilhoit, 2008). In an attempt to explain the importance of leadership, Houston (2007) describes the role of an educational leader:

> The role of an educational leader is to build a bridge and lead people across it because it is only by crossing that bridge that people can find a new place to stand. Leading people to discover their river stories, and helping them build their bridges, is at the heart of leadership. But that can only happen when the leader is prepared to climb out of the familiar box that has held him or her and be willing to confront the possibility of the unknown. (p. 2)

This definition uses imagery to describe how an effective leader challenges known paradigms as they defy obstacles that negatively influence student achievement. Confronting the effects of poverty will require a leader with a clear vision to develop a cohesive approach that understands the effects of poverty, the implementation of strategies to curtail its effect, the political nature of education, a core belief in social justice, and a commitment to lead the schools in an unconventional way.

Statement of the Problem

Legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, enacted into law in January 2002 (U.S. Congress, 2001c), holds educational systems accountable for closing

the achievement gap by ethnicity, language background, socioeconomic status, and students with special needs. However, after years of implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reform, the academic achievement gap continues to exist regardless of intense efforts to reform educational systems (Wolk, 2010). A review of *A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2010* (hereafter referred to as Blueprint for Reform, 2010) shows that the federal government continues to support and encourage changes that close the achievement gap among minorities and children of poverty. Furthermore, failure to close these disparities continues to have accountability repercussions for those who are unable to meet the challenge. The demands for academic achievement are increasing and the consequences of failure are severe for children (Mattos, 2008) and for schools who do not meet the NCLB standards for continuous improvement.

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2010) report on *The Condition of Education* found that the percentage of White students enrolled in public schools decreased from 28.0% to 26.7% while Hispanic enrollment doubled from 11% to 22% and Black enrollment decreased from 17% to 16%. Asian enrollment is 3.7%, Pacific Islander is 0.2%, and American Indian/Alaska Natives enrollment is 0.9%. The same report shows that 16, 122 schools in the United States are high-poverty schools, meaning that 75% or more of the students enrolled in these campuses are children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. These changes are precipitating the need for educational systems to confront the challenges that threaten the well-being of students. Children from

low-income families are at an academic disadvantage due to the adverse conditions that pose obstacles to learning (Zhao, 2009).

Once again an increased interest has been focused on the school principal as an important element in improving academic achievement. In the paper, *Becoming a Leader: Preparing School Principals for Today's Schools,* the principal is acknowledged as the conductor of school improvement when it stated the following:

> There is a growing agreement that with the national imperative for having every child succeed; it is the principal who is best positioned to ensure that teaching and learning are as good as they can be throughout the entire school, especially those with the highest needs. (The Wallace Foundation, 2008, p. 1)

Thus, it is urgent that the practices implemented by successful school principals are unveiled and therefore replicated by schools that confront the same dilemma. According to Waters and Cameron (2007) recognizing *what* works in schools is often not enough to transform schools. Understanding *how* these practices can be implemented is essential to positively influence increased achievement.

Educational frameworks designed to identify behaviors that link principal leadership and increased academic achievement have been researched (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, 2005; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2002; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Portin, Knapp, Dareff, Feldman, Russell, Augustine, Gonzalez, and Schuyler-Ikemoto, 2009; Waters & Cameron, 2007) and reveal common themes regarding principal behaviors linked to increased academic achievement. The common themes that lend support to how principals support high academic

achievement are the following: (a) setting high expectations for all students, (b) promoting strong communication within staff, parents, students and other stakeholders, (c) building capacity among staff data driven decision making, (d) managing school operations, and (e) addressing barriers that impede learning. Thus, principal leadership studies support the importance of the principal leadership's influence in closing achievement gaps and *how* this involves a series of actions that move an organization towards a provision of quality educational opportunities for all children.

Moreover, a leadership framework developed by Fullan (2001) addresses the challenge of leadership by stating that there are similarities between businesses and schools. One of the similarities is that they must both become "learning organizations or they will fail to survive" (p. vii). He further states that leaders are essential in an ever-changing organization. Today's leadership requires facing chaotic, non-linear scenarios, focusing on personal leadership as well as assuming the responsibility for those he or she serves. Fullan's description of leadership defines a figure who can tackle difficult questions by engaging the organization in a journey where there are no simple solutions to "turbulent" realities, but admitting that problems require people to "confront problems that have never yet been successfully addressed" (2001, p. 3).

Specifically, the framework proposed by Fullan (2001) includes five interrelated convergence of ideas that assist leaders in confronting complex dilemmas that have no simple answers or solutions. This convergent theoretical framework includes moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence making. Fullan (2001) elaborates on this relationship by explaining that

"leaders immersed in the five aspects of leadership can't help feeling and acting more energetic, enthusiastic, and hopeful" (p. 7).

In brief, studies on principal leadership state what is needed to increase academic achievement. However, how these practices are implemented needs to be clarified (Waters & Cameron, 2007) so principals engaged in providing high-performing academic achievement can skillfully apply these findings to school scenarios.

Conceptual Framework

In designing the study, the researcher approached the literature with the intent of reviewing how principals increased academic achievement in high-performing, poverty urban elementary schools. Ultimately, the review of the literature permitted the adoption of a conceptual framework to guide the study.

A meta-analysis research study conducted by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel) uncovered the following principal responsibilities as essential behaviors that influence academic achievement: affirmation, change agent, contingent rewards, communication, culture, discipline, flexibility, focus, ideals/beliefs, input, intellectual stimulation, involvement in curriculum, instruction and assessment, knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, monitoring/evaluating, optimizer, order, outreach, relationships, resources, situational awareness, and visibility (Waters & Cameron, 2007). In an effort to manage the twenty one responsibilities, Waters and Cameron organized their findings into a manageable framework that groups these responsibilities into three separate clusters. A leadership foundation component is included in the framework as the interface among purposeful community, focus, and

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magnitude of change. The *Balanced Leadership* framework recognizes that there are principal responsibilities that influence learning and others that are not correlated to learning, but are also included in the job description of principals. These leadership responsibilities are important since they will help principals connect the school vision with the actions needed to improve academic achievement. A thorough discussion of the framework is included in chapter three.

Purpose of the Study

The challenges of schools that serve children of poverty are daunting. However, a rising number of schools are showing significant progress in closing the achievement gap for all students. A growing number of available studies linking principal leadership with academic achievement are accessible to leader, yet a clear distinction of how to implement these practices is needed. It is essential that the behaviors of successful principals are studied and the findings become available for others to replicate, adapt, or consider.

The purpose of this study was to identify *how* principal leadership behaviors lead to increased academic achievement in high-poverty urban elementary schools.

Research Questions

The process by which the identified participants sustained continuous improvement that lead to high academic schools in poverty was determined through pursuing the following questions:

(1) How did the principal implement research-based leadership responsibilities that led to the pursuit of high academic achievement for all students?

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(2) How did the principal implement a school-wide improvement framework that has resulted in sustained academic achievement growth for all students?

(3) How did the principal implement the identified strategies that ensured high academic achievement among all student populations?

Methodology

The methodology for this study consisted of a qualitative approach and employed a case study method (Willis, 2007). Case studies are described by Creswell (2007) as "a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observation, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents), and reports a case description and case-based themes" (p. 73). In particular, a multiple case study was used to better understand how principals support academic achievement. Multiple manifestations were analyzed so as to ultimately conduct a cross analysis. Specifically, differences and similarities were compared to assess the degree to which the conceptual framework explained how principal leadership behaviors led to increased academic achievement.

The study focused on school principals who were selected according to research criteria such as serving ethnically diverse populations, low-socioeconomic students, and all had earned an Exemplary accountability status (see Appendix A) during the past two school years (2009-2010 and 2010-2011) from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The researcher sought agreement among participants to determine how the selected schools accomplished a high-performing status in schools serving low socioeconomic students.

The data sources consisted of semi-structured interviews and observations with three purposive selected principals. In addition, interviews were conducted with three instructional coordinators and three teachers selected by the principals included in the study. Other data sources included document reviews such as Campus Online data, Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports, and School Improvement Plans (SIP). Analysis of data followed the traditional analysis sequence outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). The sequence included field notes, write up, coding, display data, conclusions, outline, and report. A matrix analysis was developed to organize and record data that informed the study's research questions. The creation of a matrix afforded a systematic way to process the data collected across sites and sources (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition, the triangulation of data was implemented to corroborate findings. The researcher considered the five tenets of qualitative research elaborated by Merriam (1998). These tenets are detailed as follows:

1. Qualitative research is interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed.

2. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.

3. Qualitative research usually involves fieldwork.

4. It employs an inductive research strategy.

5. Qualitative research provides a study that is richly descriptive. (pp. 6-8)

A more complete detailed description of the case study method is included in Chapter Three and fully discloses the design, procedures, and data gathering.

Significance of Study

School improvement efforts are well documented in literature (Fullan, 2004; DeLorenzo, Battino, Schreiber, & Carrio, 2009) including examples of schools that have successfully closed the achievement gap (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karkanek, 2004). Essential elements for school improvement have been identified to some extent. In addition, a focus on the importance of the principal as a leader for sustained school improvement is evident in literature (Reeves, 2006; Fullan, 2003).

There is an urgency to identify school cultural beliefs, practices, school improvement frameworks, and strategies that have proven to close the achievement gap, while meeting the challenges associated with poverty. Therefore, this study expands and confirms the research that supports the important role that principal leadership plays in the implementation of changes that are designed to close these gaps.

Definition of Terms

Campus Online: Refers to a data system that all campuses in the Houston Independent School District frequently access. The data system provides instant data regarding formative assessments as well as standardized assessment and disaggregates data to predict accountability status.

Destabilizing Responsibilities: challenges "normal" organizational and individual behavior, likely to disrupt routines, procedures, and practices (Waters & Cameron, 2007, p. 18).

High Academic Performance: This study will use the state of Texas Accountability measures which categorize campuses in Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, and

Unacceptable. High performance campuses are considered Exemplary (minimum of 90% passing) or Recognized (minimum of 80% passing).

Leadership: Refers to the person "guiding and inspiring people to journey willingly toward an identified target; done well, it nurtures a culture of risk-taking and learning; thereby creating opportunity for meaningful changes in the direction, beliefs, values, practices, and skills of the individual, group, and organization" (Erkins, 2008, p. 40). In this study, leadership refers specifically to the school principal and will be used interchangeably.

Leadership Responsibilities: Refers to leadership behaviors that affect student achievement (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). For the purpose of this study, the term responsibilities and behaviors will be used interchangeably.

Low Socioeconomic Status: Student's socioeconomic status is determined by whether a student is eligible for free or reduced lunch under federal guidelines (U. S Department of Education, 2002).

Meta-analysis: allows researchers to form statistically based generalizations within a given field (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005).

Moral Purpose: Refers to the understanding that there is sense of urgency to address the needs of students (Fullan, 2001). Moral purpose leaders not only understand there is a need to close achievement gaps, but actually do something about it.

Poverty: For the purpose of this study, *poverty* will be used interchangeably with the term *low socioeconomic status*

School Improvement Plan: Federally funded schools or Title 1 schools are required to write a prescriptive plan on how they will address academic deficiencies. This plan includes a series of pre-determined sections previously established by federal guidelines.

Social Toxicity: a series of environmental factors that negatively affect children of poverty such as contamination, violence, drug abuse, crime, lead exposure, and others.

Stabilizing Responsibilities: leadership behaviors that reinforce the status quo routines, procedures, and practices (Waters & Cameron, 2007).

Strategies: For the purpose of this study, a strategy is a blueprint, design, or method for doing something.

Strong Leadership: For the purpose of this study, a strong leader is an enforcer, has a non-excuse attitude, confronts barriers, and sets clear expectations.

Delimitations

This study focused on three urban schools in a specific regional area rather than a broad sample. The intent of the study was to gain insight into how three urban school principals, purposively selected by the researcher, engaged in a journey that led their campuses to high-performing status with low-socioeconomic student populations. Only Exemplary schools selected by the researcher participated in the study.

Limitations

A qualitative research design approach was used for this study. The limitation of the study includes the possible bias of the researcher. Miles and Huberman (1994) identify a series of limitations associated with qualitative studies such as the possibility of

data overload, time demands on coding and processing data, and credibility. Due to the nature of case studies, the generalization of findings to other scenarios is limited.

Assumptions

There was an assumption that the principals selected possessed a high level of moral purpose and were intrinsically motivated to make a difference by sustaining high levels of academic achievement. Another assumption was that the principals selected openly shared their journey with explicit descriptions that served the purpose of this study. It was incumbent on the researcher to provide a risk-free environment that contributed as a knowledge base to others.

Chapter Summary

The increasing number of children of poverty who struggle to meet academic standards has prompted legal mandates to hold educators accountable for closing the academic achievement gap. School improvement efforts call for leaders who are capable of implementing sustained academic growth while encouraging and expecting systemic change. Principals are at the forefront of this challenge and have been able to sustain change that has resulted in closing achievement gaps.

This chapter provided a description of the qualitative multi-case study that researched how principals have led high academic campuses despite the challenges posed by poverty. The selected campuses have achieved Exemplary status from the Texas Education Agency. A brief introduction of the literature including the conceptual framework for the study was provided in addition to the methodology, research questions,

significance, limitation, and delimitations. The next chapter will include an in-depth

review of the literature to ground the subsequent research process.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the literature that includes a description of educational leadership and the challenge of educating children who live in poverty. It includes leadership models, organizational change, and relevant research regarding high-achieving, high-poverty schools. Studies on principal leadership frameworks will be included to support how leadership behaviors increased student achievement.

A Journey from Access to Equity

The *Blueprint for Reform* (2010) begins with President Barack Obama's remarks regarding education as his administration's national priority. These remarks state that our country has fallen behind other nations and it is imperative children in America receive a "world-class education" (p. 1). An educational system designed with middle-class children in mind is changing to ensure *all* children learn. Barr and Parrett (2007) assert that "A revolution is occurring in public education, and it has dramatic changes in our nation's schools and classrooms. This revolution is shattering attitudes and beliefs that have existed for decades and is focusing national attention on the need to educate all students effectively" (p. 1). Evidence in research is showing how high-performing, high-poverty schools are highlighting frameworks that link best practices to increased academic achievement for all children including those living in poverty (Reeves, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Williams, Kirst, & Haertal et al., 2005).

Wolk (2010) is critical of the No Child Left Behind policy and argues the legislation does not influence improved learning conditions for all children by holding all

students to the same standards. Challenges such as inadequate staffing; dismissal of ineffective teachers and leaders; budget equity; lack of quality professional development; and toxic school cultures continue to exist in school systems.

The United States has shown tremendous strides in providing access to educational opportunities. In fact, Supreme Court decisions based on cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education* led to desegregation in schools which ensured all children were allowed to go to school together regardless of skin color. Other legislative actions such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 resulted in the pursuit of access for children with handicaps. In addition, legislation to promote equity among language minorities has been mandated, such as the Bilingual Education Act of 1968. However, the intent of the law to provide access to public schools and programs does not address the gap that exists among children of poverty. Nor is school access synonymous with equity (Barber, 2009; Walker-Tileston & Darling, 2008; Wang & Kovach, 1996). The United States has the highest rate of poverty among developed nations, and clearly this trend will continue with the current income gaps influenced by economic trends (Zhao, 2009). The conditions of poverty are present in classrooms today and leaders such as principals committed to high academic achievement understand the need to be cognizant of these conditions in order to remove barriers that impede learning.

Understanding the Effects of Poverty

Poverty has been defined by Jensen (2009) as "a chronic and debilitating condition that results from multiple adverse synergistic risk factors and affects the mind, body, and soul" (p. 6). Jensen identifies five types of poverty as (a) *situational poverty*,

caused by a sudden crisis or loss such as divorce, environmental disasters, or health

conditions; (b) *generational poverty*, which happens in families where at least two

generations are born in impoverished conditions, and show an inability to move out of

their situation; (c) *absolute poverty* involves a scarcity of basic needs, and a person's

focus is on day-to-day survival; (d) *relative poverty* is characterized by a comparison of

family income and society's average standard of living; and (e) *urban poverty*, which is

prevalent in metropolitan areas with populations of 50,000 people or more.

Jensen (2009) describes risk factors that affect children raised in poverty such as

(a) *emotional and social challenges*; (b) *acute and chronic stressors*; (c) *cognitive lags*;

and (d) *health and safety issues*. Payne (2005) defines poverty as "the extent to which an

individual does without resources" (p. 7). She further expands her definition to explain

that these resources are financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems,

relationships, and knowledge of hidden rules. Payne (2005) also makes a distinction

between types of poverty and includes generational and situational poverty. Both Payne

and Jensen agree that generational poverty is characterized by occurring in at least two

generations born in poverty. They also concur that situational poverty is caused by a

crisis and can be temporary. For instance, the current economic crisis in the United States

has resulted in an increase in situational poverty caused by a crash in the housing market,

loss of jobs, and failing businesses.

According to Payne (2005), in order to break the cycle of poverty, it is vital to

receive a quality education and also establish relationships or access to adults that can

nurture student learning. However, the substandard condition of living in poverty places

children at risk for low academic performance and puts them in danger of not completing school (Jensen, 2009). Some researchers argue that to close the achievement gap among children with low socioeconomic background, school improvement must be combined with "reforms that narrow the vast socioeconomic inequalities in the United States" (Rothstein, 2008, p. 8). Other critics see this statement as an excuse to perpetuate poverty and limit the effect of schooling on this population. These critics argue that "educators should not acknowledge socioeconomic disadvantage because their unique responsibility is to improve classroom practices, which they can control" (Rothstein, 2008, p. 11).

Moreover, social toxicity has been identified as one of the many factors that children of poverty face, and educators must be aware of how these factors influence learning (Garbarino, 1997). This toxicity is characterized by poverty, violence, environmental threats, and disruption of family relationships. He argues that one can positively influence children who live under these conditions by enforcing human rights for children. Lyon (2003) cautions that our most "vulnerable children are those born into poverty" (p. 8). Lyon (2003) and Garbarino (1997) concur that addressing poverty among our nation's children is a matter of human rights.

Confronting the effects of poverty requires a concerted effort between the federal government and educators (Noguera, 2003). A focus on providing what children need to thrive is needed to reverse the effects of social toxicity. Educational researchers are providing substantial evidence regarding the effects of poverty and how to overcome these effects to ensure high-performing schools.

Reversing the effects of social toxicity is a matter that cannot be undertaken by educators alone. Noguera (2003) believes "education is a political issue" (p. 156) and argues that unless basic needs of children are met, the pervasive failure of the United States educational system will continue to exist. Noguera believes that children who are neglected, sick, or abused will not raise their level of academic readiness unless a coordinated effort is made to confront poverty with social and economic reforms that can "alleviate the hardships and suffering related to poverty" (p. 142). Children's lives today are characterized by a social environment that is poisonous to their development. Garbarino (1997) found that violence, economic pressure of parents, depression, and other issues are contributing to the decrease of "well-being in our society" (p. 13). These concerns cannot be ignored because they affect children's emotional and physical well-being. Rothstein (2008) states that children of poverty are at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts due in part to lack of preventative medical care, which results in excessive absences. Health conditions such as asthma, anemia, sleeplessness, and lack of exercise are also issues that characterize many children of poverty. Jensen (2009) argues that children of poverty confront risk factors that "makes everyday living a struggle" (p. 7). However, all is not lost. We now know that there are schools making a difference in students' lives by providing conditions that minimize poverty's effect in order to allow learning to occur (Barr & Parrett, 2007).

The challenges of poverty can be overcome when schools help students and their families by coordinating services that alleviate social conditions (Santiago, Ferrara, & Blank, 2008). Ignoring the social inequities students of poverty face on a daily basis will

not support sustainable academic achievement. Dryfoos (2008) argues, "schools alone cannot fix a society that allows the poor children to fail" (p. 38). Policies such as NCLB place sole responsibility on educators for closing the academic achievement gap between low-income and wealthy children. However, educational systems are not equipped to solve societal issues such as unemployment, health services, and violence in communities. To combat poverty's effects on academic achievement, schools must involve the community and all stakeholders (Dryfoos, 2008; Howard, 2007).

The failure of public schools to address the achievement gap has generated controversy among scholars about the ability of schools to confront the issue of high numbers of impoverished children. Wolk (2010) contends that redesigning, rather than reforming efforts that have proven not to work, is necessary. He further writes: "If existing traditional schools cannot do the job, then we must create new institutions that can" (p. 18). Wolk mentions the proliferation of states that are contracting with charter schools or entrepreneurs who personalize education to accommodate diversity in today's students.

Similarly, Hess (2010) proposes an entrepreneur model where educators reinvent the way they lead education for the 21st century. However, he does caution that his approach to addressing the current educational issues requires flexibility with policies, collective bargaining, and resilient staff. In his book, *Education Unbound,* he recognizes the work of school entrepreneurs such as Uncommon Schools, ASPIRE Public Schools, The Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), and Harlem Children's Zone as being among the models of entrepreneurs who make a difference among children of poverty. Hess

(2010) named his model Greenfield Schools, which he states is "uncomfortable for many adults, but is the right thing to do for students"; a "greenfielder" insists that educators devote their energy to "not holding down the fort, but to embracing transformation" (p. 16). Furthermore, the persistent gap among children of poverty forces educators and stakeholders to search for alternatives that can perhaps address the pervasive failure to meet children's needs, possibly by utilizing unconventional organizational structures and methods. These organizations and structures must have a profound understanding of the culture, the "social, political, and economic experiences, beliefs, and expectations," children bring to the classroom (Walker-Tileston & Darling, 2008, p. xvi).

Educators who serve in low-income neighborhoods realize their students show significant gaps in background knowledge, vocabulary, experiences, and other skills. The effects of poverty are well documented (Jensen, 2009; Payne, 2005; Rothstein, 2004; Walker & Darling, 2008) and include a wide array of challenges that must be confronted to significantly reverse the effects of culture and poverty. Walker and Darling (2008) contend that culture and poverty are responsible for discrepancies in achievement. They argue that culture needs to be understood first because it explains the circumstances of children who live in poverty, and it may provide insight on how to trigger motivation to learn. Engaging in school improvement efforts will require strong social relationships with communities, including understanding local cultural features that shape the community (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

School Reform

Comprehensive school reform efforts have been implemented in the United States to better serve the needs of a growing diverse and complex student population. Desimone (2002) describes these efforts as a series of waves. The first wave was in response to the *Nation at Risk Report* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This wave was characterized by systemic changes such as increasing standards, regulations, salary increases, core requirements, and extending the school day and year. Since these reforms were characterized by top-to-bottom mandates and a lack of capacity building, a second wave of reforms was implemented. The second wave described by Desimone had a focus on building relationships between schools and families. Emphasis was placed on serving special groups of students, hiring and retaining effective teachers, and improving teacher education programs. The third wave of reform responded to the failures of the previous school improvement efforts. Desimone (2002) found that with "a renewed focus on the importance of restructuring schools to foster changes in teaching and learning, the nation has embarked on what might be considered a third wave of reform: comprehensive schoolwide reform (CSR)" (p. 434). In essence, CSR is characterized not only by the structure and organization of schools, but also by the curriculum and how teachers deliver instruction.

Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) envision a fourth way of addressing school education reform to deal with the gaps that NCLB failed to close. In their assessment, Hargreaves and Shirley conclude that President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of

Education, Arne Duncan, recognize the failure of NCLB, and therefore support a new

vision for public education:

> Most of all, we need a vision of education as a public good that shapes the future
>
> of all of us. This vision should help us develop greater innovation and creativity,
>
> expect and demand commitment and perseverance from our students, foster the
>
> international awareness and cultural understanding that strengthen global
>
> partnerships and security, and promote the inclusiveness that elevates our
>
> differences into strengths that can enable us to bring about opportunity for all in a
>
> just society. (p. 37)

This new vision continues to focus on equity in educational opportunities and recognizes

the nation's participation in a global community. At the center of policy changes there is

a growing interest in the role of the principal as an agent of change in the process of

implementing school improvement efforts. Spillane (2009) contends: "Policymakers

appear to agree with local, state, and federal policies holding school leaders responsible

for school improvement" (p. 201). For instance, the *Blueprint for Reform* (2010) demands

effective teachers and principals in every school, and clearly indicates that school

turnaround efforts will have a process in place to address persistent failure. The policy

will have severe consequences for the principal first, and then will affect other members

of the organization. Models of implementation to ensure significant changes include the

following:

Transformation Model: replace the principal, strengthen staffing, implement a

research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and

implement new governance and flexibility;

Turnaround Model: replace the principal and rehire no more than 50 % of the

school staff, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended

learning time, and implement new governance and flexibility;

Restart Model: convert or close and reopen the school under the management of

an effective charter operator, charter management organization, or educational

management organization; and

School Closure Model: close the school and enroll students who attended it in

other, higher performing schools in the district. (p. 12)

Not only is the principal responsible for turning schools around, but also he or she will be

held accountable for the school's failure, and the previous models are evidence of the

consequences for principals who do not produce desired results.

Principal Leadership

Well into the 1980s, the principal was viewed as a strong instructional leader

central to instructional improvement and change (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003).

This focus changed and research describes today's school landscape as "one in which

multiple school members are seen as exercising powerful instructional leadership"

(Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003, p. 348). A clear definition of leadership is

problematic for researchers due to the multiple dimensions and situational nature of the

duties of leaders. Yukl (2006) provides a comprehensive description of leadership and

asserts that leaders are evaluated by "beliefs and assumptions about the characteristics of effective leaders" (p. 129). Therefore, the concept of leadership is elusive and difficult to define in one construct. Bolman and Deal (2003) agree that there is "confusion and disagreement" (p. 336) in defining the term leadership and agreeing on what difference it makes in an organization.

In an attempt to better understand leadership, Bolman and Deal (2003) define four frameworks: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic scheme. Each component of the framework is described as follows:

Structural frame.

The structural frame is embedded in current approaches to organizational design. There is an assumption that if formal arrangements are implemented, they will minimize concerns and increase performance. A series of assumptions are characteristic of this frame:

(1) Organizations establish goals and objectives;

(2) organizations increase efficiency through specialization and clear division of labor;

(3) coordination and control ensure that efforts of individuals and units coincide;

(4) organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal preferences and external pressures;

(5) structures must be designed to fit an organization's circumstances (including its goals, technology, workforce, and environment); and

(6) problems and performance gaps arise from structural deficiencies and can be remedied through analysis and restructuring. (p. 45)

Human resource frame.

This frame attempts to understand people and their relationship within organizations. The frame has a series of assumptions and is summarized as follows:

(1) Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the reverse;

(2) people and organizations need each other; organizations need ideas, energy, and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities;

(3) when the fit between the individual and the system is poor, one or both suffer; individuals are exploited or exploit the organization—or both become victims;

(4) a good fit benefits both; individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed. (p. 115)

Political frame.

The political framework views organizations as political arenas hosting individual and collective interest groups. The assumptions for this frame are as follows:

(1) Organizations are coalitions of individuals and interest groups;

(2) coalition members possess differences in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality;

(3) usually decision making involves scarce resources and there is conflict regarding who gets what;

(4) conflict is central to the organizational dynamics and power is viewed as an important asset; and

(5) goals and decisions emerge from bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position among competing stakeholders. (p. 186)

Symbolic frame.

The symbolic frame attempts to clarify and understand meaning, which makes symbols so powerful. The assumptions for this framework are as follows:

(1) The meaning of an event is more important than the event;

(2) experience is interpreted differently; therefore, events may have multiple meanings;

(3) people create symbols to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity; this anchors hope and faith and allows people to find direction;

(4) people create myths, heroes and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories that help find purpose and passion in their personal lives or workplace;

(5) culture holds an organization together and unites people around shared values and beliefs. (pp. 242-243)

Summary of frames.

Using General Motors' business experience, Bolman and Deal (2003) describe leadership through the lens of the organizational framework as previously stated. The structural leader studies the organizational design to make decisions for improvement. Structural leaders lend less importance to people and focus on the organization; therefore, they ignore the importance of how decisions or the implementation of change affect people. Structural leaders usually attempt to experiment with different innovations and will adapt to changes in areas such as economics.

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The human resource leader is viewed as the facilitator who guides others by motivating and empowering subordinates. They strongly believe that productivity can be achieved through people. As a result, they are always visible and try to make employees feel like they are part of the organization. These leaders are usually aware of the needs of employees and try to ensure these needs are met.

The political leadership frame describes leaders as realists who are aware of what they want, but also have an understanding of what is possible. These leaders are fully aware of the key players, interest groups, and power groups. In order to reach their goals, they persuade, negotiate, and coerce these players to obtain desired results.

The symbolic leadership lens views the organization as a "temple" or "theater" where there is a "community of faith, bonded by shared beliefs, traditions, myths, rituals, and ceremonies" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 360). Symbolic leaders take care of their organizations by showing their commitment and by inspiring while they lead. These leaders are not afraid to engage in difficult tasks that will pave the way for others to follow. They also persuade people by engaging in the dissemination of a vision for the future. A leader such as Martin Luther King is a clear example of this type of leadership. They use stories to engage their audience to ensure they meet their goals.

Bolman and Deal (2003) caution that there is a need for the development of a clear vision in organizations, but this is not the only area in which leaders need to show accomplishment. In fact, Bolman and Deal suggest that leaders use the frameworks in combination in order to be successful. Effective leaders will understand the situational nature of leadership (Yukl, 2006) and their own strengths, then work to expand them, and

build teams that can offer organizational leadership in all four modes: structural, political, human resource, and symbolic. Leading change is a highly complicated process, especially today, where the environment and experiences of children are in constant change. These rapid shifts of current conditions force leaders to think and act differently. Topics such as the uncertainty of the economic future and changes in policy require broadening perspectives and encourage creative thinking (Hoyle, 2007).

Leading schools, especially schools of poverty, requires administrators who can think "outside the box" without ignoring the importance of engaging in some "in-the-box" leadership, which is important in attending to the necessary, structured work of education and in maintaining important traditions and improving required practices" (Kendrick, 2007, p. 87). Moreover, educational organizations are often vulnerable to change due to policies and external forces. A lack of clearly stated intentions can also result in conflict (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008), and as a consequence, the inability to articulate expectations will result in the abandoning of any initiative because people believe that eventually this, too, will pass. Schlechty (2005) argues that school reform is negatively influenced by the inability to sustain reform that lacks systematic implementation. A lack of focus and clear vision will lead to uncertainty and ambiguity among those who must implement changes. Evidently, understanding why changes are needed and how these changes will affect staff will ease the transition into the newly-adopted changes.

Academic Achievement Gap and Poverty

The current academic achievement gap among children of poverty has the attention of policymakers and educators who realize there is an urgency to act upon this issue. Jupp (2009) states the importance of change when he writes: "Educators and policymakers understand that solutions lie not in tinkering around the edges, but in concerted effort to create systemic change" (p. 1). In education, change is a constant variable because the achievement gap continues to exist; therefore, change is expected and needed at many levels. However, a better understanding of managing change is fundamental for leaders to undertake such a task. Bolman and Deal (2003) assert that when people are confronted with changes in the education field, they also face grief and resistance, which can be understood, since change generates a series of issues such as the following:

(1) Influencing the ability to feel effective, valued, and in control;

(2) confusion due to disruption of patterns of roles and relationships;

(3) conflict between those who benefit from change and those who don't; and

(4) a sense of loss reflected in mourning, rituals, and other routines. (p. 393)

Ensuring that educational leaders understand the emotional aspect of change will create awareness of the importance of planning for this aspect of the organizational change journey. Leaders need to understand the importance of engaging teachers in the new vision since they will be responsible for the success or failure of the new changes. Sousa (2003) contends: "In the real world, it turns out that the instrument of meaningful change is the classroom teacher, and the unit of change is the individual school" (p. 2). Sousa's

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contention is logical when we consider that each school has its own set of cultural values, issues, and educational needs. Comprehending features and effects of change can assist the leader in understanding that "although there are many different roles to play in any organization, every role is critical to the success or failure of that organization" (Pellicer, 2008, p. xvii).

Thus, the leader's job is to help change the immediate context. In a changing world where children are confronted with poverty, Fullan (2003) argues that the starting point for change is not in trying to control the environment, but in dealing with the situation at hand, and in allowing people to have new experiences because they are more likely to change in a "see-feel-change sequence" (p. 2). In order to address change in Fullan's framework, a process needs to be in place in which the leader helps people to see the possibilities and experience an emotional connection with the new change, which then leads to a change in behavior.

<div align="center">

Theoretical Approaches to Leadership

</div>

Education in a democracy exists to ensure its citizens live in a civil and prosperous society. In his book, *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership,* Fullan (2003) makes the case for the existence of public schools as the equalizer of opportunities when he writes:

> The best case for public education has always been that it is a common good. Everyone, ultimately, has a stake in the caliber of schools, and education is everyone's business. The quality of the public education system relates directly to the quality of life that people enjoy (whether as parents, employers, or citizens),

with a strong public education system as the cornerstone of a civil, prosperous,

and democratic society. (p. 3)

Fullan makes a compelling argument when he contends that publicly funded

schools are to serve all children regardless of which children have the "loudest advocate"

(p. 3). In his analysis, a strong argument for social justice is evident when he describes

academic achievement and personal and social development as core purposes of school

systems.

The demand for strong leaders who are committed to high student achievement is

evident in current literature. Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, and Cohen

(2007) found:

Despite the obvious need for highly-skilled school leaders, the significant role of

the principal in creating the condition for improved student outcomes was largely

ignored by policymakers in the 1980s and 1990s, and the ability of principals to

rise to the ever-increasing demands of each additional reform effort was often

taken for granted. (p. 2)

Resurgence in the importance of the development of school leadership has increased after

many years of neglect (Fullan, 2003). However, there are many barriers that impede

leaders' efforts to reform schools. These barriers are ingrained in the system and are often

difficult to confront. Fullan (2003) finds many of them are self-imposed such as (1)

perceived system limitations; (2) if-only dependency; (3) loss of a moral compass; (4)

inability to take charge of one's own learning; and (5) a responsibility virus. Other

barriers are system-imposed such as (1) the centralization whipsaw; (2) role overload and

role ambiguity; (3) limited investment in leadership development; (4) neglect of leadership succession; (5) the absence of a system change strategy; and (6) limited definitions of the principal's role, resulting in failure to realize the moral imperative of schooling (Fullan, 2003, p. 17).

Fullan presents a vision of leadership that goes beyond teaching reading, math, and other core subjects. He visualizes the principal as an agent capable of addressing change in school while simultaneously changing the system. However, he cautions that many times principals lose their moral purpose as they experience overload and an increase in expectations from the system. This and other barriers previously mentioned can impede the goals of principals who are engaged in moral purpose.

Furthermore, Fullan (2003) explains that a call for sophisticated leadership is needed to confront the moral purpose of leaders who transform current school systems. He adds further:

> Moral purpose of the highest order is having a system where all students learn, the gap between high and low performance becomes greatly reduced, and what people learn enables them to be successful citizens and workers in a morally based knowledge society. (p. 29)

Fullan (2003) has developed a hierarchy of moral purpose where each level encompasses the previous ones. These levels are individual, school, regional, and society. Principals make a significant difference when they engage in moral leadership at the first two levels. However, the level that supports the most potential for significant and sustainable change is level two: the school level. The individual level is where the

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principal may be committed to making a difference, but this is not sustainable if change at the school level is not happening. The *school level* is where the principal's moral purpose is more evident when changes involve the whole school. Moreover, Fullan (2003) states:

> The criteria of moral purpose are the following: all schools and teachers benefit in terms of identified desirable goals; that the gap between high and low performers becomes less as the bar for all is raised; that ever-deeper educational goals are pursued; and that the culture of the school becomes so transformed that continuous improvement relative to the previous three components becomes built in. (p. 31)

The *regional level* assumes that moral leaders engage in other endeavors to change the present situation. Fullan gives an example in which principals of failing schools were paired with principals of successful schools who served as mentors or models to ensure that the principals of failing schools were also successful. He indicates that ethical principals do not only interact with their own students, but also make an effort to collaborate with their colleagues to ensure that a greater number of students succeed and become contributing members of society.

Leadership

According to Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) and to further discuss leadership, it is essential to "stand on the shoulders of those who have made similar efforts" (p.13). Scholars and researchers have provided theoretical frameworks to better understand the work of leaders. Many of these frameworks are initiated in the business

community; however, they apply to school leaders as well. In his book, *Leadership in Organizations,* Yukl (2006) provides insight to many of these theories as follows:

(1) *Transformational Leadership*: focused on change, the followers feel trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect toward the leader, and they are inspired to perform more duties than they are expected to do (Bass, 1985, as cited in Yukl, 2006, p. 262);

(2) *Transactional Leadership*: focused on trading one thing for the other, employees expect a clarification of duties that will in turn result in a reward (Bass, 1985, as cited in Yukl, 2006, pp. 262-263); and

(3) *Situational Leadership*: the leaders act according to the level of maturity of the employee. Immature employees are provided a support system with high task-oriented behaviors and directive roles (Hershey & Blanchard, 1977, as cited in Yukl, 2006, p. 223).

In addition to these theoretical frameworks, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) provide a brief description of models used in education to explain leader behaviors and change journeys such as:

1. *Total Quality Management (TQM):* The theoretical framework was created for business world; however, it is widely used in educational leadership. TQM is characterized by change agency, teamwork, continuous improvement, and trust building (Deming, 1986, as cited in Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 15);

2. *Servant Leadership:* emerges from a desire to help others; the servant leader is

   positioned in the center of the organization (Greenleaf, 1970, 1977, as cited in

   Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, pp. 16-17); and

3. *Instructional Leadership:* the concept is not well defined in literature despite the

   popularity of the concept. The concept has four distinct dimensions: resource

   provider, instructional resource, communicator, and a visible presence. This type

   of leadership has been associated with transformational leadership. (Marzano,

   Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 18)

In addition, Barr and Parrett (2007) support collaborative and distributive

leadership as a model to address the issues of leading high-performing, high-poverty

schools. This type of leadership fosters collaborative team approaches and the

distribution of duties among teachers to effectively teach all students. Other scholars

(Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karkanek, 2010)

encourage the distributive model as a means to gain collaborative intelligence, set

achievement goals, and develop interventions.

In their book, *School Leadership that Works,* Marzano, Waters, and McNulty

(2005) articulate the need to research leadership since it is identified as a factor for school

academic success. Nevertheless, in their research, they found limited quantitative studies

that address the relationship between school leadership and student academic

achievement. Some of the research findings found that efforts should not be directed to

develop leadership because it has no measurable effect on learning.

However, in a meta-analysis research study, well-documented statistical effects of leadership on student achievement were reported by Waters and Cameron (2007). The study included the examination of 69 studies involving 2,802 schools; the ratings for principal leadership were correlated with more than 1.4 million student achievement scores. According to Waters and Cameron (2007), each study selected shared four characteristics:

(1) The *dependent variable* in each study was student *achievement*;

(2) the *independent variable* in each study was *leadership;*

(3) the student achievement measures were all quantitative and standardized; and

(4) the measures of school-level leadership were all quantitative and standardized. (p. 2)

According to Waters and Cameron (2007), the McRel study "validates the opinions expressed by leadership theorists for decades" (p. 41). The 21 responsibilities (Appendix B) previously mentioned unveiled by the study provide new insights into the nature of school leadership. The literature has addressed these competencies or responsibilities before; however, the importance of this research is that for the first time the competencies have shown a statistically significant relationship between school leadership and student academic achievement.

The McRel Balanced Leadership Framework grouped the 21 responsibilities and 66 practices into a more manageable organizational structure that includes leadership, focus, magnitude of change, and purposeful community. Figure 1 illustrates which responsibilities were placed within the framework's structure.

Purposeful Community	Focus	Magnitude of Change
Affirmation	Contingent rewards	Change agent
Confirmation	Discipline	Flexibility
Ideals/beliefs	Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment	Ideals/beliefs
Input	Focus	Intellectual stimulation
Relationships	Order	Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment
Situational awareness	Outreach	Monitor/ evaluate
Visibility	Resources	Optimize

Figure 1: Primary placement of leadership responsibilities in McRel Framework.
Reprinted with express permission from McREL. (Waters & Cameron, 2007, p. 17).

According to Waters and Cameron (2007), the construct of leadership is the

foundational component in the framework, and it is strategically placed as an interface

among *Focus*, *Magnitude of Change*, and *Purposeful Community*. The framework

assumes:

 Leaders are continually engaged in focusing the work of the school, leading

change with varying orders of magnitude, and developing purposeful community

both within the school and in the larger community. The dotted lines between

leadership and the other three framework components (see Figure 2) are intended

to reflect permeable, rather than hardened or rigid, boundaries between leadership

and school and classroom practices, students, and the community. (p. 16)
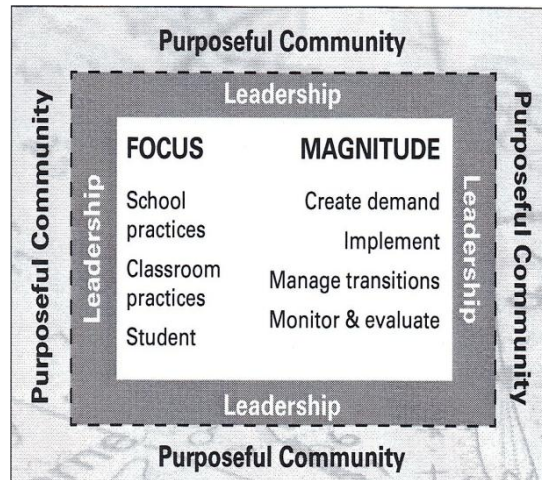
Figure 2: McREL's Balanced Leadership Framework. Reprinted with express permission from McREL. (Waters & Cameron, 2007, p. 15).

An analysis of the 21 leadership responsibilities reveals an effect of "destabilizing or challenging" organizational behaviors since they disrupt routines, procedures, and practices (p. 18). Effective leaders balance leadership responsibilities that maintain or challenge the organization when needed. Figure 3 illustrates both destabilizing and stabilizing responsibilities.

Destabilizing Responsibilities	Stabilizing Responsibilities
change agent	Culture
flexibility	Discipline
ideals and beliefs	Focus
intellectual stimulation	Order
optimize	involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment

Figure 3: McRel "Balancing" leadership responsibilities. Reprinted with express permission from McREL. (Waters and Cameron, 2007, p. 19).

The McRel Balanced Leadership Framework was published in the book *Balanced Leadership that Works.* According to Marzano et al. (2005), there are two approaches to addressing low-performing schools or what Marzano calls "doing the right work" (p. 76). First, comprehensive school reform (CSR) is usually federally funded with a mandate to implement a scientifically-based research approach to improve academic achievement. This CSR also includes professional development for teachers, leaders, and other staff, as well as parental and community involvement. The second approach involves designing a site-specific approach to identify the interventions that will address the needs of the school. A framework for improvement must be identified to do the "right work" that will significantly enhance student achievement. Many frameworks have been developed by researchers including Marzano's (2003) book: *What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Practice.* This model was developed as a result of a meta-analysis study that revealed factors that significantly increase student achievement. These factors are grouped in the following clusters: school level factors, teacher level factors, and student level factors. Each category is comprised of a series of factors within the category:

School Level Factors:

    a) Guaranteed and viable curriculum

    b) Challenging goals and effective feedback

    c) Parent and community engagement

    d) Safe and orderly environment

    e) Collegiality and professionalism

Teacher Level Factors:

a) Instructional Strategies

b) Classroom Management

c) Classroom Curriculum Design

Student Level Factors:

a) Home environment

b) Learned intelligence and background knowledge

c) Motivation

These researchers' intent was to identify a series of factors that were powerful and readily available to implement without the barrier of extensive cost. Furthermore, the importance of leadership in the implementation of school reform, best practice, and inquiry-based learning has been recognized as the most significant factor in sustaining changes that increase academic achievement. In the next section, a series of studies reveal findings that expand the knowledge of what is needed to influence learning for all children.

Leadership in High-Performing Schools

The national focus on closing achievement gaps for all students has prompted attention to the role of school leaders and their influence in the quality of education (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007). In an effort to identify essential elements of leadership, several studies have been conducted that identify how

principals play an essential role in leading effective schools. Kirst, Haertel, and Williams (2005, as cited in Darling-Hammond et al., 2007) state:

> Researchers found that achievement levels were higher in schools where principals undertake and lead a school reform process; act as managers of school improvement; cultivate the school's vision; make use of student data to support instructional practices; and provide assistance to struggling students. (p. 1)

Thus, it is important to identify which elements of leadership promote effective schools that serve students of poverty. As the research identifies these elements, other school leaders can replicate findings as they lead campuses that intend to close achievement gaps. The following is a brief review of educational leadership standards as well as studies that identify leadership elements or factors that influence student achievement. The studies are analyzed and emerging patterns are identified that reflect elements of effective principal leadership.

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) of 2008

In 1996, the Council of Chief State School Officers developed the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leaders (ISLLC) and included a framework that can influence leadership and policy. The framework has been updated to *Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008* (hereafter referred to as ISLLC 2008), and it reflects the new wealth of knowledge learned during the past decade (Wilhoit, 2008). The document includes a set of standards utilized by policymakers in their effort to improve education leadership preparation, licensure,

evaluation, and professional development. The ISLLC 2008 organizes the functions that help define strong leadership in six standards:

1) Setting a widely shared vision for learning;

2) developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;

3) ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment;

4) collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources;

5) acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and

6) understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts.

In addition to these standards, studies have referenced elements of principal leadership that result in increased academic achievement for all students. To frame the concept of effective principal leadership, a brief description of recent studies is provided.

The School Leadership Study

The purpose of this study was to address the need to improve principal preparation programs in terms of the challenges of leading effective schools in the era of accountability. The literature for this study provides a research review that summarizes the essential elements which promote successful school leaders and how they influence learning. These characteristics are briefly described as follows:

1) *Developing people:* principals offer intellectual support, and motivate people to do their work as well as provide models of practice and support;

2) *Setting directions for the organization:* principals develop shared goals, monitor performance, and promote effective communication; and

3) *Redesigning the organization:* principals create a productive school culture, modify organizational structures that undermine the work, and promote collaboration processes. (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005, p. 5)

Leithwood and Jantzi (2005, as cited in Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007) identified the focus of attention for effective school principals:

1) Setting direction by developing consensus around vision, goals and direction;

2) helping individual teachers, through support, modeling, and supervision;

3) redesigning the organization to foster collaboration and engage families and community; and

4) managing the organization by strategically allocating resources and support. (p. 9)

Other researchers named in the *School Leadership* study add the development of collective teacher capacity and engagement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2005), setting a vision, supporting staff, implementing a supportive culture, participatory decision-making structures, and high-performance expectations for all staff and students (Silins, Mulford, Zarins, 2003 as cited in Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Other elements found in the study suggest that motivation and empowerment are fundamental in effective school organizations.

In fact, Darling-Hammond, et al., (2007) found specific leadership practices that are associated with active and effective support leading to instructional improvement. According to research conducted by Leithwood and Jantzi (2002), the most critical practices involve:

- working directly with teachers to improve effectiveness in the classroom;

- providing resources and professional development to improve instruction;

- regularly monitoring teaching and student progress;

- participating in discussions on educational issues; and

- promoting parental and community involvement in the school. (p. 10)

The effective leadership elements found in this study are consistent with the standards established by the ISLLC 2008. However, the study also states that effective leadership cannot be predicted by a predetermined list of practices: "the capacity to lead in ways that support teaching and develop productive school organizations appears to be a baseline requirement, and a necessary if not sufficient, condition for school leadership" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007, p. 10).

The Study for Learning Improvement in Urban Schools

This study researched what it takes for leaders to promote and support powerful, equitable learning within school systems in urban districts. The study included four school districts where poverty and racial diversity were present in the urban districts represented. The focus on these sites stemmed from a desire to understand district leadership participation within schools facing daunting challenges. The study found six

implications for what leaders need to do to influence learning (Portin, Knapp, Dareff, Feldman, Russell, Samuelson, & Yeh, 2009). These leaders need to:

1) rethink and expand the concept of supervision to include teachers in improving work while helping teacher leaders in the development of their own capacity;

2) create partnerships with various staff members in the building who exercise leadership to some degree;

3) find ways to establish trust, stay open to criticism, and focus on instruction;

4) manage school operations and resources, which is vital to creating the infrastructure for learning;

5) be comfortable in exercising discretion and acting more entrepreneurially within the context of accountability; and

6) be fluent in the use of data as a leadership tool. (pp. 103-104)

Improving School Leadership Study

This study focuses on a cohesive leadership system (CLS) approach where policies and initiatives shared across state agencies and districts increase a principal's ability to positively influence learning in his or her school (Augustine, Gonzalez, Ikemoto, Russell, Zellman, Constant, Armstrong, & Dembosky, 2009). The findings in the study are evidence that such cohesive approaches are possible in developing leaders engaged in providing instruction. Researchers in this study identified eight strategies for building cohesion among systems:

1) building trust;

2) creating formal and informal networks;

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3) fostering communication;

4) exerting pressure and influence;

5) promoting an improved quality of leadership policies and initiatives;

6) building capacity for the work;

7) identifying strong individuals with political and social capital to lead the work; and

8) connecting to other reform efforts. (p. xxi)

The findings support the idea that "positive conditions for principals promote stronger instructional leadership" (Augustine et al., 2009, p. xxi).

Five High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools Study

A series of themes identified by the Council of Chief State School Officers (2002) were correlated to successful high-performing, high-poverty schools committed to positively influencing learning. The document produced by the researchers serves as a guide for schools and stakeholders. Correlates or themes were provided for state, district, and campus levels; however, for the purpose of this literature review, only the school themes are mentioned. These themes:

1) believe all students can be successful, including diverse learners;

2) align educational resources to address student needs via the school improvement process;

3) encourage regular and meaningful communication among staff members;

4) use student data to target continuous improvement in learning;

5) focus on student-centered learning;

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6) address academic and non-academic barriers to learning;

7) view families and communities as critical partners;

8) develop systems for identifying and implementing interventions prior to

   diagnostic testing;

9) provide a continuum of services to students eligible for Special Education; and

10) use Special Education to fully integrate students into general education.

This study was conducted in schools across the state of Texas characterized by high

levels of achievement in high-poverty schools. The study describes practices that support

academic achievement regardless of socioeconomic status and Special Education

program participation in the accountability system. The following practices were reported

by the Council of Chief State School Officers (2002):

1) setting high expectations for all students;

2) sharing leadership and staying engaged;

3) encouraging collaboration among faculty and staff;

4) using assessment data to support student success;

5) keeping the focus on students;

6) addressing barriers to learning; and

7) reinforcing classroom learning at home by engaging families.

In conclusion, the study shows that it is possible to improve student achievement while

including students with special disabilities (Council of Chief State School Officers,

2002).

Emerging Themes from Principal Studies

The studies previously discussed document patterns of behavior found in principals who improve academic achievement. According to the studies, these principals set high expectations for all students, promote communication among all stakeholders and teaching staff, build teacher capacity through professional development, monitor teaching and student growth through data analysis, effectively manage school operations, and address barriers to learning. Many of these elements are aligned to the ISLLC 2008 standards; therefore, support for these elements should be encouraged by policy makers when decisions are made about the development of principal preparation programs, evaluation systems, and professional development. These studies also lend support to principals who seek to identify practices that lead to increased and sustained academic achievement.

The principal studies presented in this chapter provide insight on what works in schools that have closed achievement gaps, yet a clear understanding of the processes that support how to reach intended goals remains an elusive idea. A possibility for further research includes identifying principals who have achieved and sustained high academic achievement in high-poverty schools. A qualitative study could determine how principals led their schools to support high-performing achievement levels in high- poverty urban schools. Thus, the focus of this study will be to qualitatively identify *how* principals led their schools to achieve high academic achievement for all of their students.

Chapter Summary

A continuous emphasis on closing achievement gaps is reflected in the new *Blueprint for Reform* (2010) policy document. Efforts to find best practices have focused attention on the principal as the most powerful agent of change. A growing number of high-performing, high-poverty schools are evident in the literature. By using research on effective schools and best practices, these schools have transformed student learning in striking ways (Barr & Parrett, 2007).

Effective principal frameworks such as those included in the School Leadership Study, the Study for Learning Improvement in Urban Schools, the Improving School Leadership study, and the Five High-performing, High-poverty Schools Study, have identified elements of principal leadership that promote high academic achievement in schools of poverty. These elements include setting high expectations for all students, promoting communication among all stakeholders and teaching staff, building teacher capacity through professional development, monitoring teacher and student growth through data analysis, effectively managing school operations, and addressing barriers to learning. Implications for further research suggest the need to gain more knowledge on how principal behaviors identified in the studies reviewed in this chapter lead campuses to achieve high levels of academic achievement for all students.

The next chapter presents the methodology the researcher utilized to conduct this study on principal leadership in high-performing, high-poverty schools.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The challenges of schools that serve children of poverty are daunting. However, an increasing number of schools are showing significant progress in closing the achievement gap for all students. Studies on high-performing schools have identified a series of elements that positively influence academic achievement such as strong leadership (Reeves, 2006), a culture of collaboration, a clear vision (DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker, 2008), and teacher effectiveness (Marzano, 2010; Muhammad, 2008; Wiggins, 2010). A strong emphasis on leadership is also present in literature; however, how leaders implement these research findings remains elusive. This study identified how principal leadership responsibilities in purposive selected school settings have led to increased academic achievement in high-poverty schools.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology procedures employed by the researcher conducting the study. The first section includes the research questions and description of the research design. Section two includes the criteria and selection process used by the researcher. Section three includes information specific to data collection procedures. Section four explains the data analysis process that was used and includes a calendar of activities from the initial stages to the culmination of the study. Section five summarizes essential information regarding the methodology detailed in the chapter.

Research Questions

Identifying how principal leadership behaviors influence high academic achievement in poverty schools was determined through pursuing the following questions:

(1) How did the principal implement research-based leadership responsibilities that led to the pursuit of high academic achievement for all students?

(2) How did the principal implement a school-wide improvement framework that has resulted in sustained academic achievement growth for all students?

(3) How did the principal implement the identified strategies that ensured high academic achievement among all student populations?

Research Design

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study. Willis (2007) states that the design is a part of the study that refers "to the researcher's plan of how to proceed. A qualitative…researcher is more like the loosely scheduled traveler than the (traveler who makes) detailed plans, with all the stops (including restaurants and routes set in advance)" (p. 196). Qualitative researchers assume reality is built by interactions with their social environment (Merriam, 1998). According to Willis (2007),

Qualitative research typically does not operate within strict technical guidelines. The technical criteria are simply not as important as they are in postpositivist research. In their place are general guidelines or family resemblances. Thus, when interpretative qualitative researchers use the term *research method,* they do not necessarily mean the detailed prescription of the quantitative researchers. (p. 196)

Merriam (1998) further describes qualitative research as an assumption that "the world is not an objective thing out there, but a function of personal interaction and perception" (p. 17). Thus, qualitative research intends to understand the meanings that people have built from their social personal interactions.

One of the strengths of qualitative research is it uses rich descriptions and explanations of processes in naturalistic environments (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman further describe the qualities of qualitative research as "Words especially organized into incidents or stories [that] have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to the reader, another researcher, a policymaker, a practitioner" (p. 1). The study on how principal leadership behaviors lead schools to high academic achievement is better understood within the natural setting and interactions with the environment. Marshall and Rossman (1999) state that, "qualitative researchers are intrigued with the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions" (p. 2). Thus, the use of qualitative research seems to provide the most appropriate method to collect the necessary data to fulfill the goals of this study.

Qualitative research approaches has some limitations such as the specific concerns addressed by Miles and Huberman (1994). These concerns are best described as follows:

We should be mindful of some pervasive issues that have not gone away. These issues include the labor-intensiveness (and extensiveness over months or years) of data collection, frequent data overload, the distinct possibility of researcher bias,

the time demands of processing and coding data, the adequacy of sampling when

only a few cases can be managed, the generalizability of findings, the credibility

and quality of conclusions, and their utility in the world of policy and action. (p.

2)

Willis (2007) argues that biases need to be recognized rather than pretending they are

non-existent. He states further:

Qualitative research rejects the very idea that you can be objective and neutral in

research. You pick certain things to study because you have an interest. You

probably also have an idea about the results and conclusions you will end up with.

That makes the study subjective, and hiding behind the third person in the write

up does a disservice because you appear to be objective when that is not the case.

(p. 210)

Qualitative research is a reflection journey and involves a non-linear process where the

data collection provides an opportunity to develop "emerging insights, hunches, and

tentative hypothesis" (Merriam, 1998, p. 151). Thus, qualitative research involves the

recognition of a series of limitations; however, these same limitations can lead to

powerful stories that support understandings in the particular scenario where they are

generated. Also, the researcher is the "tool" for data collection and analysis (Willis,

2007).

This qualitative research consisted of a multiple case study method. According to

Merriam (1998), *Multiple-case designs* are more suited when the researcher is interested

in using more than one case to gather data from various sources and draw conclusions

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from the facts. They serve to confirm or corroborate evidence which enhances validity of the study. In multiple case studies, each case may represent a different thematic finding, such as a different type of learner, teacher, or program, which may portray a clustering of properties or even a metaphor; alternatively, a researcher may analyze and discuss each of the cases in terms of important themes that run across them to varying degrees.

Merriam (1998) describes a case study as "an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group" (p. 9). Case studies can focus on a particular context such as a person and they are about real people and situations. Since the study is conducted in the environment where the person interacts with others, it provides an opportunity to gather *thick description data* such as "participant and nonparticipant observation, interviews, historical and narrative sources, writing such as journals and diaries, a variety of quantitative data sources including tests, and almost anything else you can imagine" (p. 238). Many of the advantages of case studies are enumerated by Willis (2007). These advantages are that:

1. It allows you to gather rich, detailed data in an authentic setting;

2. it is holistic and thus supports the idea that much of what we can know about human behavior is best understood as lived experience in the social contexts; and

3. unlike experimental research, it can be done without predetermined hypothesis and goals. (p. 240)

Description of Sample

Determining the sample is crucial since researchers cannot include everyone. Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that "Qualitative researchers usually work with

small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth-unlike quantitative researchers, who aim for larger numbers of context-stripped cases and seek statistical significance" (p. 27). Miles and Huberman also clarify that samples tend to be purposive, rather than random "because the initial definition of the universe is more limited" (p. 27) and because sampling involves a social process that cannot be found in random sampling.

The sample was selected using a purposive approach and boundaries set by the researcher considering the aspects of the cases that were studied and time limitations of the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For the study, three elementary school principals from a large urban district voluntarily participated. In addition, three instructional coordinators and three teacher leaders, selected by the principals, were included in the study to corroborate or provide insight that supported the purpose of the study.

The first phase of the selection process consisted of an analysis of data available in the 2009 and 2010 Snapshot and Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports for the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school year. This review process informed the selection of high-performing schools that met the selection criteria. For convenience, the schools selected were in close proximity to facilitate access for the researcher. The AEIS report was analyzed and schools that met the criteria were isolated for selection purposes. The sampling criteria for study were the following:

1. The principals worked on campus for at least two years.

2. The principals served on a campus that had been rated Exemplary by the Texas Education Agency for the past two years.

3. The campuses selected were Title 1 schools; they were predominantly
    comprised of students from a low-socioeconomic background.

The principals were contacted by phone or via email to invite them to voluntarily participate in the study. An initial contact meeting was requested and a formal letter of introduction, a copy of the dissertation abstract, a copy of the interview protocols, and any other information was facilitated. In addition to the principals, the study included three instructional coordinators and three teacher leaders selected by the principals. Each campus included one principal, one instructional coordinator, and one teacher leader respectively. Tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 provide a snapshot of the participants.

Table 3.1: Principal profiles

Participant	Principal experience at current position	Experience in education	Colleges Attended	Degrees
Principal A	2 years	11 years	Texas A&M Sam Houston University	B.A. Elementary Education M.Ed. Educational Administration
Principal B		36 years	North Texas University	B.A. Elementary Education M.Ed. Counseling and Guidance Ed.D. Educational Leadership
Principal C	10 years	26 years	Texas Southern University	B.A. Elementary Education M.Ed. Administration and Supervision Ed.D. Educational Leadership

Table 3.2: Instructional Coordinator (IC) Participants

Participant	Experience at current position	Experience in education	Colleges Attended	Degrees
IC-A	2 years	7 years	Michigan State University	B.A. Elementary Education
IC-B	6 years	28 years	Texas Southern University	B.A. Elementary Education M.Ed Education
IC-C	2 years	25 years	University of North Texas	B.A. Elementary Education

Table 3.3: Teacher Leader (TL) Participants

Participant	TL experience at current position	Experience in education	Colleges Attended	Degrees
TL-A	1 year	3 years-same campus	University of North Carolina	B.A.Political Science and Religious Studies Teach for America Corp Member
TL-B	5 years	9 years	Purdue University Texas Southern University	B.A. Elementary Education M. Ed. Administration/Mid Management
TL-C	10 years	21 years	Texas Southern University	B.A. Elementary Education

Procedures for Data Collection

Appropriate approval was obtained including Institutional Review Board (IRB)

process and school district research approval protocol. The participants selected for the

study participated in a one hour semi-structured individual interview on a mutually

agreed date during September and October of 2010 (see calendar of events in Appendix

C). Interviews provide a unique approach to discovery because it allows the researcher to

"enter into the other person's perspective" (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). These interviews were

used to obtain thick descriptions of the principals and the leadership behaviors that have

influenced student learning. Thick descriptive data "include participant and

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nonparticipant observations, interviews, historical and narrative sources, writings such as journals and diaries, a variety of quantitative data sources including tests, and almost anything else you can imagine" (Willis, 2007, p. 238). The interviews were audio taped and transcribed by the researcher; field notes were compared and coded using Atlas software along with manual coding.

The semi-structured questionnaire instrument (see Appendix D) utilized in the study was developed by the researcher to facilitate "a cross-case comparison" that was "laid side by side in the course of the analysis" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 35). The instrument was validated and modified by using a peer review method. In qualitative studies published to date, "the diversity of data sources is amazing" (p. 203), and to better understand the interactions of the principal and other members of the school community, other sources of data were gathered such as school and parent handbooks, memos, letters, minutes of meetings, newsletters, school websites, school improvement plans, student common assessment data, AEIS reports, TAKS data, data walls, and other written documents. Two one-hour observations of the principal interacting with teaching staff, parents, and students were conducted for the purpose of observing behaviors related to the conceptual framework employed such as culture, communication, and focus. Data from these observations were documented in field notes. Marshall and Rossman (1999) explain:

> Researchers supplement participant observation, interviewing, and observation
> with gathering and analyzing documents produced in the course of everyday

events . . . the review of documents is an unobtrusive method, rich in portraying

the values and beliefs of participants in the setting. (p. 116)

Data Analysis

Data analyses consider the formulated conceptual framework and focus on

research questions to prevent overload and engage in a selective process (Miles &

Huberman, 1994). The specific analysis of data followed Strauss and Corbin's (1998)

strategy of data analysis which includes open coding where concepts were identified and

their properties discovered in data. Themes were identified as data are broken down into

discrete parts to determine similarities and differences. Codes were assigned for each

grouping using axial coding to assign categories and subcategories. Continuous

examination of the transcripts, artifacts, and documents occurred to triangulate the data.

To support a conclusion, the process of triangulation ensures "support from more than

one source" (Willis, 2007, p. 219).

The researcher conducted audit trails and member checks, when necessary, to

increase validity of data. Audit trails document the research process from data gathering

to writing work. As ideas emerged, a well-documented trail ensures the data are captured

when these ideas emerge and data supporting findings as they are expanded. Member

checks involve the process of engaging participants of the study as reviewers of

conclusions.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Three presented the methodology used to conduct this study. A

discussion of qualitative research elements was presented with the purpose of describing

how this multi-case study was conducted within the qualitative research framework. Also

included were the research design, description of the sample, procedures of data

collection, and data analysis. The next chapter will include the results of the study

including major themes and will be organized according to research questions.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected from this qualitative study. The chapter analyzes three schools and each school is organized in two distinct sections. The first section presents the profiles of the selected sites including demographic information and principal information. The second section is organized by the order of the research questions and emergent themes. An additional section presents a cross analysis including differences and similarities between the three principals selected for the study including emergent themes. The focus of the study was to explore how principal leadership behaviors lead to increased academic achievement in three high-poverty elementary urban schools as evidenced by academic gains in standardized testing. The research findings answered the following three questions:

1. How did the principal implement research-based leadership responsibilities that led to the pursuit of high academic achievement for all students?

2. How did the principals implement a school-wide improvement framework that has resulted in sustained academic achievement growth for all students?

3. How did the principals implement the identified strategies that ensured high academic achievement among all student populations?

The collection of data consisted of document reviews, observations, interviews, and artifacts. During the data collection phase of this study, the researcher reviewed pertinent documents that revealed a descriptive profile for the campuses, including demographics and teacher information, physical environment, mission and vision

statements, symbolic artifacts, and daily operational information. Various documents were reviewed such as: School Improvement Plan (SIP), data walls, Academic Excellence Indicator System, school website, field notes, minutes from meetings, letters, newsletters, parent and teacher handbook, data spreadsheets, teacher assessment instruments, PLC meeting protocols, Memos, School Accountability Report Card, symbolic objects, TAKS, *Aprenda*, and Stanford data from the school districts' Research and Accountability Database.

In addition to artifacts and document reviews, nine interviews were conducted. The three campus principals were interviewed using the questionnaire detailed in Appendix D. In addition to the principal's three instructional coordinators and three teachers were interviewed (see Appendix E) to assist the triangulation of data. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed by the researcher. The transcripts were uploaded on the Atlas software to facilitate the coding process. A written consent (see Appendix F) for both audio tapes and transcriptions were obtained as stated in the research design.

After collecting aforementioned data, an analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's (1994) strategy of data analysis included in Chapter Three. Information collected through interviews, observations, and documents was organized, studied, coded, and separated into clusters. Patterns were studied and characterized by similarities and differences (Saldaña, 2009).

School A: Physical Location and Description

School A Elementary is located in a large urban district in Texas. The surrounding neighborhood is made up of small single family homes, apartments, and businesses. This area of School A has a population of 23,052, and of that 1.4% is African American, 94.6% is Hispanic, and 2.1% is White. The median age in the adjacent neighborhood is 27.6 and the average household income is $24,612. Twenty-five percent of the families and individuals are living below the poverty line (http://www.brainyzip.com). The educational background of the residents in this community reflects that 29.3% have a high school diploma and 2.3% have a college degree. This is significantly lower than the national average of 80% for high school graduates and 24.4% for bachelor's degree.

Initial Impressions

The physical structure of the campus contains 27 classrooms, three offices, and one cafeteria. Upon observation, the campus had a well-maintained landscape and clean surroundings, and the marquee clearly confirmed that the campus had earned a Texas Education Agency Exemplary rating. Furthermore, a series of signs are posted in the building indicating the years the campus had received Recognized and Exemplary ratings. Clear directions are posted on the doors to direct visitors to the main entrance. All other doors are locked for safety reasons and to facilitate proper monitoring of students. As visitors enter the campus, they are received by a courteous clerk who promptly greets and welcomes visitors with a smile. In order to gain entrance to the campus, proper identification must be provided to ensure safety. The *DYMO Raptor Technologies* computer software utilized by the campus is linked to a database that

identifies registered sex offenders. The system alerts administrators and police department of potential safety concerns. A review of the Harris County Sex Offenders registry reveals that the area is populated by numerous offenders; therefore safety is a major priority for the campus staff.

The students entered the building through the cafeteria doors where they were received by school personnel including the principal. In many instances, the principal interacted with students to remind them of the campus rules which include the use of uniforms and clear backpacks. Monitors were evident in all areas of the campus and they also interacted with students by providing corrective feedback or greeting them to the campus. In one instance, as a teacher gathers her students to direct them to the classroom, the instructional coordinator suggests he reviews the students' expectation regarding uniforms. She then extends the conversation with the student by stating, "We are special; we set ourselves apart." Pride and optimism are major themes observed through the interaction with students.

The parents dropped off their children and are directed through the waiting line clearly marked by cones. The instructional coordinator explained the process of dropping off and picking up the students and the process posed challenges since many times the parents refuse to follow the rules. The presence of the administrators in the area facilitated the safe and orderly traffic flow.

Learning begins immediately at arrival since there is a strong emphasis on access to reading. Students from kindergarten to second grade waited in the multipurpose room and were provided with leveled readers. I approached many students and noticed they

were actively engaged in the reading. The books were arranged by Lexile scores, a measure that identifies each student's reading level. After the administration of Stanford and *Aprenda* scores, a list is provided listing the student's Lexile score. Teachers have access to these scores through a database system (Chancery) available to staff members. The students were able to select books at the level suggested by their score and progressively advance to higher levels as they engage in sustained reading experiences. The upper grade students arrive to the cafeteria where they were also provided with leveled readers. Access to computers was available in the Reading Café, an area in the cafeteria where students were provided with assessments to determine the next reading level. The campus uses the Scholastic *Reading Counts* software designed to measure reading readiness. The principal clarified that reading is a concern consistently evidenced by data. Since the campus serves a large population of limited English proficient students, they are constantly challenged by the struggles of learning a second language.

School A: Principal Profile

Principal A has a led the campus for two years. However, previous to becoming the principal, she served as the instructional coordinator. She earned a bachelor's degree in education from Texas A & M University and a master's degree in educational administration from Sam Houston University. Due to the enrollment of the campus, they were unable to hire an assistant principal; therefore, in addition to her duties, the instructional coordinator performed the duties of both the assistant principal and instructional coordinator. She has seen the transformation of the campus and has been involved in the process that led the campus to become a high-performing campus.

Principal A has also served as an LPAC chairperson, grade level chair, mentor, and lead mentor for the campus. She has a total of 11 years of experience in the education field.

The principal of School A can be described as a goal oriented leader. She is focused on the work ahead of her and acknowledges the challenges of serving students from a low socioeconomic urban school. She has no tolerance for excuses when it comes to the students she serves. She affirmed that:

> There is no excuse, these children can learn just as well as their counterparts in the higher economic schools." To her having low expectations is a barrier to learning because as she stated "we were handicapping them because of the area they were in and because" *los pobrecitos* they don't have the materials, they don't have the home support and so we are enabling students not to learn."

She is truly convinced that all students can learn regardless of their circumstances and, unrelentlessly, her mission is to make sure all students are "college ready."

The focus and standards for operating procedures is reflected in the school's mission: "The mission of School A Elementary is to ensure that every student reaches their highest potential both academically and socially in a safe environment. Our vision as a professional community is that by addressing students to monitor progress and providing rigorous and challenging interventions, we can ensure that all students receive a quality education thus empowering them to strive for a higher education. We value that every child is entitled to an excellent education that not only meets their needs but prepares them for the future that includes college and career." The vision and mission is

posted throughout the classrooms and halls. It remains visible in all areas of the campus

for all members of the community to internalize.

School A: Student Profile

The campus was built in 1992 in response to the increase in student enrollment in

two adjacent campuses. The enrollment has decreased during the last two years since

charter schools have developed in the neighborhood and have used marketing strategies

to attract students from campus A. The School Improvement Plan indicates that the

campus serves 550 inner city children. According to a review of the Academic

Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) the campus had 542 students enrolled.

School A provides instruction to students from pre-kindergarten to fifth grade. In

addition, it serves students in the Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities

(PPCD). The instructional structure of the campus is composed of Regular Instruction,

Gifted and Talented, Special Education, and Bilingual Education. The information

shown in the following tables was accessed from the 2010 Texas Education Agency

Academic Excellence Indicator System report. Table 4.1 displays the student enrollment

by grade level, Table 4.2 displays students ethnic distribution, Table 3 provides student

descriptive data, Table 4.3 displays student descriptive data for 2010 and Table 4.4

displays student's enrollment by program.

Table 4.1: Student Enrollment by Grade Level in School A

Grade Level	Number of Students
Early Childhood	2
Pre Kindergarten	77
Kindergarten	84
First	87
Second	77
Third	74
Fourth	74
Fifth	67
Total	542

Table 4.2: Ethnic Distribution in School A

Ethnicity	Count	Percent
African American	8	1.50%
Hispanic	529	97.60%
White	3	0.60%
Native American	0	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	0.40%

Table 4.3: Student Descriptive Data in School A

Description	Count	Percent
Economically Disadvantaged	521	96.10%
Limited English Proficient	283	52%
At Risk	376	69.4
Mobility Rate	59	13.1

Table 4.4: Student Enrollment by Program in School A

Program	Count	Percent
Bilingual/ESL	262	48.30%
Gifted and Talented	69	12.70%
Special Education	30	5.50%

School A: Staff Profile

The 2010-2011 School Improvement Plan reports that the campus' professional staff is composed of one principal, one instructional coordinator, one literacy coach, one math coach, and 32 teachers. Data used for the following tables were acquired from the

Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report and then compared to the School

Improvement Plan. Table 4.5 shows teachers by ethnicity, Table 4.6 show teachers by

gender, and Table 4.7 indicates teachers by years of experience.

Table 4.5: Teachers by Ethnicity in School A

Ethnicity	Count	Percent
African American	0	0.00%
Hispanic	18.5	56.10%
White	14.5	43.90%
Native American	0	0.00%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0.00%

Table 4.6: Teachers by Gender in School A

Gender	Count	Percent
Female	24	72.70%
Male	9	27.30%

Table 4.7: Teachers' Years of Experience in School A

Beginning Teacher	6	18.20%	
1-5 Years	16.5	50%	
6-10 years	6.5	19.70%	
11-20 years	2	6.10%	
over 20 years	2	6.10%	
Average Experience			5 years

The campus TAKS data for the past five school years is reported in Table 4.8. An

increase in student performance is evident in Reading, Math, Writing, and Science scores.

A slight decrease in Reading is noted in 2010; however, the campus received an

exception from the state allowing the campus to retain their Exemplary status. The data

reported in this table were accessed through the TEA Campus Report Card and

corroborated by the AEIS report.

Table 4.8: Accountability TAKS Scores 2006-2010 in School A

Subject	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Reading/LA	76%	75%	86%	96%	88%
Math	69%	83%	88%	94%	94%
Writing	88%	78%	87%	98%	98%
Science	46%	70%	94%	94%	95%

School A: Research Question One

How did the principal implement research-based leadership responsibilities that led to the pursuit of high academic achievement for all students?

The principal engaged in a series of behaviors, leading the campus to high-performing status. These behaviors provided the foundation to initiate the subsequent changes the campus needed to reach high-performing levels. The principal challenged the status quo by communicating the brutal facts denounced by data. She also communicated ideals and beliefs and adopted a strong leadership style that adapted to the situational nature of leading change. The data collected to answer Research Question One was gathered from interviews, document analysis, field notes, and observations.

Challenged the status quo

In his book, *Good to Great,* Jim Collins (2001) articulates how businesses that are confronted with brutal facts are stronger, resilient, and find ways to prevail. In the early stages of the change process the principal found resistance to change due, in part, to low expectations. She stated that the teachers were "consistently giving pushback and you would always get the 'well they can't do it,' you know you are expecting too much." Also parents were resistant to changes because the focus shifted from a festive environment to a teaching and learning environment. Every month the campus held a festival or dance performance and the parents supported these activities. As part of the

change process, these activities were minimized to protect instructional time. Trust was an issue because the parents perceived the changes as an attempt to remove them from the campus. Initially the parents resisted, but later on adapted to the changes when they realized their students were being successful at the academic level. The principal recalled:

> The parents were a barrier because they were so used to having a school dance once a month, coming in and out at will, so when the shift changed to where it's no longer about having all those activities, but we now have to focus on the academic activities. . . then we'll start bringing the activities [back]. They became a barrier where it was: Why are you taking all the fun stuff away? Why are you keeping us out of the school? What do you have to hide? So it was really sitting down and having parent meetings and telling them this is what we are doing, this is why we are doing it. Look at your students. This is where they are at; this is where they can be. We are just like other schools in the neighborhood, and they are being successful. So they [parents] became a barrier, but once they understood, once they saw after the 1st year's gains, what their students had received then they backed up in fact, they became more our cheer leaders and so they were helping us a lot. Other parents that became disgruntled or new parents that came to our school that compared us and said we were not like the other schools they came from. We would have those conversations. Listen, it's different here, but your child will learn.

Communicated ideals and beliefs

The principal not only confronted all stakeholders with the "brutal facts," but she constantly communicated and assured them that their students would learn. A sense of urgency was included in the communication while always supported by data. She also communicated high expectations in written communications and in collaborative meetings.

The campus was rated Exemplary; however, new data provided by the school district revealed that many students were not reading on grade level. For instance 58% of first grade, 72% of second grade, 71% of third grade, 79% of fourth grade, and 82% of fifth grade students are currently not reading on grade level according to a report generated after the administration of the Stanford test. The conversations shifted again and questions began to surface. A teacher reflects on this process as he stated,

> This year, especially, we have been reexamining what it means to be exemplary. While we have 90% of students successful—passing the TAKS--why are our Stanford scores so low? Why can't we compete well when compared to other Texan students? How are we doing nationally? I guess we are readdressing what it means to be exemplary. Once you have gotten to the mountaintop, you ask, 'Are we really that great?' So, I think that reflection is healthy. You don't want to get complacent, it does kind of push you to really…you get so consumed with these labels….so we're addressing what it means to be exemplary. That helps us stay focused, away from getting the label. Oh, 90% of your kids are passing, but they are just passing, basically…so yeah.

Employed Strong Principal Leadership

In the initial stages of change, the principal felt the need to be a strong leader who guided and established a plan. Her leadership team consisted of the instructional coordinators and a Math and Literacy coach. At her arrival at the campus, the teachers were set in their own ways had low expectations due to their perceptions regarding low socioeconomic neighborhoods. The teachers initially did not think the data was a reflection of their teaching. Many conversations took place where the principal consistently communicated a high expectation, no excuse belief. The process included documentation of personnel who refused to do what she understood was right for children. The instructional coordinator reflected on the change process and recognized that many teachers served as barriers; however, she confirms that the principal understood that all teachers were not on board and personnel changes were necessary. She recalls that in order to become a high-performing school, it included:

> Moving people around and getting rid of people. If you don't have great teachers in every classroom, what progress are you going to make? So I know there's probably a lot of people that were here when the previous principal first came and then most of them are gone. I think within a couple of years most people left that weren't exactly fitting with the vision of the school. A couple have left in the last year that no one is crying tears over.

Conversations regarding hiring processes took place among the leadership team. In order to attain their goals, they hired Teach for America teachers predominantly. They understood that most of these teachers stay in the education system for only two years,

but the strategy was worth trying. To implement and sustain change the principal believed that effective teachers could make the difference and would bring an innovative group of teachers to invigorate the campus. The principal's perception was best described by a teacher. He stated:

> I think that the type of people that were being hired really lent itself to our success. I think that is a big managerial action, having sat in on interviews now, this past summer, I think hiring is always a difficult task, especially in the teaching profession; it's incredibly difficult. There are people who are fantastic interviewers, but you really don't know how things are going to pan out. You know what I mean? I would say that our success rate is pretty high, so I think the type of people that were being hired and whether that is skill or luck, probably a bit of both, but I think that is an action that has contributed to our success. Identifying those people that have that spark and are willing to do what it takes, they might not have all the content knowledge now or yet, but they have that kind of intangible quality that tends to move students regardless of the fact that they have never done this before or have been, what some people would call, adequately trained to do it actually. So, I would say that is one big contributing factor.

Principal A admits that at the initial stages she did not include teachers or other staff in the decision making process because she felt they did not have the same vision as the new administration. She describes herself as very strict and driven by goals. In addition, the challenges of being a new principal reduced her time significantly.

However, over time, systems were put in place and then communication included staff input; finally, she distributed leadership responsibilities through her instructional coordinators, coaches, and grade level chairpersons. She adapts leadership styles to meet the needs of specific situations. As she reflected on the previously stated one-way communication process, she said:

> I really sat down and thought about it and said I really can't do it all one my own and I shouldn't do it on my own. So I do have an instructional coordinator, I still have a math coach and a literacy coach, they are part of my administrative team so when we are talking about programs that we are doing or teachers that are struggling or doing amazing things that's handled there. I've also included the grade level chairs and told them they are part of the leadership team."

The current collaborative structure has increased trust among the staff, and even though the principal recognizes she still has not found a way to get everyone on board, she notices they are "getting there—it's baby steps." She now reflects and understands that she can establish a balance between being directive and nondirective.

Executed Situational Awareness

The principal created awareness for the urgency to act on the current state of the school. Using other models such as neighborhood schools similar to School A, she supported the belief that School A Elementary would also provide a quality education with a college bound focus. The adoption of the PLC model supported the principal's belief that low socioeconomic students could perform just as well as their counterparts "on the other side."

School A Elementary was losing enrollment to Kipp and Yes Academy. These competitive schools offer after school programs that meet the needs of working parents and also the needs of students. Extended time was offered and this provided a safe haven for students with working parents. An analysis of the AEIS report revealed that in 2006 the campus enrollment was 599 students. The campus enrollment is currently 542. The concern was evident in all the interviews conducted. In response to the declining enrollment, the principal initiated what has been described as a re-branding process. The teacher leader stated:

> The principal was very good at rebranding the school. If you walk into a sad building, you know you have walked into a sad building—one that is just downtrodden—and those little things, I guess, not to say that they are the reason for success, but they definitely contribute to it. It's part of that culture. You have to build a culture where your students are happy to be here and your teachers need to be glad they are a part of this, you know what I mean? I think part of ...it is the little stuff. Making the school look better, improving the facilities…I mean we are...with technology at this school, we do not go without. We have more SMART Boards than we know what to do with; we have all of these things in place. We had our logo changed, murals in the multi-purpose room, she really moved to a college-oriented, college-bound culture…my wife's school has done it and they are finding success with it as well. You have to take those steps to reinvigorate the school, especially in Houston, in any place where there is a market where a parent can say my child doesn't have to come to your school, you have to make

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yourself attractive to the community. For whatever you can say about charter

schools, they do an excellent job of branding themselves and you can see HISD

scramble behind them to try and make up the gaps.

School A is responding by using marketing strategies such as brochures and

advertisements in local businesses. Every year they send post cards to the homes in the

community to lure students to the campus.

School A: Research Question Two

How did the principals implement a school wide improvement framework that has

resulted in sustained academic achievement growth for all students?

The data show the principal implemented a school wide model that has resulted in

sustained academic achievement growth for all students. This model provided the

systematic process needed by the school staff to ensure student learning. This process

included sustaining a culture of collaboration, a focus on learning, and data driven

decision making. The data collected to answer Research Question Two was gathered

from interviews, document analysis, follow-up contact notes, collegial meeting protocols,

field notes, and observations.

Culture of Collaboration

The data reveal the phrase Professional Learning Community (PLC) was

continuously mentioned. The principal indicated that indeed at the initial stages of her

leadership, the leadership team attended a PLC conference that led them to initiate

change following the PLC framework. In order to do so the campus established a clear

mission and vision, shared common goals and commitments, developed frequent common assessments, and collaboration practices.

The consistency in the implementation is evident in conversations, school environment, and meeting protocols. Working in isolation is no longer acceptable since the principal ensures communication in ongoing weekly meetings. She has created an organizational structure that allows all teams to meet at a designated time and the leadership is actively engaged in the process. She said:

> We discussed what our expectations were. We look at data and when we look at data the questions are: What is going on? What is student A, Student B, and Student C? Why is this one progressing? Why is this one not? And it was also us more as facilitators. Look at this teacher, if you did awesome on this objective. What did you do? How can you help your counterparts who didn't do so well? So it was especially building that trust with them, coming in, getting them a set time, and set expectation as to what is going to occur in that PLC and then building trust with them. It's ok to say "I don't know how to teach this objective, does anyone have any idea, and opening yourself up to accepting ideas, accepting constructive feedback, so it was a process, but once you got that trust, it kind of started moving along.

Teamwork is a major component of the school-wide framework. Teachers were provided structures to facilitate the conversation. A protocol guides the discussion that includes the following questions:

1. What are students learning?

2. How do you know they learned?

3. What will you do with those who did not master the concepts?

4. What will you do with those who mastered?

A common language is observed through the data gathering period of this study. Phrases such as common assessments, collaboration, assessment, accountable, interventions, and extended time appear frequently in the school's conversations, environment, and documents. The school improvement plan is also evidence of a PLC school-wide structure since it includes vision statement, mission, smart goals, and a path to collaboration and decision making. Constantly reflecting on student academic achievement and seeking support from colleagues is evidenced through meeting observations.

Focus on Learning

The focus of the principal is learning and to ensure this happens, the PLC meeting includes a great deal of data discussions, prescriptive intervention, and ensuring extended time. Based on data, the PLC team determines what interventions will take place. The current year posed challenges with the budget, but that did not detract them from providing extended time. At the initial stages the campus provided tutorials after school and on Saturdays; however, budget shortfalls prevented them for paying teachers, so they could no longer support an extended day tutorials program. To respond to this challenge they developed the "Power Hour." During instructional time, all resources are allocated to providing differentiated instruction to students. The Math Coach believes that identifying needs and providing support is a strength they posses. He further explained

that "there is no hesitation to do whatever it takes." He also emphasized that one of the strengths of his campus was what he describes as "triage." He elaborated that "we are very good at identifying where the wound is and patching the wound and getting there."

Challenges such as transitioning English Language Learners (ELL) into English assessments generated substantial debates and dilemmas among the collaborative teams. In retrospect, the principal reflects upon the concerns of dealing with high ELL populations. Her conversation suggested that lower grades may need more support and not necessarily the grade the student initially transitions into English. In support of this belief the Math Coach stated that:

I imagine any high ELL population school, fourth grade, or if it is fifth grade, transition year is always incredibly difficult. We continued to struggle with that, even now, because I think that, that has always been a challenge, we try not to adjust the challenge by horning all the resources into 4th grade, but realizing to ease that transition from 3rd to 4th, then the resources really need to be poured on much lower in the primary grades.

Data driven.

A data driven culture is observed in School A and it influences all decisions and guides discussions on student progress. The school district provides substantial data reports that are being dissected to identify trends and eventually lead to decision making. In addition, common assessments and benchmarks are closely monitored to ensure alignment with the curriculum without losing sight of district and state assessments such as Stanford and Aprenda. Especially know that the district has engaged in Value Added

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reports to determine high-performing campuses based on comparisons with other schools. These reports are used to determine performance pay for teachers, staff, and leadership.

The School Improvement Plan (SIP) includes the previous year's trends in data and serves as a foundation to determine the school-wide plan. Specifically it states that

Students will be administered formative and diagnostic assessments at the beginning of the school year and will continue throughout the school year for grades Pre-kinder to fifth grade. Each PLC has established a plan of common assessments on taught objectives as well as incorporated, the state and district mandated assessments to plan and deliver instructional accordingly. (p.2)

A closer review of the SIP includes a need assessment and inquiry process. Specifically, the inquiry process is a reflection of successes and also used to identify areas for improvement. The SIP confirms that the campus improvement design and planning process are embedded in the PLC model.

School A: Research Question Three

How did the principals implement the identified strategies that ensured high academic achievement among all student populations?

The data show the principal put into practice strategies that ensured high academic achievement among all student populations. These strategies were implemented as a systematic process that ensured academic achievement through a well articulated curriculum alignment. In addition, frequent assessments and benchmarks were employed to monitor student progress in a timely manner. The data collected to answer

research question three was gathered from interviews, document reviews, collegial meeting protocols, field notes, and observations.

Research based learning.

An examination of documents and observations reveals that there is an expectation for all teachers to use research based strategies and to use models that encourage high levels of learning. For instance, an *ESL Focused Walk Thru* form includes a criteria that states "Higher order thinking skills are presented during the lesson (Blooms)." In addition research based strategies for ESL learners is present on the form as well. These are: active learning, context imbedded lessons (visuals clues, gestures, and expressions), wait time, and Total Physical Response. In addition, a workshop provided by the school's Bilingual Coordinator also communicates the expectation that research proven strategies are necessary to increase the success rate of English Language Learners (ELL).

The implementation of a Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) is also evident on the campus. An effort to support struggling learners has prompted the campus to develop a committee that would support students learning by recommending research based practice that will increase the likelihood of student's academic achievement. The committee follows the Response to Intervention (RTI) model that implements a series of interventions beginning with whole group, small group, and ultimately individualized learning interventions.

An area that concerns the campus leadership team is the lack of vocabulary development among students. Professional development agendas support the belief that

the campus in increasing their teaching capacity to support this weakness among students. Specifically since the campus is mostly composed of ELL learners the challenges are evident through the participant interviews. The SIP included the development of vocabulary as a weakness that needs to be addressed. In addition, the *Reading Counts* program has been implemented to address not only reading motivation and comprehension skills, but to enhance vocabulary development through reading.

Curriculum Alignment.

It appears that the campus leadership team had a clear understanding regarding their responsibility to lead the teaching staff to ensure the written curriculum was aligned with state, district, and classroom assessments. Lesson delivery was carefully crafted and took into consideration specific student needs. An observation of a PLC meeting revealed that the discussions led the teams to focus on the data generated during the current week. The data was thoroughly discussed and posted on data walls by all members of the team. In the words of the principal, the teams really analyze the data generated by students and "tear it apart" to align instruction. Following the discussion on data, a series of suggestions for the implementation of effective strategies was shared by team members in order to design lesson plans. The team leader ensured that the objectives included a balance among the written curriculum and the tested curriculum. Students who were not mastering were the focus of conversations and led to the implementation of intervention strategies to meet student needs.

School B: Physical Location and Description

School B Elementary is located in the southeast area of a large urban district in Texas. The surrounding neighborhood is made up of small single family homes, apartments, and small businesses such gas stations and convenience stores. The neighborhood surrounding School B has a population of 11,112 and, of that, 71.5% is African American, 17.5% is Hispanic, and 17.4% is White. The median age in the adjacent neighborhood is 34.6 and the average household income is $35,384. Approximately twelve percent of the families and individuals are living below the poverty line (http://www.brainyzip.com). The educational background of the residents in this community reflects that 69.9% have a high school diploma and 11.9% have a college degree. This is significantly lower than the national average of 80% for high school graduates and 24.4% for bachelor's degree.

Initial impressions

Elementary School B serves a population of 300 students and is considered a small campus. The student population lives in close proximity, and in the morning they arrive on campus by walking. Some students are dropped off by their parents. When visitors arrive they are required to enter the office and sign in. A visitor's pass is provided to allow access to the building. It was noticed that students waited for their teachers in the hall while adults monitored. As the teachers arrive, the students walk into the classroom and breakfast is served in the classroom. The school district has focused attention on the importance of ensuring students eat a well-balanced breakfast since it appears to have a positive effect on student academic achievement. The program, however, poses

challenges associated with the use of instructional time. The principal indicated since it is a non-negotiable mandate, they "make it work." The staff is friendly and courteous. They are also curious about the researcher's presence, and they approach her to see if she needed help.

Extensive student work and inspirational messages were observed reflecting the vision of the campus. Some of the phrases were:

- "212 Turn up the Heat"
- "Great School, Great Staff, Great Students!"
- "Committed to Excellence"
- "Look in the mirror and you will see someone who can be whatever they want to be"
- "Dream, Believe, Achieve"
- "Prepare for hands-on learning"
- "Your attitude affects the outcome"

Safety and awareness procedures were posted in several areas of the campus and these were posted to ensure student understanding of safety and awareness. Students knew how to proceed and the staff was present monitoring and ensuring instruction began promptly.

School B: Principal Profile

The principal of School B has worked in education for 36 years in different capacities as a teacher, assistant principal, counselor, and principal. In 1975, she obtained a bachelor's degree in education from North Texas University. In 1985, Principal B pursued a master's degree in Guidance and Counseling from Texas Southern University.

Her desire to continue to serve children in different capacities led her to pursue a doctorate degree from Texas Southern University in 1997. She has served at the elementary and middle school levels in the same district. Her professional experiences include teaching elementary grade levels for eleven years, counselor for nine years, assistant principal for eight years, and principal for eight years at the current campus.

When Principal B accepted the current position she was told that the campus was a "great little campus" with a "hard working staff." However, after a short period of time, she noticed the staff was resentful and she was not welcome. Principal B began monitoring instruction and discovered a series of teacher behaviors that were not in agreement with her vision. A lack of planning and curriculum alignment was evident as she attempted to observe classrooms and request lesson plans. Open hostility and distrust describes the attitude of teachers who previously were accustomed to working in isolation and doing what they pleased. She said:

> It's very difficult to be met like that as a new principal and you're just met with hostility, open hostility like that. They had been accustomed to doing basically what they wanted to do. They could come and go when they wanted; they could leave in the middle of the day. It was like a banana that was real pretty on the outside, but when you peeled it back it was rotten on the inside and I just wasn't accustomed to that, I had never seen anything like that. So it was bad, it was bad, and if you can believe it, it got worse.

School B: Student Profile

School B provides instruction to students in grades pre-kindergarten to Fifth grade. The instructional structure of the campus is composed of regular instruction, Gifted and Talented, Special Education, and English as a Second Language (ESL). The information shown in the following tables was accessed in the 2010 Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System report. Table 4.9 displays the student enrollment by grade level, Table 4.10 displays students' ethnic distribution, Table 4.11 provides descriptive data, and Table 4.12 displays student enrollment by program for 2010.

Table 4.9: Student Enrollment by Grade Level in School B

Grade Level	Count
Pre-Kindergarten	46
Kindergarten	39
First	49
Second	47
Third	43
Fourth	46
Fifth	30
Total	300

Table 4.10: Ethnic Distribution of Students in School B

Ethnicity	Count	Percent
African American	267	89.00%
Hispanic	31	10.30%
White	2	0.70%
Native American	0	
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	

Table 4.11: Student Descriptive Data in School B

Description	Count	Percent
Economically Disadvantaged	275	91.70%
Limited English Proficient	21	7%
At Risk	135	45%
Mobility Rate	68	25.50%

Table 4.12: Student Enrollment by Program in School B

Program	Count	Percent
ESL	21	7.00%
Gifted and Talented	17	5.70%
Special Education	9	3.00%

School B: Teacher Profiles

The 2010-2011 School Improvement Plan reports that the campus professional staff is composed of one principal, one instructional coordinator shared with another campus, one literacy coach, and 19 teachers. The data used for the following tables were acquired from the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report and compared to the School Improvement Plan. Table 4.13 shows teachers by ethnicity, Table 4.14 shows teachers by gender and Table 4.15 indicate teachers' years of experience.

Table 4.13: Teachers by Ethnicity in School B

Ethnicity	Count	Percent
African American	19	100.00%
Hispanic	0	
White	0	
Native American	0	
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	

Table 4.14: Teachers by Gender in School B

Female	18	94.70%
Male	1	5.30%

Table 4.15: Teachers' Years of Experience in School B

Experience	Count	Percentage
Beginning Teacher	0	
1-5 Years	5	26%
6-10 years	4	21.10%
11-20 years	4	21.00%
over 20 years	6	31.60%
Average Experience		15.20%

The campus TAKS data for the past five school years is reported in Table 4.16. An increase in student performance is evident in Reading, Math, Writing, and Science scores. A decrease in Writing is noted in 2010; however, the campus received an exception from the state allowing the campus to retain their Exemplary status. The data reported in this table was accessed through the TEA Campus Report Card and corroborated by the AEIS report.

Table 4.16: Accountability TAKS Scores 2006-2010 in School B

Subject	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Reading/LA	64%	71%	72%	95%	93%
Math	65%	66%	72%	97%	94%
Writing	84%	82%	72%	94%	83%
Science	56%	77%	66%	92%	96%

School B: Research Question One

How did the principal implement the research-based leadership responsibilities that led to the pursuit of high academic achievement for all students?

The data show the principal led the campus to high-performing status by implementing a series of leadership behaviors that provided the foundation to initiate the subsequent changes the campus needed to reach high-performing levels. The principal challenged the status quo and communicated ideals and beliefs by enforcing operating

procedures. The data collected to answer Research Question One was gathered from interviews, document analysis, artifacts, field notes, and observations.

Challenged the status quo.

Holding people accountable and documenting teachers became part of the process of becoming a high-performing school. The teachers had become a barrier to achieve high-performing academic levels and the principal made sure they were on board. She confronted the teachers with data, held conferences with teachers regarding expectations for teaching and learning, and documented those who failed to comply. Her communication style was firm, but she used metaphors and symbols to engage teacher's attention and change their behaviors. The communication with the staff was clearly an expression of high expectation since these were non-negotiable expectations. She stated that "I want you to know it is not personal; it's just business. The children in this neighborhood cannot stand a mediocre teacher, and a lot of you are mediocre. They need somebody who's going to go above and beyond every day. It is not personal; it's business."

After setting the standard operating procedures and consistently communicating these, the conversations turned gears towards academic achievement. She recruited the support of the Executive Principal (supervisor) and regional instructional coordinators to address the academic aspect of the change process. She felt their support was instrumental to the changes the campus experienced. Specifically, she acknowledged that the Executive Principal played an instrumental role in the strengthening of instructional decision making and planning processes. Together they would monitor instruction,

provide guidance: positive and corrective feedback. "Failure was not an option" since they were on a journey to save their campus. School B's reputation quickly got the attention of the community, and they lost a significant number of students. Principal B recalls how they had to reach out to the community to lure students into the campus. The principal stated:

> Things started to improve, [and] so did our image in the community. Because school B had gone down so badly, there was a bad relationship with the community. We had kids living right down the street who attended other schools because those parents did not want to send their kids to school B. On the other hand, we had kids from other schools attending school B because we were becoming better. Enrollment was declining so I had to recruit, but what could I say with the scores so poor. I went to around recruiting at churches, community centers, and even had a tea for our older community members. We had to build a better relationship with them; we are still working on that. It is improving, but we are still working on it.

The principal and staff continue to work on the image of the campus in the community since the neighbor schools pose significant competition. A review of the School Improvement Plan and SDMC agendas show how the campus engages in activities such as parades and academic competitions, and also invites community members to participate in programs. The campus vision includes the community component when it states that part of the vision is to "foster a sense of collaboration and cooperation between students, staff, parents, and the community."

Communicated ideals and beliefs.

At her arrival as a principal she noticed a series of teacher behaviors that were not conducive to learning and placed students' safety at risk. A teacher recalls that "one of the challenges our principal had to address was between the staff." It appears that the previous administration did not hold teachers accountable for the work they were hired to perform. She describes the initial condition of the campus as following:

> I noticed that teachers were pretty much doing what they wanted to and when I tried to stop some of it there was a lot of opposition. Teachers were accustomed to coming in late. I would come in during the morning and these classrooms would be open no teacher in there but students in there so I was like, 'where is everybody?". I found out that almost everybody had a master key, so whoever had the master key, they would open the door, the kids would go in so they wouldn't be in the hallway, but there was nobody there to supervise them.

In response to the unethical teacher behavior and lack of procedures she began to set expectations and establish rules and procedures. A review of the teacher handbook evidenced clear procedures that included monitoring of students, responsibilities, and topics such as discipline management. The handbook also included a series of memos that clearly aligned teacher behaviors and consequences for failure to comply followed by policy supporting teacher duties. Safety was at the top priority because students were not being supervised and student behavior problems were a concern. Monitoring systems were put in place to ensure staff's compliance and focused conversations were common

to address those who refused to change their current practice. She was constantly grieved by the teachers' open opposition and hostility was evident. She recalls:

> One lady filed grievances on me four times in April, and she's still here, but she has changed. The union had a lot to do with it because they target new principals looking for sensational stories. October is sweeps month, so we got a big story here during sweeps month and we got another big one during TAKS time, same teacher, same union lady, different topics. The only time I've been on TV has been that same teacher. It's pretty hard.

She also stated that,

> Yes, I had to start documenting. When I did start putting it in a memo, that's when they started grieving me a lot. The executive principal would come sit with me during those grievances until they finally stopped. I haven't had a grievance now for about 3 years.

Her leadership style changed and she became more assertive and direct in her communication. A teacher stated that the managerial actions she implemented made a difference in the school's ability to transform into a high-performing campus. She said that the principal "became more firm and she let us know what direction she wanted to take the school and helped us understand what we needed to do to get there."

Since the students' behaviors were a concern, she expanded the behavior management campus plan to a consistent school-wide program. The program engaged the teachers in rigorous training sessions including coaches to support their learning.

Principal A indicated that the behavior was so out of control teachers knew only to address it by yelling at students. She stated:

> By the way, discipline was just really a challenge because the children were not accustomed to responding at all until you screamed at them. Everybody was screaming; even I was screaming, stop doing that! Stop doing that! On the third time, they would stop; but it was screaming, just screaming, just loud screaming. The way staff talked to the children was just horrible. Well this is the way you have to talk to these children. I said something has to give; I can't go around screaming like that all the time.

After extensive professional development on classroom management, changes began to emerge and the discipline became more manageable. A teacher stated, "Our first issue was discipline. She brought in professional development on classroom management and poverty."

School B: Research Question Two

How did the principal implement a school-wide improvement framework that has resulted in sustained academic achievement growth for all students?

The data show the principal implemented a school wide framework that has resulted in sustained academic achievement growth for all students. This framework provided the systematic process needed by the school staff to ensure student learning. This process included the use of data to inform instruction, establishing a culture of collaboration, and a focus on learning. The data collected to answer Research Question

Two were gathered from interviews, document analysis, follow-up contact notes, collegial meeting protocols, field notes, and observations.

Culture of collaboration.

Collaboration was non-existent at Elementary School B, teachers locked themselves in the classroom and did not engage in student learning talks or planning sessions. In her search for guidance she discussed the analogy stated in the book, *Whatever it Takes* (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, and Karkanek (1994) regarding Apollo 13 (1995) movie. She asked the teachers to recall how the men and women responded to the crisis of a crippled spacecraft that put the lives of astronauts at risk in space. In her recollection, she reminded them that oxygen was depleting, resources were scarce, and basically there was no procedure in the book that could give clear directions. In response to the emergency, the leader calls the NASA team and recommits them to the purpose of NASA: sending men and women into space and returning safely. He told them "Failure was not an Option" and then called upon them to build collective intelligence to solve the crisis. Principal B "hooked them" them with the analogy and used it to begin building the foundation of Elementary School B framework to become a high-performing campus.

The PLC framework supports collegial conversations where teachers share best practices. This was an issue for School B because the teachers had become accustomed to working in isolation. One of the teachers reflects on the initial condition of the campus by stating:

I believe that some of the teachers were not working together as a team. The students didn't understand the mission that we were trying to accomplish, not just

exemplary rating but for them to learn and grow as students. So basically it was some type of disconnect that was present before the change.

In response to the challenges posed by the teaching staff, continuous conversations regarding student progress became the norm. A planning process guided the conversations and included a written protocol to document collective decisions. A review of this protocol included team names, meeting date, team goals, team members present and absent, meetings outcomes, questions, concerns and participant signatures. The principal facilitated these meetings by scheduling additional time to meet and collaborate.

Focus on learning.

The understanding that excuses were no longer acceptable set the expectation for learning. If the purpose of school is to ensure student learning, Principal B felt the need to facilitate a framework where the process was consistent and supported learning with best practices. Weekly PLC meetings were scheduled for all grade level teams to focus on learning. Carefully developed lessons ensured students were engaged in meaningful lessons that promoted rigor and relevance as well as differentiation of instruction. Frequent monitoring from the administrative team followed a common protocol. This protocol included searching for evidence of lessons plans aligned to the curriculum and differentiation of instruction for English Language Learners (ELL). Specifically, teachers at School B are required to implement English Language Proficiency Standards ELPS. These standards provide a framework for teaching English Language Learners. The campus has an ELL population of approximately 21 students. This presents challenges

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for students' academic progress because these students are in an English as a Second Language classroom environment where the teacher is ESL certified, but does not speak the students' native language. ESL teachers have been trained to use strategies such as total physical response, small group instruction, extended time, and reading strategies such as chunking, context clues, and others. A list of modifications is included in the teacher's lesson plan to ensure the practices are being consistently implemented.

Data driven decision making.

After carefully assessing the needs of the students and teaching staff; the principal engaged the campus community in the essential elements of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) advocated by Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, and Karkanek (2004). These educators told the stories of educators who transformed failing campuses into high-performing campuses and their expertise and guidance were being promoted by the school district. The powerful voices of these educators could not be ignored and she saw that how the principles of PLC could significantly increase collaboration and focus on learning; something she knew her campus desperately needed.   The initial stages included professional development to establish the framework components and protocols. A series of conversations led to the identification of non-negotiable behaviors and acceptable teaching practice. These non-negotiable behaviors included collegial relationships, collaboration and sharing of best practice, frequent assessments and generating data to guide decisions regarding instructional interventions.

The teachers at Campus B engage in frequent common assessments and data talks. The students' data are displayed in the data room where the teachers conduct their

PLC meeting. The data is analyzed to identify weakness and strengths and teachers have an opportunity to share best practices and provide suggestions on how to ensure student learning for all students. A teacher stated: "The main thing was also the children were not on level and needed extra help, so she brought in more resources. We had pull outs, after school tutorials, and Saturday tutorials. We worked hard to get them to the status we are now." Based on the data generated by frequent assessments, students were provided assistance during and after class. A review of attendance records kept by the instructional coordinator reveals that extended time instruction has become the norm where approximately 75 students stay after school and 62 attend Saturday classes.

During a follow-up conversation with the principal she shared that recently data has become a sensitive topic for teachers since the current districts administration appears to support a teacher appraisal system where data is used to evaluate teachers. The campus data is visible to the district and they are currently being challenged and questioned by the data. The school district has created a series of continuous interim assessments and this is currently creating some challenges she hopes to overcome. Once again continuous changes challenge the status quo and the issue of trust has resurfaced again.

School B: Research Question Three

How did the principal implement the identified strategies that ensured high academic achievement among all student populations?

The data show the principal identified strategies and/or practices that ensured high academic achievement among all student populations. These strategies or practices supported the ideals and beliefs that resulted in learning opportunities for all students.

These strategies or practices were research based learning and curriculum alignment. The data collected to answer Research Question Three was gathered from interviews, document reviews, follow-up contact notes, collegial meeting protocols, field notes, and observations.

Research based learning.

Building teacher capacity was an urgent need at School B. Part of the initial professional development included an awareness of which research based practice would ensure student success. In addition to promoting a PLC model for school improvement, the principal led extensive experiences that exposed the teachers to effective teaching practice through the implementation of effective lesson delivery. The components for lesson planning included anticipatory set, objective and purpose, input, modeling, checking for understanding, guided practice, and independent practice. Her monitoring protocol forms include these components and constant feedback is given to teachers to improve their teaching practice. The students were expected to engage in activities that required identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, homework and practice, cooperative learning, non linguistic representations, generating and testing hypotheses, and advance organizers. These strategies were supported by research findings included in the work of Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001). A walk through the classrooms reveals that the teachers have posters stating the strategies and the lesson plans to show the implementation of such strategies.

Curriculum Alignment and Involvement

At the initial stages of the implementation of changes that would lead the campus to a high-performing status the principal noticed that the teachers were not following the curriculum and were teaching "concepts" out of commercially bought products such as worksheets. The principal stated:

Academically there were no, I didn't discover, I wouldn't say no, not any, but there were very few curriculum guides in the building. When I would ask the teachers, first of all, they didn't want to turn in lesson plans because they hadn't had to in a long time. I would say maybe 3 or 4 teachers were doing lesson plans, and these were just the teachers that were going to do right whether anybody watched them or not. But there were very few guides in the building and we were in CLEAR then. Nobody had any, I'm going to say maybe 4 or 5 and that was in 2 to 3 different subjects. So nobody had a complete set of curriculum guides, unless it was those 2 or 3 teachers that were going to teach anyway. I'd ask, "What are you going to use to make your lesson plans?" and they would look at each other like are you going tell her, she's asking this question. So I had to order all new curriculum guides, under the assumption that they knew how to use them. Well, that wasn't the case.

The lack of planning and curriculum indicated that the campus needed to clarify why they exist and then establish goals based on solid curriculum planning. In addition, careful attention to state assessment was at the forefront of every lesson in order to align the learning to what matters most. One of the essential questions was "What are we going

to teach? In essence the answer required a careful plan to align the curriculum. The challenge they faced was that the students had so many gaps that many times they had to teach what they were supposed to know before engaging in new learning. Those conversations took place in PLC meetings and many times required vertical alignment meetings to ensure a system was in place to reduce the gaps in learning.

As the principal facilitated the new curriculum guides she noticed the teachers did not know how to use them. She then organized professional development activities provided by instructional coordinators, knowledgeable teachers, and the principal. The journey was troublesome for Principal B and she often questioned how these teachers were allowed to "teach" when monitoring systems did not exist and holding teachers accountable was not part of the vision.

School C: Physical Location and Description

School C is located in the southeast area of a large urban school district in Texas. The neighborhood has a population of 27,676 residents, and of that 84.3% is African American, 13.7% is Hispanic, and 6.1% is White. The median age in the adjacent neighborhood is 33.6 and the average household income is $26,544. Twenty five percent of the families and individuals are living below the poverty line (http://www.brainyzip.com). The educational background of the residents in this community reflects that 60.7% have a high school diploma and 6.7% have a college degree. This is significantly lower than the national average of 80% for high school graduates and 24.4% for bachelor's degree.

Initial Impressions

School C can be described as a recently built, modern campus with attractive facilities. The campus has been in existence since 1959 and during the 2006-2007 academic school year, a new state-of-the-art campus was inaugurated to better serve the academic needs of students. Principal C describes the campus as the "jewel" of the neighborhood. The campus has 41 classrooms, four offices, one cafeteria. The entrance is carefully monitored by clerks who control access. All visitors must report to the office to gain access to the campus facilities. Identification must be provided at all times with no exceptions. Identification cards such as state licenses are swiped to identify possible felons or sex offenders. The area has a significant amount of sex offenders residing in the area and precautions are taken to ensure student and staff safety.

The morning procedures are carefully monitored. Parents drop off their children on the left side of the building while monitors assist students and direct them to designated areas. Once the students are in the building, they are directed to the cafeteria for breakfast. An adjacent area is available for students to wait for their teachers. As the first bell rings, teachers arrive and gather their students. Many teachers take them to the restroom while others walk into their classrooms. Administrators and monitors monitor the halls until all classes are in their assigned classrooms.

A close observation of the facilities reveals bulletin boards and artifacts produced by students. All the student work posted on bulletin boards included authentic student samples. The staff can be described as cordial, warm, and helpful. They are also proud of their accomplishments and display their academic status with banners and posters.

School C: Principal Profile

The principal of School C has been serving the current school district since 1985. She has been a classroom teacher for six years, professional development trainer for two, an Alternative Certification Supervisor for three years, and Assistant Principal for five years, and Principal for ten years at the current campus. She earned a Bachelor degree in elementary education, a master's degree in administration and supervision, and a doctoral degree in educational leadership from Texas Southern University.

Principal C reflects on the initial condition of the campus and recalls that the perception of the campus was described as a "stable performing campus with regards to accountability." She chose to observe the culture of the campus before initiating changes that would disrupt her intent to establish relationships and gain their trust. After a while she identified a series of areas that needed improvement. She also recognized that changes in leadership require a period of time where "you have to get to know the personnel and they have to get to know you." Principal C can be described as a cautious leader who believes that leadership is about relationships. Her perception of leadership includes the belief that all leaders are different and they bring about change using different strategies.

In her assessment, the campus needed to be led into an exemplary status. She believed it had potential; however, the staff was holding back their potential because they had become complacent. The staff had been on the same campus and under the same leadership and did not see the need to initiate changes; albeit the school district was changing. The expectation was for all schools to become high-performing campuses.

Schools that were described as economically disadvantaged were rated exemplary. These campuses served as evidence that it could be done, there will be no excuses, and the journey will begin. The principal recalls that, "it took me a length of time to get the initial plan solid."

School C: Student Profile

School C provides instruction to students in grades Pre kindergarten to Fifth grade. The instructional structure of the campus is composed of regular instruction, Gifted and Talented, Special Education, and English as a Second Language (ESL). The information shown in the following tables were accessed in the 2010 Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System report. Table 4.17 displays the student enrollment by grade level, Table 4.18 displays students ethnic distribution, Table 4.19 provides student descriptive data, and Table 4.20 displays student enrollment by program for 2010.

Table 4.17: Student Enrollment by Grade Level in School C

Grade Level	Number of Students
PPCD	5
Pre Kindergarten	69
Kindergarten	90
First	89
Second	82
Third	87
Fourth	73
Fifth	87
Total	582

Table 4.18: Ethnic Distribution in School C

Ethnicity	Count	Percent
African American	473	81.30%
Hispanic	107	18.40%
White	2	0.30%
Native American		
Asian/Pacific Islander		

Table 4.19: Student Descriptive Data in School C

Description	Count	Percent
Economically Disadvantaged	531	91.20%
Limited English Proficient	67	12%
At Risk	282	48.50%
Mobility Rate	55	11.90%

Table 4.20: Student Enrollment by Program in School C

Program	Count	Percent
Bilingual/ESL	33	5.70%
Gifted and Talented	37	6.40%
Special Education	59	10.10%

School C: Teacher Profiles

The 2010-2011 School Improvement Plan reports that the campus' professional staff in composed of one principal, one assistant principal, one instructional coordinator, and 37 teachers. Data used for the following tables were acquired from the Academic Excellence Indicator Report (AEIS) report and then compared to the School Improvement Plan. Table 4.21 shows teachers by ethnicity, Table 4.22 show teachers by gender, and Table 4.23 show teachers by years of experience.

Table 4.21: Teachers by Ethnicity in School C

Ethnicity	Count	Percent
African American	31	83.80%
Hispanic	1	2.70%
White	4	10.80%
Native American		
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	2.70%

Table 4.22: Teachers by Gender in School C

Gender	Count	Percent
Female	30	81.10%
Male	7	18.90%

Table 4.23: Teachers' Years of Experience

Experience	Count	Percentage
Beginning Teacher	1	2.70%
1-5 Years	3	8%
6-10 years	15	40.50%
11-20 years	7	18.90%
over 20 years	11	29.70%
Average Experience	14.7	

The campus TAKS data show an increase in student performance in Reading, Math, Writing, and Science. A decrease in Math is noted in 2010; however, the campus received an exception from the state allowing the campus to retain their Exemplary status. The data reported in Table 4.24 was accessed through the district's Campus Online database and corroborated by the AEIS report.

Table 4.24: Accountability TAKS Scores 2006-2010 in School C

Subject	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Reading/LA	97%	92%	96%	91%	94%
Math	86%	83%	90%	92%	88%
Writing	99%	98%	99%	96%	96%
Science	90%	71%	96%	98%	93%

School C: Research Question One

How did the principal implement the research-based leadership responsibilities that led to the pursuit of high academic achievement for all students?

The data show the principal led the campus to high-performing status by implementing a series of leadership behaviors that provided the foundation to initiate the subsequent changes the campus needed to reach high-performing levels. The principal challenged the status quo, communicated ideals and beliefs by focusing on goals, and established a culture of trust among all stakeholders. The data collected to answer Research Question One was gathered from interviews, document analysis, field notes, and observations.

Challenged the status quo.

As previously stated School C was considered a stable campus and a "pretty good school." However, the principal understood that times were changing and accountability was a factor the staff did not consider essential. In her words, it's "almost like accountability was not an expectation for a campus like us with students of poverty and color." In comparison to other campuses in the near vicinity, Campus C was considered the best. Principal C realized that in order to initiate a movement towards becoming high-performing the culture of the school needed to change to include high expectations as a realistic expectation.

Principal C chose to challenge the status quo but she considered the importance of relationships and teamwork as a tool to reach high academic levels. It was important to

gain trust among all staff members, parents, and community members. As the instructional leader stated "she had an open door policy" and knew "how to talk to the parents." In addition she clarifies that "she just took every avenue she could to see that the school would perform highly."

It appears that the campus took small steps into becoming a high-performing school. The principal studied data trends and observed the dynamics of the day to day operations. In the process, she gained the staff's trust and established her credibility as an administrator who understood the challenges of education children of poverty. She also communicated high expectations and challenged teachers to be their best.

The implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) facilitated a cohesive system that focused on learning. Hope and High Expectations were communicated through stories of campuses that were once deemed as failures and now are examples of high-performing campuses.

Communicated ideals and beliefs.

Principal C acknowledged the importance of communicating ideals and beliefs and chose to do so by establishing relationships and building trust. The teachers on campus C had become complacent since the perception of the community was that they were a "pretty good school." The campus academic rating had fluctuated between Acceptable and Recognized and within the neighborhood it was considered the best campus. Principal C held the Assistant Principal position of a very well-known high-performing school in the district. She was hired as a principal to "replicate" the work of the previous campus. In her own words she recalls that when her former superintendent

assigned her to the school he said that "it was not going to be easy, but your mission and goal is to replicate what you've done at the other school with this school that needs some assistance in that area."

In her assessment, Principal C recognized the need to build trust among all stakeholders. Otherwise, her goal to lead a highly performing school would not be obtainable. She decided to build trust by establishing positive relationships that would lead to open, honest conversations about necessary changes. While she established positive relationships with the teaching staff, she also communicated her goals with the parents and kept them informed. She believed that the organizational culture of an institution is a reflection of the relationships with people and she focused great attention on developing and nurturing strong relationships with people on campus and the community. The campus instructional coordinator observations of the principal were as follows:

> I think her open-door policy for parents helped. She let the parents know that she would listen to their concerns. She knows how to make them feel comfortable and she really knows how to come across to parents. So parents didn't mind working with her to help their kids succeed. She let the community know what she wanted to achieve for the school and she let them know her goals.

In many instances, the phrase "open-door policy" came across as the teacher and instructional coordinator, interviewed by the researcher, described her relationship with parents. The same open door-door policy was observed and expressed by the teachers and

staff. As the principal built trust among parents, she began to address the barriers of poverty that characterized the neighborhood. The instructional coordinator stated that:

> When some students came to school and needed clothes, we had a closet where we kept clothes. When the new principal came in I think she implemented uniforms. We had family night, so parents would understand the skills required of their children. We sent materials home so parents could work with their children at home.

The principal's caring nature opened the doors to communication and guided the teachers to achieve the new goals. One teacher stated "All our teachers are here for the children, too, so when she started to walk her walk, they walked with her. They were willing to do whatever it took for the kids to succeed."

School C: Research Question Two

How did the principal implement a school-wide framework that has resulted in sustained academic achievement growth for all students?

The data show the principal implemented a school wide framework resulting in sustained academic achievement growth for all students. This framework provided the systematic process needed by the school staff to ensure student learning. This process included establishing a culture of collaboration, data driven decision making, and a focus on learning. The data collected to answer Research Question Two was gathered from interviews, document analysis, follow-up contact notes, collegial meeting protocols, field notes, and observations.

Culture of collaboration.

As an instructional leader the principal established structures that supported collaboration around student data. Extensive data analysis was conducted by the school members to inform the decision making process. The new instructional decision making process enabled teachers to have the time to analyze pertinent student data as a team and to collaborate to ensure student performance. The staff agreed that a focus on data had a significant influence on increasing student academic achievement on Campus C.

One of Principal's C major concerns was that teachers worked in isolation. This was one of the major challenges she confronted. She recalls:

> I think at this campus one of the most glaring challenges was the fact that your very proficient teachers wanted to stand alone and it was difficult for them to understand that this was a group process and it didn't matter how wonderful they were even with test scores, or classroom management, or the homeroom environment, or the teaching pedagogy in general if they were not able to impart that to the grade level or team. So that was the first piece: having them to understand that we have no bright stars. This is a group process. Everybody doesn't move together, but we have some common threads that bind us in our work, in our mission and in our identified goals and in what we must do in our practice to deliver the best educational instructional program to our students.

Focus on learning.

The school district had facilitated systems to increase awareness on data decision making. Databases such as Campus Online assisted the campus on managing data from

benchmarks, common assessments, and state assessments. The principal had a strong focus on learning and this instrument facilitated the conversations regarding student academic achievement. Extensively disaggregated data allowed the campus to focus on specific skills that needed re-teaching and differentiation of instruction. Individuals interviewed said that since this data tool is available they assess the students by scanning the answer documents and reports are generated immediately. In return, they are able to provide timely interventions for struggling students. Conversations regarding student progress take place in administrative team meetings. These meetings provide a platform to engage team members in conversations about how they will serve as facilitators for struggling students. The conversations also gear towards how they would monitor and support struggling teachers who are not meeting the expectations of the campus. These meetings are documented in a protocol form that includes a plan of action to attend to academic concerns.

The initial stages of becoming a high-performing campus led the staff to engage in dialogues regarding the academic needs of the students. They focused the conversations using data from different sources including weekly common assessments. Confronting their data would allow them to make decisions that would strike a balance between the stated, taught, and the tested curriculum. As the researcher attended one of the collaborative meetings, she observed how challenging the conversations would become. A teacher was visibly upset about one of her student's lack of academic progress and the teachers supported her by analyzing her data with her and demonstrating hands-on activities she could implement to ensure the students were successful. In their

analysis they stated that perhaps the student needed base ten blocks because he did not have a grasp of place value. One of the teachers offered to tutor her student during her ancillary time, so at the same time she could learn how to differentiate the needs of students. The principal intervened and offered to facilitate base ten blocks for her class.

Data driven decision making.

Fullan (2001) states that organizational coherence is reflected in the development of "shared commitment to ideas and paths of action" (p. 118). Despite the changes occurring on campus, it was important to remain focused and aligned in thought and action. To achieve coherence, the use of data helped create precision in the decision making process and activities associated with knowledge building and collaboration.

The principal led the campus to implement a school-wide structure that included consensus about the focus, direction, and goals of the organization. In addition, monitoring systems and continuous two-way feedback have been established to ensure the campus goals and beliefs are supported through actual practice. Engaging campus teachers and administrators in collaborative ensures the alignment in thought and action. Protocols to keep the dialogue focused ensure that the conversations remain centered on student academic achievement. Frequent weekly meetings and data talks are held where data are discussed and critical decisions are made to support student learning and teacher expertise.

The discussions guiding instruction are centered on frequent assessment of learning and data generated by these assessments. The principal participates in the collaborative meetings and, as they discuss the data, they identify the areas in need of

intervention. The students are assigned to tutorial sessions provided by several teachers. School C has organized their intervention strategies by extending time spent on tasks after school and on Saturdays. Interventionist teachers also tutor students during the regular schedule. Tracking records based on frequent assessments are maintained by the teachers with the purpose of informing instructional decisions. An examination of these records show that student's needs are identified and a prescriptive treatment is assigned based on the objectives needed to master skills.

School C: Research Question Three

How did the principal implement the identified strategies that ensured high academic achievement among all student populations?

The data show the principal identified strategies and/or practices to encourage high academic achievement among all student populations. These strategies or practices supported a focus on curriculum alignment, research based learning, and facilitated resources based on needs. The data collected to answer Research Question Three were gathered from interviews, document reviews, follow-up contact notes, collegial meeting protocols, field notes, and observations.

Research based practice.

Professional development for teachers is an area the principal believed was essential to support best teaching practices. A review of a PowerPoint presentation, provided by a teacher interviewed, show how rigor and relevance is expected in the lesson delivery. The workshop was facilitated by the principal because she strongly believes that if the staff envisions her as an effective instructional leader; this will build

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trust through actions. Several agendas and teacher sign in sheets were examined and show that the principal is actively engaged in professional development focusing on best practices. Other professional development sessions she has provided include High Yield Strategies, Collaborative Learning, and Small Group Instruction. A careful review of Professional Development agendas reveals that the staff is also engaged in Professional Development. A teacher interviewed said they prefer trainings that come from "inside the school" because it allows them to identify strengths among their colleagues.

Curriculum alignment.

The campus engaged in a series of changes that promoted a focus on curriculum content. One of the principal's strengths was curriculum development. The instructional coordinator interviewed confirmed this

> One thing about her as an instructional leader, she knows the curriculum. She knew how to implement the curriculum. So, from what she knew, she used it and put it in place that way. I mean, knowing that she knew the curriculum and so she talked to the teachers letting them know her expectations. If she went to classrooms and didn't see what she expected, she would let the teachers know that.

Furthermore, she ensured teachers participated in the curriculum decision-making process as well as the research based effective teaching practices. A teacher recalled the initial stages of the change process where the principal met with all the grade level teams and required them to share their best practices. In return all these best practices were shared with all grade levels. One teacher recalled that the instructional leadership met to

address collegial conversations among grade levels. They decided that they would request input from all teachers to ensure their voices were heard and valued. Based on the data, they would share effective teaching strategies that promoted high levels of student achievement. She said:

> We went to the teachers and asked for successful strategies. She also observed teachers to see what they were doing. We combined all the different strategies. She had posters made of these strategies and posted them so kids could read different strategies. Everybody had input, so we shared ideas. She attended the PLC meetings and shared what was discussed there.

These posters are visible in classrooms and have become a school-wide strategy reference guide for students to follow. For instance, in Math problem solving is a subject where the campus needs improvement. A group of teachers attended a Math conference and brought back ideas they have gathered to address the instructional Math needs. As a result they developed a problem solving board that is used by all classroom teachers.

Facilitated resources.

Once the campus principal identifies an instructional concern, she addresses by facilitating programs, staff, and materials that can support learning. For instance, this year was based on the TPRI results, reading was a concern and teachers expressed the need to have parental support. It is their belief that fluency can be improved if the parents assist by listening to their children read every day. The principal reflected on the subject and argued that they could not monitor parent participation; however, if she hired hourly lecturers she could ensure an adult listened to the students. Immediately after the meeting

she reviewed the campus budget and was able to hire two hourly lecturers that are currently assisting the students. A review of the TPRI results from the beginning of the year and the middle of the year reveal that the students are making progress.

Cross-Case Analysis

The cross analysis of the three elementary school case study is guided by the research questions previously stated. Similarities and differences between schools are established through common emergent themes identified from the research.

Background

It is important to establish the context of the three schools prior to beginning the comparison of themes of this study. All three schools are part of the same large urban district in Texas. The three schools share similarities, but also share significant differences. School B and School C demographics are mostly comprised of African American students, and they are both experiencing a growing population of Hispanic students. School A's population is mostly composed of Hispanic students. The three campuses have high levels of economically disadvantaged students and are considered Title 1 schools. Each community shows families living below poverty lines; these percentages fluctuate between 12.7% and 25.8%. The lowest percent of families living below poverty was the community surrounding School B. School C and School A had the same percentage of families living below poverty levels. The educational background of residents in the communities fluctuated between 29.3% and 69.9% of residents who earned a high school diploma. College graduates living in the communities fluctuated between 2.3% and 11.9%. Both high school and college graduates were significantly

lower in the community surrounding School A. School B and School C were slightly different in both categories.

The average work experience for teachers in all campuses fluctuates from 5 years to 15 years of experience. School A had the lowest average teacher experience while School B and School C showed a similar average. School B's teacher work experience average was 15 years while School C was 14.7 years. School A teaching staff was mostly staffed by Teach for America members.

All schools were rated Exemplary during the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years and they all received an exception from the Texas Education Agency. The criteria to be rated as an Exemplary school is based on a 90% passing percentage for all subjects and demographic groups. School A had a passing percent of 88% in Reading, School B passing percent for Writing was rate was 83%, and School C Math passing percent was 88%. All other subjects tested were above the 90% required passing percentage.

Research Question One

How did the principal implement research-based leadership responsibilities that led to the pursuit of high academic achievement for all students?

Similarities and differences between the three schools are established through the emergent themes identified in the study. These themes are challenging the status quo and communicating ideals and beliefs.

Communicated ideals and beliefs.

The principals involved in this study communicated ideals and beliefs in every way possible. These ideas included high expectations and the belief that all students

could learn given the right educational experience and the appropriate research based intervention in the event students struggled with a concept. All principals were aware of the challenge posed by working with students of low socioeconomic background. They appear to understand the disadvantages, but also realized that an effective teacher could make a difference in a student's education. A review of the campuses' School Improvement Plan communicates ideals and beliefs and these are followed by actions to effect change. Other documents such as the teachers' and community's handbooks also communicated the ideals and beliefs these leaders possessed.

Challenged status quo.

The initial academic condition of all the schools led the principals to become change agents. All principals had been assigned with the mission of ensuring student academic growth that would lead campuses to an Exemplary rating. However, each principal confronted different dilemmas and conditions. School A and C confronted a staff that was complacent and did not think change was necessary because they were a "good" school. These principals responded in different ways. Principal A had already worked on the campus and therefore knew what needed to improve. She approached the changes in a radical way and established a one way decision making strategy that later on shifted to a more distributive leadership model. As previously stated, later on the staff's input was included and leadership duties were distributed among the team. The principal of School C was very cautious and established relationships to gain the staff and community's trust. In her assessment she realized the staff had potential; but they were "a diamond in a rough" in need of polishing.

The principal from School B inherited a staff that lacked professional ethics and were confrontational. The staff's behaviors placed students at risk and they did not accept the responsibility for student learning. The principal solicited help from her immediate supervisor and together engaged in an effort to increase the staff's expertise, but at the same time enforced procedures by documenting personnel if necessary. Her journey was different from all other principals included in the study. During the first year of her tenure the campus earned a rating of Unacceptable, the lowest rating a campus could obtain and this served as a "wake up call." She described her nature as a caring person and she used her counseling background to guide her staff through the changes that needed to occur. She balanced strong leadership with caring leadership and this set the tone to initiate the change that turned around a low performing campus into the Exemplary campus status it has earned for the past three years.

Research Question Two

How did the principal implement a school improvement framework that has resulted in sustained academic achievement growth for all students?

As a means to effect change the principals developed a school wide improvement model congruent with the Professional Learning Communities established by Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, and Karkanek (2004). During the study a series of themes emerged that describes the implementation of the model. These themes included culture of collaboration, focus on learning, and data driven decision making.

Culture of collaboration.

A series of leadership conferences promoted by the school district exposed leadership teams to the ideals and beliefs of a group of educators who had experienced success in challenging schools with similar demographics and socioeconomics. As a result, all schools in the study saw an opportunity to implement a model that appeared to use the teachers' strengths to support each other. A clear vision and mission was established and it guided the change process. This vision and mission was stated in School A and School B's School Improvement Plan and was posted on all schools.

A series of non-negotiable commitments were established. The principal of School A and School B established these commitments while School C required input from staff members. Shared common goals are evident in the SIP as well as data walls and teacher handbooks. Teachers are expected to work and engage in collegial conversations focused on learning. Teachers would no longer work in isolation since all the principals created schedules that allowed extended time to meet. Principal A conducts the meetings, but shared that she is shifting this responsibility to her leadership team including grade level chairs. School B and School C principals participate in the meeting, but the teachers conduct them and they are described as facilitators.

The PLC framework appears to support cohesiveness as evidenced by the common language, structure, and protocols used in all campuses. The frequent use of terms such as PLC meetings, common assessments, timely intervention, extended time, collegial, collaboration, data informed, teamwork, and others were evident in all

campuses. The schools included in this study shifted from an "island" mentality to a collaborative mentality where all students' academic achievement is discussed.

Focus on learning.

Under the leadership of these principals the teachers made informed decisions regarding differentiation strategies that would address any student's gaps. Each campus had its own set of strategies that would be implemented. School A appeared to be confident in their ability to diagnose and prescribe intervention strategies. A Math Coach and Instructional Coordinator attended meetings and they served to manage schedules and assign students to staff members who would address the instructional concerns. Their school's organizational structure provided a "Power Hour" where all staff would provide direct instruction to students who were experiencing difficulties, but also accelerate students who were performing well. Gifted and Talented students were assigned to computer labs where they would engage in *Renzulli* research projects. *Renzulli* software is provided by the school district to address the particular needs of Gifted and Talented students. Their discussions include extensive questioning and reflective thoughts to respond to the needs of students.

Data driven decision making.

School B appeared to need support with their PLC meetings, and the principal made sure she attended the meetings. The staff can deviate from the purpose of the meeting and attempt to discuss issues and concerns that are not on the agenda. A protocol including an agenda is followed to focus the discussion on student learning. School C appears to have experienced teachers who addressed the instructional needs of their own

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students. They do engage the principal in the conversation and request support in terms of materials and programs. All campuses include a PLC protocol that includes the following questions:

1. What are students learning?

2. How do you know they learned?

3. What will you do with those who did not master the concepts?

4. What will you do with those who mastered objectives?

School A has included an additional item that requires "the next steps" and items to address in the next meeting.

Accountability is a common theme among all campuses. Monitoring and evaluating students, best practices, and learning was an essential part of the school's day to day operations. It appears that these principals were consistently developing a system that included data to support effective practice. The conversations that were based on opinion were not being validated by the group; they needed to be validated with supportive data. The leaders monitored the effectiveness of school practices in terms of the influence on student learning.

Research Question Three

How did the principal implement the identified strategies that ensured high academic achievement among all student populations?

As stated previously the school included in this study engaged in a series of strategies that led their staff to ensure cohesiveness by using a common language characteristic of the Professional Learning Communities (PLC framework) proposed by

Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2004). Each campus engaged in a series of strategies that were specific to the needs identified in frequent data trends. School A was very specific and acknowledged that the data was reflective of collegial decisions that promoted "objective focused tutorials, strong leadership, weekly PLC collaborations, and monthly vertical meetings." The school implemented a reflective model of communication where constant inquiry was evident in conversations. The campus had identified ELL learning discrepancies that were attributed to a weak instructional program that was not preparing students to transition. Therefore, it was necessary to conduct vertical meeting to ensure alignment and cohesiveness. The issue was not considered a fourth grade issue but a campus concern that led to the continuous decrease in scores. Intervention was very specific and followed the Response to Intervention model where students were taught in whole group, small group, and focused one on one intervention. Additional programs implemented by the campus included Reading Counts. The staff was well aware of the importance of research based practices and this was also truth for School B and School C.

School B focused on curriculum alignment. As mentioned previously, the staff did not use curricular materials and taught what they called "concepts." The principal identified this as a weakness that needed immediate attention and facilitated the school district's approved curriculum. The campus engaged in a series of professional development activities that guided the staff to ensure alignment and develop lesson planning skills. They also engaged in curriculum alignment to ensure the stated curriculum was aligned to assessments required by the district and the state assessments.

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They developed "roadmaps" necessary to ensure the campus would become a high-performing school. In addition, Renzulli software was used for all students including Gifted and talented. Writing was a concern so they secured the support of the Writing Academy program that provided coaches to support teaching and learning. This program guided the staff with lessons and strategies to support language arts and writing essays. High Yield research based strategies were required in daily instruction and the principal monitored to ensure implementation.

School A and School C developed and used the School Improvement Plan as a guide to drive decisions and implementation of strategies. School B established order first and then used the curriculum as a guide. Order was necessary to create structures that would inhibit certain behaviors that placed students at risk. At the same time, order facilitated an environment where collaboration was the norm and collegial conversations took place. Frequent analysis of data engaged the staff in curriculum calendars aligned to assessments but always including research based learning. The principal clarified "it's not all about TAKS," but they made sure the students mastered the objectives needed to become proficient on the required assessments. In essence, the principal provided and reinforced clear structures, rules, and procedures for both the staff and the students.

The tone for School B was different. The principal adopted a model where she established the staff and leadership were a marriage. She conducted a symbolic ceremony and told the staff:

This past year, I married my staff. They didn't know we were getting married, but I went and got these plastic rings, placed them on their tables and at the end told

them; that I've only ever been mean to my ex-husbands, I've had 2 and I'm never

been intentionally mean to anyone but them. So in order for me not to feel bad

about me being mean to you, by the power invested in me by the State of Texas

and the [School District]; I pronounce us spouse and spouse. We're married now,

and I don't feel bad about writing you up, telling you no or anything else of that

nature. So we are married now and I can be mean to you if I want to. They were

kind of shocked, but I've never had to write anyone up since then. I'm never

intentionally mean to anyone. I have a counseling background. I'm a nurturer. I'm

never intentionally mean to anybody. Right now, if I'm mean to you, it's not

going to make me feel bad. Do what you're supposed to do, and I won't have to.

So we're married.

From that day on she says relationships improved and they now describe themselves as a

marriage. The principal reflected on her decision to work with the staff. She knew that

some people needed to leave, but also knew the majority of the teachers could learn and

she chose to lead them into becoming effective teachers.

Summary

This chapter provided the findings from the research study. Three urban

elementary schools were included in the study. The purpose of this study was to identify

how leadership behaviors led to increased academic achievement in high-poverty, urban

elementary schools. Each campus was reported separately and included two distinct

sections. The first section presented the profiles of the selected sites, including

demographic information and principal information. The second section was organized

by the order of the research questions including emergent themes. An additional section presented a cross analysis including differences and similarities between the three principals selected for the study. The cross analysis was organized by research questions as these questions specifically addressed leadership responsibilities, school wide model for improvement, and strategies implemented by the principal.

Data gathered through interviews, document reviews, direct observation, and artifacts revealed the campus principals challenged the status quo, communicated ideals and beliefs, established a culture of collaboration, focused on learning, used data to inform instruction, aligned the curriculum, and implemented research based practices.

In addition, the challenges revealed by new sets of data continue to surface and staff members recognize that the journey is never-ending, and there is always a new goal to reach.

Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

Introduction

This chapter includes a re-statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, methodology, and discusses findings. The discussion is organized by the major themes that appear to have influenced how principals led high-performing, high-poverty schools. The McRel Balanced Leadership framework was used to organize the discussion in this chapter. At the end of this chapter, the reader will find conclusions and implications for practice and further research.

Re-Statement of the Problem

The challenge to equalize opportunities for children of poverty demands school improvement efforts that address this growing population. Educators are aware that "the majority of the students often lack the educational resources that promote learning enjoyed by children from higher-income homes, including parental involvement, books, educational experiences, and access to and comfort with technology, to name just a few" (Howard, Dresser, & Dunklee, 2009, p. 6). Regardless of this reality, all schools are expected to perform at high academic levels.

Legislation such as NCLB (2001) hold schools accountable for closing achievement gaps and outlines consequences for failing schools, including severe measures such as removal of school leadership, teaching staff, and/or reconstitution of schools. The *Blueprint for Reform* (2010) shows continuous support from the federal government to close the achievement gap; however, the gap continues to exist among minorities and children of poverty. Low income children have been identified as the

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group that poses the most challenges since they are exposed to adverse conditions that pose obstacles to learning (Zhao, 2009; Howard, Dresser, & Dunklee, 2009).

A growing trend among researchers has identified the principal as the conductor of school improvement. Principal behaviors or responsibilities have been linked between the principal and increased academic achievement (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, 2005; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2002; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Portin, Knapp, Dareff, Feldman, Russell, Augustine, Gonzalez, Schyler, & Ikemoto, 2009; Waters & Cameron, 2007). A series of common themes are evident among these frameworks and include: (a) setting high expectations, (b) promoting communication among all stakeholders, (c) building capacity, (d) data driven decision-making, (e) managing school operations, (f) and addressing barriers that impede learning. These and other studies lend support to the belief that principals influence student achievement, and therefore it is important to identify *how* these behavior or responsibilities close the achievement gap.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify how principal leadership behaviors led to increased academic achievement in three high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools. Principals who are committed to changing ineffective schools into high-performing schools are confronted with continuous challenges. Several studies confirm that while schools of poverty continue to address widening academic achievement gaps there are schools beating the odds. Furthermore, Lezotte and Snyder (2011) state the "findings from effective schools research have provided schools and districts with a vast

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resource and solid foundation for today's school improvement efforts" (p. 1). Correlates

of effective schools have been identified and are characterized by the belief that

educators are on a "learning-for-all-mission." These correlates are (1) high expectations;

(2) strong instructional leadership; (3) clear and focused mission; (4) opportunity to learn

and time on task; (5) and frequent monitoring of student progress.

Research Questions

The study was guided by a series of questions that intended to capture the process

principal's undertake to lead high academic performing schools in poverty. These

questions are the following:

1. How did the principal implement research-based leadership responsibilities that

   led to the pursuit of high academic achievement for all students?

2. How did the principal implement a school-wide improvement framework that has

   resulted in sustained academic achievement growth for all students?

3. How did the principal implement the identified strategies that ensured high

   academic achievement among all student populations?

Methodology

The study design consisted of a qualitative approach based on the protocols

suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). A case study method was employed as

described by Cresswell (2007). Case study methods require the researcher to explore a

system over time and to collect in-depth data involving multiple sources of information.

A case study approach was appropriate for this study because it allowed the researcher to

study the subjects in their authentic setting. Merriam (1998) describes this research

process as a means to build reality based on interactions. Through the collection of multiple data sources which included individual interviews, observations, collection of artifacts, and field notes, the researcher was able to gain a perspective of how the principals' leadership responsibilities led the campus to become a high-performing campus regardless of the low socioeconomic status of students.

Miles and Huberman (1994) have identified a series of limitations to qualitative studies such as data overload and researcher's biases. To address these limitations the researcher ensured she followed a data analysis strategy including open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and the identification of themes including differences and similarities. Frequent data displays facilitated the identification of themes and clustering. The frequent examination of data including interviews, artifacts, documents, and observations facilitated the triangulation of data. Triangulation of data ensured conclusions were supported by more than one source (Willis, 2007). Audit trails and member checks were conducted to increase validity. The audit trails serve as documentation to support conclusions and member checks engages the participants as reviewers of conclusions.

The sample was selected using a purposive approach. Miles and Huberman (1994) elaborate on the qualitative study sample selection by stating that qualitative researchers work with "small samples of people" (p. 27). They further explain that in qualitative approaches sampling involves a social process that is coherent and logic. Random sampling found in quantitative methods cannot and do not meet this criteria. Three elementary schools from the Houston Independent School District in Houston, Texas

were selected. These schools were selected due to their Exemplary rating status and student population characteristics. Location and proximity also determined the selection since this facilitated frequent contact by the researcher.

This study used multiple sources of data which informed the findings: semi-structured interviews of three principals, three teacher leaders, and three instructional coordinators; direct observations of schools morning procedures, facilities, bulletin boards, and meetings, including SDMC and PLC meetings; and a review of a variety of artifacts including School Improvement Plans, AEIS reports, Campus Online agendas, Report Card Reports, agendas, minutes, PLC protocols, teacher observation and feedback protocols, student handbooks, teacher handbooks, Professional Development PowerPoint presentations including sign in sheets, schools' websites, posters, charts, data walls and binders, ceremony rings, and buttons.

Discussion of Findings

The study confirms some of the findings of previous research on high-performing, high-poverty schools (see Appendix G). The findings support three research questions addressing how the principals implemented research-based leadership responsibilities, how principals implemented a school wide improvement framework that resulted in sustained academic achievement growth, and how the principal implemented the identified strategies that ensured high academic achievement among all students. This section includes a discussion of findings and is organized according to the major themes emerging from the study.

Challenged the Status Quo

The principals in this study appeared to understand their mission and immediately communicated an urgency to change the current status quo. They served as catalyst for change as they communicated ideals and beliefs to stakeholders. If students were expected to succeed, drastic measures would be taken and change was inevitable. It appears that the principals understood the barriers and identified those barriers as teachers and in many instances parents. It appears principals chose to become optimizers who set the emotional tone for change by inspiring others to engage in the innovations that would lead them to achieve their goals. Interviews with teachers and instructional coordinators confirmed that principals were always optimistic and exuded energy that in some cases was contagious. One teacher affirms, "she made us believe we could do it."

The literature review reveals extensive work on organizational change. An interesting approach uses the Kubler Ross (1969, as cited in Kearney & Hyle, 2006) grief model to understanding change. Kearney and Hyle (2006) identify a series of processes personnel experience when organizational changes occur. This process is not linear, and these stages repeat themselves, replace each other, or exist side-by-side (p. 114). These processes are denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Strengths and weaknesses were identified with the use of this model; however, the researcher thought it was important to consider a framework that involved the emotional aspect of change in organizations.

Change is accompanied by a period of resistance. This resistance was evidenced in all campuses, but perhaps the most challenging scenario was confronted at School B.

Blatant defiance and unethical behavior were responses these educators chose to exhibit when imminent change became a reality. The data gathered suggests they mourned their previous principal, and in her assessment, the current principal believed their response was a desperate measure to bring her back.

Change is one of the most important and difficult responsibilities for a leader. In his book, *Leadership in Organizations,* Yukl (2006) recognizes the challenges of leading change, and argues that leaders are more likely to successfully implement change if they have an understanding of the change process and develop the skills to confront these challenges. Resistance to change is an undeniable issue that serves as a barrier to change processes, and the reasons are lack of trust; belief that change is unnecessary; change is not feasible; economic threats; relative high cost; fear or personal failure; loss of status and power; threat to values and ideals; and resentment of interference. Yukl (2006) believes that resistance to change is a result of strong values and emotions and this energy can be redirected to improve change. Data gathered from interviews reveal, indeed, teachers and parents alike did not believe change was necessary because the level of expectation was for students to continue to perform at the same level. Since students were from low income families, the common belief was to lower the bar because of the many barriers imposed by poverty.

Communicating Ideals and Beliefs

All principals demonstrated a focus on goals that sustained continuous improvement. They supported strong goals that would guide their work and gathered input to establish these goals. Goals were communicated in the data, and more

importantly included in the School Improvement Plan. PLC meetings were guided by the stated goals. The presence of data walls showed how goals were stated as SMART goals. At the initial stage it might be 60% mastery, but once this goal is mastered, it increases into 70%, 80%, 90%, and 100% in some subjects.

The principal's participation in PLC meetings served to assess the needs of teachers in terms of materials, professional development, and expertise. As a facilitator the principals were involved with the curriculum and also assessed needs for materials. The findings suggest that principals facilitated intellectual stimulation of teachers by supporting meaningful professional development aligned with needs revealed by data or observations. All principals stated that some teachers needed more support than others and in many instances were placed on growth plans. These growth plans provided a structured, systematic process that teachers followed to ensure mastery of teaching skills.

Culture of Collaboration

Perhaps an important factor that determined how the school's staff shaped cohesiveness was through the leadership responsibility of communication. The Professional Learning Community (PLC) school-wide framework implemented in all schools in the study created a common language and structure. Dufour, Dufour, and Eaker (2008) describe PLC as "ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve" (p. 14). In order to sustain student academic achievement educators must engage in continuous "job-embedded learning." In their book, *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities,* Dufour, Dufour, and Eaker (2008) identified six characteristics guiding the work of PLC. These are shared

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mission, values, and goals focused on student learning; collective culture with a focus on learning; collective inquiry into best practice; action orientation or learning by doing; commitment to continuous improvement; and results-oriented. They also clarify a series of big ideas that must be present in schools who engage in the PLC improvement model. The first idea is to ensure all students are learning at high levels. The second idea is to build a collaborative culture where teachers work interdependently and assume collective responsibility for all learners. And last, learning must be documented by ongoing evidence in order to respond immediately to those who are experiencing difficulty.

As discovered in observations, the principals created the structures to facilitate all teachers' input and engagement in the PLC process. Scheduled meetings were conducted where data served as evidence of student growth and determined informed decisions regarding differentiation or continuous growth. A common protocol was followed and the big ideas previously mentioned were stated in the protocol. The conversations were geared toward student learning; other topics, such as school issues or concerns, were not allowed in the dialogue. There is reason to argue that each campus possessed different levels of maturity in the process. For instance, School B still exhibited behaviors that pointed responsibility for student learning on other factors such as student apathy. Interestingly, other members of the team provided input to persuade the teacher that educators needed to search for strategies to increase student engagement.

A common language was used by all schools; this created a culture of learning. For example, in assessing the reality of schools, they were all data informed and used differentiation strategies to address weaknesses. Concepts such as common assessments,

data driven, collegial, collective, inquiry, sustained improvement, and other concepts bounded their work and focused their efforts on monitoring progress to reach the campus goals. In addition, best practices led the decision making process and a strong preference for instructional strategies proposed by Marzano's (2001) was common among all three schools. Sin

Focus on Learning

A common thread among all the principals selected for this study was that they were hired to ensure high academic achievement regardless of socioeconomic status or other barriers. In the era of high accountability the expectation is for all students to succeed. Historically, the evolution of the purpose of school has shifted, and as a consequence all students are expected to perform. To explain this shift, Lezotte and Snyder (2011) state: "Initially, the primary purpose was to teach the basic knowledge and skills necessary to ensure an understanding of democracy and democratic values" (p. 12). However, today "the goal of public education has become to remove the major consequences of being economically disadvantaged in America" (pp. 12-13). It appears that the principals were aware of their purpose and they engaged in a process that assessed the condition of the school. After assessing the condition, they proceeded to establish a vision and mission that would lead the changes that needed to take place.

The school district had engaged in a series of leadership conferences that set the stage to implement research based practices, and the Professional Learning Communities framework for school improvement. It is not clear if schools were mandated to implement the model; however, it appears the schools engaged in the process convinced that the

framework for school improvement would *focus* the work. After the district engaged the leadership teams in the training, the schools were trained by their leadership teams. Evidence from research shows that district leadership, school leadership, and teacher behavior can be tightly "coupled" regarding student academic achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009). In his book, *All Systems Go,* Michael Fullan (2010) argues that "unless you align school, district, state, and national agendas, innovation within schools cannot be sustained" (p. vii). The implication of this argument is that *focused* coherent attention to educational issues of all stakeholders including the state, district, and school level provide the support system needed to ensure goals are aligned and efforts are directed to student learning. In the cases included in this research, it appears that the school district had influenced the decision making process and the schools accepted the challeng

Research based learning.

The data gathered during this study suggests that the inclusion of researched based learning was considered. In many instances there was evidence of the use of High Yield Strategies; Response to Intervention Strategies, Rigor and Relevance, and ESL research based strategies proven to result in high levels of achievement. A review of literature related to these strategies lends support and encourages the implementation of these to ensure high levels of academic achievement.

In their book, *Classroom Instruction that Works,* Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) suggest that student success increases when certain instructional strategies are used. Specifically, the use of graphic organizers, cooperative learning, and summarizing and note taking among other strategies are suggested strategies to increase academic

achievement. Other research based strategies include; wait time, pre-teaching vocabulary, cue, and activating prior knowledge, questioning strategies that include rigor and relevance, and others (Walker-Tileston & Darling, 2008). Evidence of the use of these research based strategies was present during the study. In an attempt to understand why all campuses use the strategy the researcher conducting this study confirmed that the model is supported by the PLC model for school improvement.

The principals included in this study established systems that promoted a proactive approach when confronted with students who were struggling to learn. Howard, Dresser, and Dunklee (2009, p. 129) state that, "continuous formative assessments provide the educational teams with the data necessary to drive instruction based on actual areas of need" (p. 129). Timely intervention strategies were consistently observed in all campuses. Decisions on how to address the needs of students were collaboratively undertaken and carefully crafted plans were developed to ensure learning for all students.

Curriculum Alignment

The principal included in this study promoted alignment among learning expectations, learning experiences, and assessments. They ensured teachers were aware of the curriculum they were expected to teach but also ensured that the learning experiences included sound instructional strategies. Frequent common assessments led the discussions among team members and served to make instructional decisions that were data informed.

In their book, *Why Culture Counts: Teaching Children of Poverty*, Walker-Tileston and Darling (2008) support the concept of "triangulating for alignment" as a

meaningful way to address curriculum, instruction, and assessment. These scholars

suggest that teachers need to check for the alignment of

1. The stated learning *expectations* (standards, curriculum, and objectives); what we

say we want students to learn

2. The *instruction* (activities, experiences, listening, and so on), that provide students

with the means to learn the stated learning expectations-instructional strategies for

teachers and learning activities, assignments, and products for students

3. The *assessments* items or tasks that specifically measure learning of the standards,

curriculum, or objectives and reflect the language of instruction, not some other

format. (p. 149)

The schools included in the study demonstrated alignment among curriculum

(expectations), instructional practices, and assessments. However, it is not clear if this

was intentionally implemented or resulted as a consequence of the implementation of a

PLC model for school improvement.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study provided an opportunity to gain insight on how three

principals in urban elementary schools implemented leadership responsibilities to

improve and sustain the academic achievement of students. Schools are learning

communities that require leaders with high expectations and the firm belief that all

students can learn given the right learning opportunities. These schools had leaders who

were visionaries and communicated goals that engaged educators through an inquiry

process where all members of the community collaborated and assumed responsibility for all students.

Summary

Education is constantly confronted with change and savvy leaders understand that change can be an emotional and personal process. Structural changes are frequently visible when policy and procedures are mandated. Changes such as a new textbook adoption, reading programs, or scheduling are structural and may not change teachers' practices. On the other hand, cultural changes can result in meaningful, sustainable improvement. Meaningful changes are anchored in the culture of the organization and are evident in the assumptions, beliefs, values, expectations, and habits that constitute the norms in the organization (Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008). The leaders in this study changed the culture of the school by shifting from cultures of isolation and fatalism to collaboration and hope. These leaders recognized that the journey continues. They question their practices and seek evidence that shows there is so much more they need to do. An exemplary rating is just the beginning. The culture of these campuses forces them to examine their practice on a daily basis. Reflective collaborative efforts were visible in their dialogue regarding the search for better ways to reach all children. These schools experienced profound cultural shifts and continue to revisit their practice until they have ensured all students are learning at high levels.

Schools are not isolated in the educational system and they exist to fulfill a purpose. Schools are influenced by external forces and coherence is necessary to make sense of the process. The federal and state levels promote structural changes through

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policies and mandates. The district serves to support schools and ensure compliance, but the school makes sense of all systems by ensuring compliance while attaining to the culture of the school and remaining focused on student learning. The principals in this study appeared to understand that their responsibility was to create the conditions to help teachers build on their collective capacity to ensure students learned at high levels.

The role of the principal was instrumental in the change process. They created the conditions that helped the teachers build upon their collective capacity to ensure student academic success. Isolating one's self was non-negotiable, and the principals paved the path to support this cultural shift in behavior. Not only were teachers required to collaborate and share, but the principal was part of the process and served as a facilitator. The work of a leader is complex and can easily be distracted with duties that do not result in substantive changes that focus on student learning. Therefore, these leaders dispersed leadership by engaging others in the process of decision making. This is essential to sustain changes when the principal is not present. Once the changes are embedded in the culture, it is sustainable because teachers and leaders continue to do what is best for students.

<center>**Implications for Practice and Further Research**</center>

The success of these principals can be related to a series of factors. While their leadership approaches to sustain school improvement were different, they all focused time and attention to evidence through data, the power of collective intelligence, and coherence in the process. There behaviors exhibited characteristics of transformational, transactional, and also shared leadership. Situational awareness caused shifts in

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leadership responses. When these principal needed to be directive they did not hesitate to clearly communicated areas that were non-negotiable. But they were also great listeners and demonstrated high regards for collective voices and input from staff members. In some instances they were leaders and in other they were followers.

Another implication from this study is the power of leading change while managing relationships through trust. These leaders took the time to build relationships with stakeholders and ensured trust through action. They were also advocates for their campuses. When external forces threatened their existence they reached out to the community and communicated honestly. They re-examined what it meant to be exemplary through reflective communication. They used data as evidence to communicate the hard truths (Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008) or brutal facts (Collins, 2001).

This multi-case study adds to the body of research on principal leadership practice that lead high-performing campuses in spite of the challenge of working with children of poverty. The site selection consisted of three schools in a large urban district and due to the qualitative nature of the study the generalization of findings to other scenarios is limited. The participation teachers at large were not included in this study.

Additional research is needed to continue to find how principals lead schools to high-performing levels. As a result of this study several topics emerged as a possibility for further investigation:

- Conduct a comparison study to research principal leadership practices in low socioeconomic and high socioeconomic populations.

- Conduct a longitudinal study to explore the sustainability of Professional Learning Communities as school improvement model over time and beyond the tenure of the current principal.

- Explore the teacher's perception and practices that lead campuses to sustainable high-performing academic achievement.

The principal *leadership responsibilities* relate to one another. The principals in this study echo how these responsibilities occur within each other. For instance, monitoring is related to visibility, curriculum, and focus among all responsibilities. The results support the finding that these principals focused on *destabilizing responsibilities* while engaging in *stabilizing responsibilities* to balance the strategies used to lead the campuses to increased academic achievement among all students. This focus resulted in a cultural shift that engaged teachers in sharing practices to reach the goal of ensuring all students learned at high levels.

Appendices

Appendix A

Table 6: Requirements for Each Rating Category

	Academically Acceptable	Recognized	Exemplary
Base Indicators			
TAKS (2009-10)* • All Students and each student group meeting minimum size: • African American • Hispanic • White • Econ. Disadvantaged * TAKS (Accommodated) included for all grades and subjects.	Meets each standard: • Reading/ELA ... **70%** • Writing .... **70%** • Social Studies.. **70%** • Mathematics.... **60%** • Science............ **55%** **OR** Meets Required Improvement **OR** Meets standard with TPM	Meets **80%** standard for each subject **OR** Meets **75%** floor and Required Improvement **OR** Meets standard with TPM	Meets **90%** standard for each subject **OR** Meets standard with TPM
Completion Rate I (Class of 2009) (if meets minimum size) • All Students • African American • Hispanic • White • Econ. Disadvantaged	Meets **75.0%** standard **OR** Meets Required Improvement	Meets **85.0%** standard **OR** Meets floor of **75.0%** and Required Improvement	Meets **95.0%** standard
Annual Dropout Rate (2008-09) (if meets minimum size) • All Students • African American • Hispanic • White • Econ. Disadvantaged	Meets **1.8%** standard **OR** Meets Required Improvement	Meets **1.8%** standard **OR** Meets Required Improvement	Meets **1.8%** standard **OR** Meets Required Improvement
Additional Provisions			
Exceptions (See Chapter 3 for more details.)	May be applied if district/campus would be *Academically Unacceptable* due to not meeting *Academically Acceptable* criteria.	May be applied if district/campus would be *Academically Acceptable* due to not meeting *Recognized* criteria.	May be applied if district/campus would be *Recognized* due to not meeting *Exemplary* criteria.
Check for Academically Unacceptable Campuses (District only)	Does not apply to *Academically Acceptable* districts.	A district with a campus rated *Academically Unacceptable* cannot be rated *Recognized*.	A district with a campus rated *Academically Unacceptable* cannot be rated *Exemplary*.
Check for Underreported Students (District only)	Does not apply to *Academically Acceptable* districts.	A district that underreports more than **150** students or more than **4.0%** of its prior year students cannot be rated *Recognized*.	A district that underreports more than **150** students or more than **4.0%** of its prior year students cannot be rated *Exemplary*.

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Principal Leadership

Responsibilities	Associated Practices
Culture: *fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation*	Promotes cooperation among staff Promotes a sense of well-being Promotes cohesion among staff Develops an understanding of purpose Develops a shared vision of what the school could be like
Order: *establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines*	Provides and enforces clear structure, rules, and procedures for students Provides and enforces clear structures, rules, and procedures for staff Establishes routines regarding the running of the school that staff understand and follow
Discipline: *protects teachers from issues and Influences that would detract from their teaching Time or focus*	Protects instructional time from interruptions Protects/ shelters teachers from distractions
Resources: *provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs*	Ensures teachers have necessary materials and equipment Ensures teachers have necessary staff development opportunities that directly enhance their teaching
Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and Assessment: *is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and Assessment practices*	Is involved in helping teachers design curricular activities Is involved with teachers to address instructional issues in their classrooms Is involved with teachers to address assessment issues
Focus: *establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention*	Establishes high, concrete goals and expectations that all students meet them Establishes concrete goals for all curriculum, instruction, and assessment Establishes concrete goals for the general functioning of the school Continually keeps attention on established goals
Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment: *is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices*	Is knowledgeable about instructional practices Is knowledgeable about assessment practices Provides conceptual guidance for teachers regarding effective classroom practice
Visibility: *has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students*	Makes systematic frequent visits to classrooms Maintains high visibility around the school Has frequent contact with students
Contingent rewards: *recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments*	Recognizes individuals who excel Uses performance versus seniority as the primary

	criterion for reward and advancement Uses hard work and results as the basis for reward and recognition
Communication: *establishes strong lines of communication with teachers* and among students	Is easily accessible to teachers Develops effective means for teachers to communicate with one another Maintains open and effective lines of communication with staff
Outreach: *is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders*	Assures the school is in compliance with district and state mandates Advocates on behalf of the school in the community Advocates for the school with parents Ensures the central office is aware of the school's accomplishments
Input: *involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies*	Provides opportunity for input on all important decisions Provides opportunities for staff to be involved in developing school policies Uses leadership team in decision making
Affirmation: *recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments and acknowledges failures*	Systematically and fairly recognizes and celebrates accomplishments of teachers Systematically and fairly recognizes and celebrates accomplishments of students Systematically acknowledges failures and celebrates accomplishments of the school
Relationship: *demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff*	Remains aware of personal needs of teachers Maintains personal relationships with teachers Is informed about significant personal issues within the lives of staff members Acknowledges significant events in the lives of staff members
Change agent: *is willing o and actively challenges the status quote*	Consciously challenges the status quote Is comfortable with leading change initiatives with uncertain outcomes Systematically considers new and better ways of doing things
Optimize: *inspires and leads new and challenging innovations*	Inspires teachers to accomplish things that might seem beyond their grasp Portrays a positive attitude about the ability of the staff to accomplish substantial things Is a driving force behind major initiatives
Ideals/beliefs: *communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs*	Holds strong professional beliefs about school, teaching, and learning Shares beliefs about schools, teaching, and learning with the staff Demonstrates behaviors that are consistent with beliefs
Monitors/evaluates: *monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning*	Monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction, and assessment
Flexibility: *adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable*	Is comfortable with major changes how things are done

with dissent	Encourages people to express opinions contrary to those with authority Adapts leadership style to needs of specific situations Can be directive or non-directive as the situation warrants
Situational awareness: *is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses This information to address current and potential Problems*	Is aware of informal groups and relationships among staff of the school Is aware of issues in the school that have not surfaced but could create discord Can predict what could go wrong from day to day
Intellectual stimulation: ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture	Keeps informed about current research and theory regarding effective schooling Continually exposes the staff to cutting-edge ideas about how to be effective Systematically engages staff in discussions about current research and theory Continually involves the staff in reading articles and books about effective practices

Note: Reprinted with express permission from McREL. (Waters and Cameron, 2007, p. 15).

Appendix C

Calendar of Activities

A brief description of activities and timelines related to the study is disclosed from the

initial stages of study to the final presentation of research report to doctoral committee:

Timeline	Activity
August 2010	Research proposal presented to committee Institutional Review Board Application submitted for approval; initiate approval process from selected school district
Beginning of September 2010	Initial meeting to gain access to campuses selected
Mid September through October 2010	Focus groups, personal interviews, document gathering
October through December 2010	Data analysis, coding, member checks
January 2011	Write up of findings and conclusions
February 2011	Submission of findings to dissertation chair
March 2011	Submission of findings to committee members
April 2011	Presentation of final dissertation defense

Appendix D

Semi Structured Interview for **Principal**

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. My research project is an essential part of my requirements for my doctoral studies at the University of Texas at Austin. The study focuses on how leadership strategies conceived and employed by successful principals who led the transformation of high-performing urban elementary schools in high-poverty areas and influence academic achievement. Due to the success that your school has experienced under your leadership, the information that you provide is considered important and essential in response to the inquiry of this study. This session will be tape recorded and transcribed. Your responses will be kept confidential and no personally identifiable information will be included in the final dissertation.

Have you had an opportunity to review and sign the consent form?   ___yes ___no

Do you agree to this interview being tape recorded?   ___yes ___no

Do you have any questions before we begin?   ___yes ___no

1. Please describe your role in your current work location and the length of time you served in this capacity?

2. What prior experiences and leadership roles have you had and how long have you been in the district?

3. Based on the 2009 and 2010 State of Texas Accountability System, your school received an Exemplary Rating. In retrospect, what was the general condition of your campus at the time you initiated the change process?

4. What are the most outstanding challenges you recall having to address in your effort to bring about change?

5. Describe the planning process utilized that guided your actions and those of your staff and your community.

6. Can you identify instructional leadership and/or managerial actions that you initiated and carried out that in your opinion made a major difference in the school's ability to transform into a high-performing campus?

7. How did these actions make a difference in changing the school's ability to improve the current condition of your school?

8. Describe the instructional decision making structures and processes that were employed that you believe may have resulted in increased academic achievement.

9. During the implementation of these organizational changes and strategies, what barriers or enabling forces did you encounter?

10. As the leader, how did you address them?

11. How did you ensure alignment and commitment to the goals described in your planning process?

12. What type of evaluation strategies were utilized to assist in ongoing decision-making process?

13. What else do you recall about the school's initial condition and the process that was undertaken under your leadership that you believe may have significantly influenced the result of campus achieving an Exemplary rating?

14. What else would you like to add that I didn't to ask?

Appendix E

Semi Structured Interview for **Assistant Principal and Teacher Leader**

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. My research project is an essential part of my requirements for my doctoral studies at the University of Texas at Austin. The study focuses on how leadership strategies conceived and employed by successful principals who lead the transformation of high-performing urban elementary schools in high-poverty areas influence academic achievement. Due to the success that your school has experienced under your principal's leadership, the information that you provide is considered important and essential in response to the inquiry of this study. This session will be tape recorded and transcribed. Your responses will be kept confidential and no personally identifiable information will be included in the final dissertation.

Had you had an opportunity to review and sign the consent form?

___yes ___no

Do you agree to this interview being tape recorded?

 ___yes ___no

Do you have any questions before we begin?

 ___yes ___no

1. Please describe your role in your current work location and the length of time you served in this capacity?

2. What prior experiences have you had and how long have you been in the district?

3. Based on the 2009 and 2010 State of Texas Accountability System, your school received an Exemplary Rating. In retrospect, what was the general condition of your campus at the time you initiated the change process?

4. What are the most outstanding challenges you recall your principal had to address in her/his effort to bring about change?

5. Describe the planning process utilized that guided the actions taken by the staff and the community.

6. Can you identify instructional leadership and/or managerial actions that your principal initiated and carried out that in your opinion made a major difference in the school's ability to transform into a high-performing campus?

7. How did these actions make a difference in changing the school's ability to improve the current condition of your school?

8. Describe the instructional decision making structures and processes that were employed that you believe may have resulted in increased academic achievement.

9. During the implementation of these organizational changes and strategies, what barriers or enabling forces did the principal encounter?

10. As the leader, how did he/she address them?

11. How did the principal ensure alignment and commitment to the goals described in your planning process?

12. What type of evaluation strategies were utilized to assist in ongoing decision-making process?

13. What else do you recall about the school's initial condition and the process that was undertaken under your principal's leadership that you believe may have significantly influenced the result of campus achieving an Exemplary rating?

14. What else would you like to add that I didn't to ask?

Consent Form for Study

Title: Principal Leadership in High-performing, High-poverty Urban Elementary Schools

IRB Protocol # 2010-08-0057

Conducted by: Angie Miranda, Educational Administration, (832) 385-8112

angiemira@aol.com

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Ruben Olivarez of The University of Texas at Austin

Department/Office: Educational Administration, Telephone: (512) 475-8579

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The person in charge of this research will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can stop your participation at any time and you refusal will not impact current or future relationships with UT Austin or participation sites. To do so, simply tell the researcher you wish to stop participation. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent for your records.

The **purpose of this study** is to determine how principal leadership influence student academic achievement in high-performing, high-poverty schools. It is anticipated nine to twelve respondents representing various roles in the school will be interviewed.

If you agree to be in the study, we will ask you to do the following things:

- Participate in an interview for approximately 60 minutes

- If necessary, provided documents that support interview statements

Risks of the study:

- This study may involve risks that are currently unforeseeable.

- Though actions will be taken to prevent the loss of confidentiality there is a risk that confidentiality could be lost

- If you wish to discuss the information above or any other risks you may experience, you may ask questions now or call the Principal Investigator listed at the top of this page.

Benefits of the study: Respondents may benefit from the reflective process of answering questions regarding how principal leadership influenced student achievement in high-performing, high-poverty schools.

Compensation: There is no compensation associated with participating in this study.

Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:

- Respondents' privacy will be maintained by conducting interviews only with those individuals who have given their consent and by arranging interviews at a time and location convenient to the respondent.

- Respondents will be able to ask questions about the research ad will be able to end the interview or withdraw permission to be included in the research.

- Confidentiality of respondents will be maintained by removing personal identifiable information form transcripts. Each respondent will be assigned a code number and this number will be associated with any data that is derived from the interview. Quotes included in the final report will not specify the work

assignment or role of a respondent unless there are multiple respondents with the same role.

- The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that can associate you with it, or with your participation in the study.

The records of this study will be stored securely and kept confidential. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin, members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and (study sponsors, if any) have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of these records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make possible to identify you as a subject. Throughout the study, the researchers will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions about the study please ask now. If you have questions later, want additional information, or wish to withdraw your participation call the researcher conducting the study. Contact information has been included at the top of this page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, complaints, concerns, or questions about the research please contact The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at (512) 232-2685 or the Office of Research Support and Compliance at (512) 471-8871 or email

orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu. You will be given a copy of this information to keep for you records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in the study. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:_____

Date:_____

_____

Date:_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Investigator:_____

Date:_____

Appendix G

Comparison Principal Studies

Research Elements	School Leadership Study	Study for Learning Improvement in Urban Schools	Improving School leadership Study	Five High-performing, High-poverty School
Finding 1	Developing people: principals offer intellectual support, and motivate people to do their work as well as provide models for practice and support.	Develop teacher leadership capacity.	Build trust	Setting high expectations for all learners.
Finding 2	Setting directions for the organization: Principals develop shared goals, monitor performance, and promote effective communication.	Create partnership with informal school leaders.	Create formal and informal networks.	Sharing leadership and staying engaged.
Finding 3	Redesigning the organization: principals create a productive school culture, modify organizational structures, promote collaboration.	Establish trust, openness to critique, focus on instruction.	Foster communication	Encourage collaboration among faculty and staff.
Finding 4		Principals need to be	Exerting pressure and	Use assessment

		comfortable exercising discretion and acting more entrepreneurially in the context of accountability	influence	data to support student success.
Finding 5		School operations and resources are vital to creating infrastructure for Learning.	Promoting an improved quality of leadership, policies and initiatives	Keeping the focus on students.
Finding 6		Fluent in the use of data as a leadership tool	Building capacity for the work	Addressing barriers to learning
			Identifying strong individuals with political and social capital to lead the work and connecting to other reform efforts.	Reinforcing classroom learning at home by engaging families.

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