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# Dominant Leadership Dynamics of School Administrators Leading Non-Instructional Personnel

Michael Ewton

*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

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Dominant Leadership Dynamics of School Administrators Leading Non-Instructional Personnel

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Michael Ewton  
Covenant College  
Bachelor of Science in Organizational Management, 2000  
Columbus State University  
Master of Public Administration, 2007  
Kennesaw State University  
Educational Specialist in Educational Leadership, 2013

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University of Arkansas

The dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Kevin P. Brady, Ph.D.  
Dissertation Chair

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Ed Bengtson, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

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Kara A. Lasater, Ed.D.  
Committee Member

## ABSTRACT

With the literature and many schools and school districts advocating for enhanced communication and engagement with parents, families, and the community at large, it is advisable that school-level administrators consider the manner in which they engage the non-instructional employees who serve their schools. This dissertation explores the dominant leadership dynamics experienced by high school principals responsible for supervising non-instructional support services and leading non-instructional operations personnel in their schools. Trained and expected to be instructional leaders, principals must still ensure their students receive the basic services necessary to maintain a safe and effective learning environment. Ensuring students receive the benefit of meal service, bus transportation, facilities maintenance, and janitorial services are essential responsibilities of principals, but may seem contradictory to a quixotic notion of instructional leadership. This phenomenological qualitative inquiry compares leadership styles used by school administrators when leading non-instructional personnel as compared to those utilized with instructional faculty. Challenges examined in the inquiry include the navigation of organizational complexities involved with non-instructional operational services provided by the school district and the leading of outsourced employees in schools. Specific complexities explored in the study include school district organizational structure, the outsourcing of non-instructional services and employees, the delegation of principal responsibilities, and the discovery of employees who perceive themselves to be isolated from the school community. Finally, this research delves into the manner in which principal preparatory and professional development programs prepare school administrators to lead non-instructional staff in the performance of their fundamental school operational functions. Implications of the findings and recommendations for future practice include school –level administrator

professional development relating to the engagement of and communication with non-instructional support personnel in their schools. Additional practical recommendations involve district-level program evaluations to determine the current effectiveness of organizational service structures and the outsourcing of operational services and staffing.

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My daughters, Chelsea Ewton and Morgan Elder, through their love and encouragement have been a constant source of inspiration for me throughout this long academic journey. I love them both very much and am as proud of them as a dad can be.

Finally, I cannot say enough about my wife, Tena Ewton. As my intellectual and emotional soulmate, she is my constant source of strength and confidence. It does not seem like enough to thank her and say that I love her beyond measure. I hope she senses my sincerity when I say I could not have accomplished this goal without her.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents. My late father, Michael F. “Mickey” Ewton, Sr., helped to form in me an appreciation for pragmatic research work. Some of my fondest early memories are visits to libraries and even the National Archives, in the pre-Internet 1970’s, viewing countless miles of microfilm in search of genealogical evidence of our family’s origins and history. My mother, Dr. Lelia C. Mullis, is undoubtedly my most foundational academic role model. Throughout my childhood, she taught elementary school (and later college) while she herself was a graduate student. I have many childhood memories of visiting university student centers and libraries while mom was in class or working on her own research. These early experiences helped me to view higher education as a normal part of life. Words cannot express what my parents’ example, support, and unconditional love have meant to me as a professional, as a researcher, and as a person.

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## CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership dynamics experienced by school administrators supervising non-instructional personnel in the performance of school operations. The primary role of the modern principal is commonly regarded as serving as the instructional leader for their school. It is widely recognized that the core business of any school system is to facilitate student learning by providing quality instruction and learning opportunities (Schlechty, 2009). Perhaps not as readily realized is that approximately half of the employees working in the nation's public schools do not provide direct instruction to students (Loeb, 2016). During the 2014-2015 school year, for example, there were over 3.1 million teachers working in U.S. public schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Nearly that same number of employees provided non-instructional services ranging from school administration and guidance counseling to transportation and school nutrition services (Loeb, 2016).

With a heavy emphasis of school administrator leadership development often placed on instructional leadership, one may find it reasonable to question whether building level administrators find unique challenges in leading non-instructional personnel and managing non-instructional school operations functions. Do the same leadership characteristics and styles commonly associated with being an instructional leader lend themselves to effective leadership of non-instructional operations staff? One element of focus for this study was to determine whether school principals often employ similar leadership and management styles with non-instructional support personnel and functions compared to supervising teachers and directing instructional concerns.

The leadership style most commonly associated with instructional leadership for school improvement and often referred to in the literature as desirable of modern principals is transformational leadership. The effect of transformational leadership is described as influencing followers by leading them to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the organization (Bass, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Burns, 1978).

Other major school leadership styles discussed in the literature include transactional leadership and passive avoidance or laissez-faire leadership styles (Bass, 1985). Transactional leadership occurs when “the leader rewards or disciplines the follower depending on the adequacy of the follower’s performance” (Bass, 1998, p. 6). These transactions may involve the exchange of goods and services, currency, psychological, political, emotional or other attention or benefit (Burns, 1978). Finally, passive avoidance or laissez-faire leadership is the lack of effective leadership and is described by Bass (1998) as a “non-transaction” where authority is never exercised (p. 7).

While every effective leader must use a combination of the transformational and transactional leadership styles from time to time and under various conditions, school administrators likely have a dominant leadership style that they tend to utilize most often. The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership dynamics experienced by school administrators supervising non-instructional personnel in the performance of school operations. An additional goal of this inquiry was to determine whether and to what extent administrator leadership styles differ depending on the instructional or non-instructional context of their personnel interactions.

This phenomenological qualitative study explored whether principals who consider themselves primarily to be instructional leaders and who perceive that they utilize the transformational leadership style in their dealings with matters of classroom instruction are equally as effective when interacting with operational support functions outside the classroom. Differences in professional background, educational level, job function, and organizational reporting structures were some of the foreseeable elements that could have possibly necessitated leadership style differences for principals interacting with both instructional and non-instructional operations employees.

Among the factors that make leading non-instructional operations markedly different from instructional functions is that many non-instructional operational personnel do not report directly to the building-level school administrator. In fact, some operations personnel may not be school system employees at all. As was the case with the school system that was the subject of this inquiry, common school operational functions including transportation, student nutrition, facilities maintenance, information technology, custodial services, school nursing, and security services are often managed at the school system level. Furthermore, any or all of these functions may be subject to outsourcing by contracting with private companies or through agreements with other governmental entities outside of the school system.

School conditions such as a clean and secure facility, safe and dependable bus transportation, and the service of nutritious meals are indispensable parts of facilitating effective learning environments (Bartlett & Herlocker, 2010). Today's school principals are tasked with making sure that their individual schools provide these essential services in order to support students. These services are considered essential to creating conditions conducive to learning. Although many of the non-instructional operations employees who perform these functions often

report to system-level supervisors or to managers from the outside entities by which they are employed, building-level administrators find it necessary to communicate and coordinate with these employees on a regular basis. This complex organizational relationship and lack of a direct school-level reporting structure may potentially cause complications with school-level administrators' ability to supervise operations personnel and to manage support functions as efficiently as they might if the non-instructional staff members reported directly to school administrators. Conversely, system level or contractor support may prevent principals from having to spend as much time coordinating operations functions as they may if all operations functions were managed at the school level (Chan & Richardson, 2005).

This phenomenological qualitative study was conducted in three high schools within a public school system located in a southern state. This school system's professional learning emphasis for school-level administrators over the last decade has concentrated on school improvement and school climate enhancement facilitated through the building of instructional leadership capacity by school-level administration. The inquiry explored the manner in which strong instructional leaders lead non-instructional operations staff and manage school operations functions.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem of practice of school-level administrators having to balance their responsibilities as instructional leaders with leading non-instructional operations staff in the performance of their duties and responsibilities presents challenges worthy of further inquiry. Public school systems are complex organizations comprised of employees who perform functions ranging from classroom instruction and school administration to food preparation and

janitorial cleaning services. Of the approximately 1,676 employees working in the subject school district, 585 are classified as non-instructional support staff employed by the school system. Approximately 190 additional support staff members work for private service companies or other governmental entities contracted to perform certain operations and support functions within the school system. The addition of these outsourced employees brings the total number of personnel working in the school district to 1,866. Due to there being no established position limit, these numbers exclude substitute teachers working in the district.

Among the services performed by the 775 non-instructional support staff in this school system are: food service, student transportation, facilities maintenance, information technology, custodial services, school nursing, finance, human resources, office administrative, and school safety and security. These services are important since they can have a direct impact on student learning environments (Bartlett & Herlocker, 2010).

Through their direct or indirect impact on students, each of these service functions has the potential to affect students in either a positive or negative way (Reeves, 2010). According to a 2016 study by the Brookings Institute, evidence exists to suggest that the roles of non-teaching staff in schools can be noticeably influential on students (Loeb, 2016). It is, therefore, important that school improvement efforts not be limited exclusively to teachers and those providing direct student instruction (Loeb, 2016). With non-instructional operations staff comprising nearly half of all employees in many school systems and their potential for influencing the learning environment or having direct impact on individual students, the manner in which these employees are supported and led may have significant influence on the school environment and therefore could have an impact on student success.

In addition to potential influence on the learning environment, non-instructional support employees may influence public perception of their schools. According to the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), the majority of public information from local schools is disseminated by the school secretary followed by custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and classroom aides. Teachers, principals, central office administrators, and board members complete the list as the least prevalent source of public information distribution (National School Public Relations Association, 2001). Whether or not this assertion is true of all schools, the recognition that non-instructional support staff have a voice in the community suggests that their involvement and understanding of what happens at school may play a part in informing the community's perceptions. It is conceivable that school-level administrators' leadership styles could directly influence the message delivered to and through the non-instructional support personnel in their schools.

### **Focus on Systemic Issues**

Although most operational services are managed at the system level or are outsourced to outside entities through system-level contracts, it is not unusual for many school-level administrators to oversee or coordinate basic support functions and to interact with and lead operations department staff members in the course of routine school management functions. Senior district-level administrators within the subject school system have recently been engaged in conversations regarding the preparation that principals receive both prior to assignment and during their tenure as school administrators. These discussions included the management of resources and non-instructional school functions. With the primary emphasis of professional learning and school-level leadership development in recent years concentrating on school improvement through instructional leadership, little emphasis has been placed on principal



preparation for management functions such as budgeting, human resources management, or the leadership of non-instructional operations personnel and the management of non-instructional operations functions.

The overarching concern regarding whether school-level administrators in the school system are adequately supported in their preparation to proficiently manage non-instructional functions and to effectively lead the employees who perform these tasks is that there may be school climate and school improvement implications. Some school improvement researchers emphasize the importance of including employees of all levels and work groups within a school or school system in climate and improvement efforts. Such efforts include treating all employees with respect and recognizing their importance in interacting with and impacting the success of students (Bartlett, 2010; Reeves, 2010). The circumstances existing within the school system prior to the study indicated that administrators did not actively engage non-instructional operations staff members in the same manner that teachers are engaged by school administration in their school climate and improvement efforts.

This study could serve to inform future professional development of school administrators. The school system involved in this study has recently designed and initiated a new leadership academy for aspiring leaders within the district. The vision of this program is to prepare future assistant principals and principals to be effective school leaders in keeping with the vision, mission, and beliefs of the school system. The district-level administration has increasingly come to recognize the importance of preparing school-level administrators with a balanced approach for leading all types of employees and managing the complexities in all areas of school business and operations as being essential to the support of classroom instruction.

## **Directly Observable**

Leadership challenges experienced by principals interacting with non-instructional operations staff are directly observable. Among the most fundamental of such challenges is the fact that most employees performing non-instructional support functions do not always report directly to the principal. Due to economic and operational necessities, functions such as transportation, food service, custodial services, information technology support, and school security are managed at the school system level with resources divided among individual schools.

Although school principals in the district are not usually responsible for the human resources functions of recruiting, hiring, scheduling, paying, promoting, and terminating non-instructional operations staff, they are responsible for making sure that their various functions are performed satisfactorily in the interest of the students, staff, and visitors at their schools. Prior to conducting this study, it was thought that issues might sometimes arise when operations employees who report to a manager or director at the central level are given possibly conflicting direction by principals at their assigned schools. Reporting to two supervisors may cause frustration for the support employee just as it may for the principal dealing with the potential inefficiency of communicating through a third party outside of the school in order to correct service issues inside the building. This organizational complexity could be further aggravated when the persons performing the operations tasks are not employed by the school system as in the case with outsourced services and personnel.

A typical issue that illustrates the difficulties principals encounter due to complex organizational reporting structures occurs when addressing service failures. Custodians that work

in the schools are employed by a private company that contracts with the school system to provide janitorial services in every school and administrative building within the school district. In accordance with the terms of the service contract, each school now has a lead custodian who serves as liaison with the principal, but employees of the custodial service provider report directly to supervisors of the contracting company. Although principals or other school-level officials are expected to be able to communicate with custodians about routine tasks and requests, there have been times when they have not had effective direct recourse for addressing service failures as they are not authorized to reprimand or substantially redirect the custodians that work in their buildings. When these types of issues arise, principals must contact the custodial contractor representative. If the company does not satisfactorily address the service failure, the principal then must contact the school system's director of facilities maintenance who will in turn contact the janitorial services contractor and deal with the issue from a contractual standpoint. A recent change in custodial contractor has apparently corrected many of the service failure frustrations principals had been experiencing in the past, but the organizational complexities remain.

This complex communication structure is but one example of some of the frustrations some principals may experience when dealing with non-instructional operations service functions. It may, at times, seem that the financial benefit of outsourcing certain support services has come at some cost to school system functionality.

The study of this problem of practice sought to determine if principals' predominant leadership styles are altered when dealing with non-instructional functions and communicating with non-instructional operations personnel in a complex organizational setting. The observable

nature of the issue to members of the school community contributed to the viability of the problem of practice as an important research topic.

### **Actionable**

The results of this inquiry may be used to inform the future professional development of existing principals, assistant principals, and district-level administrators as well as other future aspiring leaders. Over the course of the two previous school years, the superintendent and her cabinet collaborated with an outside consulting organization in the development of a leadership academy designed to provide aspiring leaders with a common set of leadership skills. The primary intent of the program is to benefit the school district by building school-level leadership capacity for the future. The new aspiring leaders program seeks to develop both instructional and operational leadership capacity in order to produce well-rounded principals and assistant principals who share a common body of knowledge throughout the district. The program replaces an older leadership academy, retired approximately five years prior, which focused almost entirely on instructional leadership to the exclusion of all other functions that principals and assistant principals realistically have to ensure are performed in the course of their day-to-day responsibilities.

A portion of the new curriculum addresses the management of school resources and facilities. This addition will serve to better prepare school-level administrators for managing business and operations functions in their schools, but it does not yet address the specific leadership challenges of leading non-instructional personnel. The results of the inquiry could help to provide perspective for school-level administrators, system-level operations directors, private service and staffing providers, as well as some of the non-instructional operations staff

that work with or for them. Deeper understanding of the phenomenon could help to strengthen and potentially inform the development of the non-instructional leadership segments of the district's aspiring leaders program.

### **Connects to a Broader Strategy of Improvement**

This problem of practice focuses on the leadership challenges of school-level administrators in leading non-instructional operations staff and managing operational functions in their schools. In order to understand how this problem of practice connects to a broader strategy of improvement, it is first necessary to be familiar with the district's stated vision, mission, and beliefs.

The vision, mission, and beliefs statements of the school district were thoughtfully written, updated, and revised over a ten-year period by groups of teachers, administrators, support staff, community members, and other stakeholders. These guiding documents are prominently displayed in every school, office, administrative facility, as well as on the district's website and social media platforms. These tenets are also intended to be utilized as the basis for important strategic as well as tactical decisions made throughout the district. Examples include the development of the school system's strategic plan and professional learning priorities. The vision, mission, and beliefs of the school system state:

**Vision:** We envision a valued and dynamic school district that prepares students for success in a global community.

**Mission:** Our mission is to maximize student learning by providing challenging and engaging educational experiences in a safe and supportive environment.

**Beliefs:**

1. We believe the needs of students, personnel, families, and the community are best met with a unified direction.
2. We believe our purpose is to lead students to success by engaging them in challenging and meaningful work.
3. We believe teachers are leaders who design learning experiences for students.
4. We believe our personnel, families, and community members are vital to the education of our students.
5. We believe in creating and maintaining a safe, inviting, and inclusive learning environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

The district's beliefs emphasize the importance of involving all students, personnel, families, and community members in the education of students. Additionally, emphasis is placed on the need for all members of the school community to have a "unified direction" and to provide "a safe, inviting, and inclusive learning environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect". Given the use of the terms, "everyone" and "all personnel", it may be presumed that both administrators and non-instructional support personnel are to be included as important contributors to school climate and improvement efforts as well as members of the greater school community. It would, therefore, be considered essential that administrators are able to effectively lead and professionally interact with all employees in the school community. The study examined the challenges that may accompany leading non-instructional personnel working in their respective schools.

## High Leverage

The ability to identify and address challenges that school administrators experience in the course of their daily duties leading non-instructional support staff is fundamental to supporting positive and healthy school climates. Challenges encountered by principals include difficulties effectively communicating with employees that do not report directly to the principal, but who perform functions that directly impact the school. Another challenge contemplated in the design of this study was the potential impact of administrators taking time away from instructional matters in order to manage basic school operational tasks.

With new national standards for school leadership emphasizing the need for school administrators to be culturally responsive, it is increasingly important for school leaders to recognize the need for including all school employees as members of the school community (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). These efforts may yield dividends in school culture and climate enhancement and further assist in the engagement of families and the community at large.

Having declared safe and inviting school environments and respect for others to be priorities in the school system's vision, mission, and beliefs statements, the school district has intentionally placed an emphasis on promoting a positive school climate. Professional interactions, relationships, and principal leadership styles have the potential of playing a significant role in the growth or stunting of a school's climate, learning environment, and student achievement (National School Climate Council, 2007). A healthy school climate is dependent upon the contributions of all adults in the school. Including non-instructional support personnel,

every adult plays a significant role in positively influencing students, other staff members, and the community at large (Reeves, 2003).

Approximately half of all employees working in the school system are non-instructional support and operations staff. Realizing that each of these individuals has a voice in their communities that have the potential to influence public perception of the school and the school system, make the understanding of leadership style implications and the maintaining of positive professional relationships between administrators and non-instructional operations staff a high-leverage proposition.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions addressed in this inquiry are:

**RQ1.** What leadership challenges do school-level administrators encounter when supervising non-instructional personnel?

**RQ2.** Are the dominant leadership styles used by school-level administrators for leading non-instructional personnel comparable to those used for leading instructional personnel?

**RQ3.** How can school-level leaders be more effectively prepared to lead non-instructional personnel in the performance of essential school operational functions?

### **Overview of Methodology**

The methodological approach for the study was a phenomenological qualitative inquiry. Qualitative data were collected at three high schools located within a single school district



located in a southern state. Individual interviews with principals and assistant principals from the three schools were conducted. In addition to school administrator interviews, two separate sets of focus groups were also conducted at each of the same schools. The first focus group set consisted of non-instructional operations personnel with the second set of three focus groups being comprised of teachers. The composition of the non-instructional personnel focus groups were a combination of employees from the various operations groups serving the schools. Non-instructional participants included school nutrition workers, custodians, maintenance technicians, and bus drivers. Participants in the instructional faculty focus group were teachers from various academic departments with varying degrees of career seniority.

The study's interview and focus group protocols (Appendices A, B, and C) defined questions designed to answer the established research questions. The Research Question and Research Instrument Map demonstrates the alignment between questions in the research instrument and the overarching research questions for this inquiry.

## **Research Question and Research Instrument Map**

### **Research Questions**

- RQ1 What leadership challenges do school-level administrators encounter when supervising non-instructional personnel?
  
- RQ2 Are the dominant leadership styles used by school-level administrators for leading non-instructional personnel comparable to those used for leading instructional personnel?
  
- RQ3 How can school-level leaders be more effectively prepared to lead non-instructional personnel in the performance of essential school operational functions?

### **Interview Protocol - Individual School Administrator (Appendix A)**

- |     |   |     |
|-----|---|-----|
| Q1  | Tell me about your background in education, especially in educational leadership.   | RQ3 |
| Q2  | What are your favorite aspects of your work?  |     |
| Q3  | What are the most important of your responsibilities?   |     |
| Q4  | What are your greatest frustrations and why?  |     |
| Q5  | How much of your average workday involves managing non-instructional school functions such as buses, custodial, food service, security, or technology issues?                     | RQ1 |
| Q6  | Do you delegate primary responsibility for these types of functions to an assistant principal or do you routinely manage them yourself?   |     |
| Q7  | Take a moment to read these descriptions of leadership styles (Appendix D) and tell me which best describes your primary leadership style.  | RQ2 |
| Q8  | Given your leadership style characteristics, do you think you use the same leadership style when leading non-instructional personnel as you do instructional staff?               | RQ2 |
|     | Prompt: Do the nature of their jobs require variations of leadership style?   | RQ2 |
| Q9  | When there are issues with non-instructional functions, what do you do?   | RQ2 |
|     | Prompt: Direct to employees, manager, district level directors, contractor / outsourced provider management, etc.   |     |
| Q10 | What have been your greatest challenges leading non-instructional personnel?  | RQ1 |
| Q11 | Are non-instructional operations staff included as members of the school community? (included in staff meetings, celebrations, school initiatives, etc)                           | RQ1 |
| Q12 | Thinking back to your graduate and professional development work, what preparation have you had for leading non-instructional personnel and managing non-instructional functions? | RQ2 |

- Prompt: Was there a mentor who guided you along your professional path to becoming a school administrator? RQ3
- Prompt: If so, did they offer guidance with regard to supervising non-instructional tasks and employees? RQ3
- Q13 If you could talk to the younger you who just graduated college and was entering the field of education for the first time, what advice would you give yourself? RQ3
- Q14 What else should we have talked about that we haven't?

### **Focus Group Protocol - Non-Instructional Personnel (Appendix B)**

- Q1 Remembering to use your assumed name, please introduce yourselves to the group.  
 Prompt: Tell us about your background working in the school system.
- Q2 Prompt: What attracted you to your career field?  
 Tell us what you do at work?  
 Prompt: Do you have a daily routine? What tasks do you perform on a normal day? Who do you interact with through the course of your day?
- Q3 What are your favorite aspects of your work?  
 Prompt: Is your work exciting? What makes it that way? Do you consider your current employment to be a job or a career? Why?
- Q4 What are your greatest work frustrations and why?  
 Prompt: People? Processes? Communication? Recognition?
- Q5 Who do report to? RQ1  
 Prompt: If more than one person, does this work smoothly or does it cause issues? Is the reporting structure clear? How would you realign organizational chart?
- Q6 When something goes wrong or there is a problem in your work area, Who do you go to for help?

Prompt: Department / system-level supervisor, principal, assistant principal, peers? Why?

- Q7 How would you describe your working relationship with the principal and assistant principal at your school?  
 Prompt: (\*\* Make sure each of these questions are answered. \*\*): RQ2
- Do you usually communicate with the principal directly or with an assistant principal or other designee at the school?
- Do you believe that the principal or assistant principal understand the work that you and your departments do? RQ2
- Do you believe that the principal or assistant principal appreciate the work that you and your departments do? RQ3
- Do you ever receive conflicting directives from your department supervisor and a school administrator? RQ2
- Q8 Are you “in the loop” of what is going on in the school? RQ1  
 Prompt: Are you involved in school meetings, parties, training, etc?, PBIS familiarity? Participation in training or safety planning? Included in school community? RQ2
- Q9 Take a moment to read these descriptions of leadership styles displayed on the sheets in front of you (Appendix D). Indicate two characteristics of your school administrator. RQ2
- Q10 What else would you like for me to know about you, your department, or your school? RQ2

### **Focus Group Protocol - Instructional Faculty (Appendix C)**

- Q1 What do you teach and how long have you been doing it?
- Q2 Reflecting on your career, what led you to the field of public education?
- Q3 What are your favorite aspects of the work you do?  
 Prompt: Is your work interesting or exciting? What makes it that way?
- Q4 What are your greatest frustrations and why?

Prompt: People, processes, communication, recognition?

Q5 When something goes wrong in your work area, who do you go to for help?

Prompt: Department head, principal, assistant principal, peers? Why?

Q6 How would you describe your working relationship with the principal and assistant principals of your school?

Q7 Take a moment to read these descriptions of leadership styles displayed on the sheets in front of you (Appendix D). Indicate two characteristics of your school administrator. RQ2

Q8 Are you "in the loop" or informed of what's going on in the school?

Q9 Do you have opportunity to observe interactions between school administrators and non-instructional operations staff? Describe interactions. RQ2

Q10 Are non-instructional operations staff included as members of the school community (included in staff meetings, celebrations, school initiatives, etc). RQ1

Q11 What are the strongest points your school has going for it? RQ2

Q12 What areas could use more focus or support?

Q13 What else would you like for me to know about you and your school?

### **Positionality**

The term “positionality” in the context of this study is defined as the role and perspective that I, as the researcher, brought to the inquiry. The inquiry took place within the school system in which I am employed as the assistant superintendent for operations. This school system is made up of over thirteen thousand students in 23 schools. The school system has a moderately-high rate of poverty as evidenced by its free and reduced price meal rate exceeding 72%.

Demographically, students throughout the school system are classified as being 53% white, 41%

Latino /Hispanic, 2% African American, 3% two or more races, and 1% other races or ethnicities.

Most of the school system's non-instructional operations functions are managed by directors or other supervisors at the district level while some are outsourced through contracts with private service providers or through intergovernmental agreements with other public entities. The transportation, information technology, school nutrition, and facilities maintenance departments each have their own directors and subordinate supervisors who oversee and coordinate each department's operations at the school and district levels. Department supervisors are the usual point of contact for principals and other building administrators needing assistance with the various support service functions.

Janitorial and grounds maintenance services are outsourced through a combination of outside private corporations and public entities which have their own supervisory and management structures. Managers from these organizations work directly with the director of facilities maintenance who is internally responsible for execution and fulfillment of these service contracts. The school nutrition department has a combination of in-house school system employees and line workers provided through a private staffing service. My work responsibilities include the oversight, guidance, and support of the directors of the school nutrition, facilities maintenance, transportation, and information technology departments. I do not, however, manage the day-to-day functions of these departments.

### **Researcher's Role**

In addition to being the researcher in the study, I am a district-level administrator responsible for overseeing nearly all of the non-instructional operations functions within the

district engaged in the study. As assistant superintendent responsible for district operations, the directors of the various operations groups previously described report directly to me. Each department also has one or two additional supervisory levels between the director and customer-facing service providers or line workers.

Given my organizational positionality, I am uniquely situated to observe and investigate this problem of practice. My work responsibilities also involve regular communication with principals and other stakeholders who may be affected by the operations services provided to the schools. I am confident that the professional working relationships and rapport I enjoy with school principals and assistant principals helped to obtain candid and meaningful feedback in the course of the inquiry. The administrators involved in the study do not report to me nor do I participate in their employee evaluations. Although I was not personally familiar with many teachers involved in the study, it is also true that I do not evaluate or supervise any of the teachers who participated in the instructional staff focus groups.

Although front line non-instructional operations staff do work within the greater purview of my work responsibilities, these staff members have other supervisors and do not report directly to me. There are typically two other supervisors on the organizational chart that separate my position from the participants in the non-instructional focus groups. It became clear to me that approximately half of the non-instructional focus group participants were unfamiliar with me and my position prior to the informed consent interview disclosure being provided to them at the beginning of the focus group processes. For these reasons, I as a researcher, was positioned to have a perspective to understand the situations described by inquiry participants without placing employees in a position of feeling pressured to participate in the study or to provide answers other than their own honest and candid responses. Participants were thoroughly and explicitly

assured that their participation was voluntary and that there would be no repercussions for any information they may share.

Exposure to routine information and work experiences surrounding the problem of practice may sometimes tend to lead to researcher biases. Whether they be real or perceived, acknowledgement of potential bias and taking steps in the research design to neutralize the effects of any preconceived ideas surrounding the research problem served as a protective safeguard ensuring objective data gathering, analysis, and reporting (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Readers are receiving full disclosure of my positionality as researcher and of potential concerns of bias. Every effort was made to recognize researcher bias and to mitigate it throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting phases of the inquiry.

### **Assumptions**

Given the stated positionality and the goals of this inquiry, it was assumed that building-level administrators at least occasionally encounter challenges within the school setting that are unique to leading non-instructional operations staff at the school level. Before conducting the inquiry, examples of assumptions included potentially inefficient personnel reporting structures and the management or coordination of tasks for which the principal may have no specific training or expertise.

It was also assumed that non-instructional operations staff have the potential of making a significant impact on school climate within a given school. By intentionally engaging non-instructional support staff and by ensuring that support staff feel that they are an integral part of the school community, principals may lead support personnel to take more ownership in improving the climate within the school. By ensuring that these employees also have a basic



understanding of the school's vision and initiatives, principals can potentially create a cadre of advocates that help to tell the school's story in the community.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

*Instructional personnel.* School employees responsible for delivering or directly supporting classroom instruction. Examples include teachers, paraprofessionals, and instructional coaches.

*Non-instructional operations staff / personnel or Non-instructional support staff / personnel.*

Personnel who perform essential physical service functions for the benefit of students and the learning environment. Examples include: bus drivers, school nutrition workers, technology support specialists, custodians, and maintenance technician

*School-level administrators.* Educational leaders who serve as principal, assistant principal, or equivalent positions within a school setting.

*School-level administrator leadership style.* Key aspects of school-level administrators' predominant leadership skills and habits.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

The manuscript for this dissertation is divided into five chapters. Following this introductory chapter is the review of current research literature. The literature review will summarize available research relating to the leadership styles of school administrators and the challenges school leaders encounter when leading non-instructional personnel. Also explored are the approaches taken by principal preparation programs to train and prepare school administrators to lead non-instructional operations personnel. Other important points included in the literature review are the manner in which leaders of other types of organizations lead personnel who perform support functions that are outside the core business of the business or

organization. Finally, there is an exploration of how non-instructional operations personnel have the potential of serving as important contributors to healthy school climates and cultures.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach for the research. The research literature relating to how school-level administrators interact with non-instructional support staff is limited. The phenomenological qualitative study sought to answer the established research questions by interviewing individuals who have direct knowledge and experiences relating to the topic. The inquiry utilized a qualitative research approach consisting of individual principal interviews and separate sets of focus groups consisting of non-instructional personnel and then instructional faculty. Information from the various interviews and focus groups were coded and analyzed to a point of saturation where findings became clear.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the inquiry by explaining the most salient findings as they relate to and inform the research questions established for this study. Sections of this chapter include a brief data analysis summary, a presentation of the findings, and a concise summary. Direct quotations from administrator interviews and employee focus groups are included as evidence to support and explain the research findings presented. Chapter Four is intended to present the research findings without interpretation or the drawing of conclusions.

Chapter Five builds on the inquiry findings to discuss implications of the findings as well as to make recommendations for future practice and future research. This chapter provides details of what was learned that can be of immediate use and of what is left to be learned or clarified through future inquiry. Chapter Five concludes this dissertation.

## CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership dynamics experienced by school administrators supervising non-instructional personnel in the performance of school operations. The intent of this review of the literature was to examine the existing research relating to the leadership dynamics of school administrators working with non-instructional school operations personnel performing essential operations service functions in the school.

In this modern era of public education it is widely understood that the core business of public schools should be effective teaching and learning. Most public education organizations require school operations functions that support the core business of effective teaching and learning. Among these services are the essential operations functions that do not always require personnel to possess educational certification or to perform direct classroom instruction. Although not widely regarded as the core business of schools, efficient operations support functions are fundamental to the safe and orderly function of public schools in the United States. Without such services, effective teaching and learning cannot occur.

Other industries and organizations have core business as well as ancillary support operations functions. For example, a modern hospital's core functions are to provide direct medical care to patients. In order to provide quality medical care, support personnel, including lab technicians, nursing assistants, custodians, food service workers, and patient transport personnel are required. One study demonstrated that leading support personnel in medical organizations to perform more of the non-nursing tasks required in a medical care environment leads to the maximization of nursing productivity and resource utilization. Leaders may train

support personnel to work in collaboration with the nursing staff to bolster the strength of the overall patient care team (Thompson & Stanowski, 2009).

Just as nurses and physicians provide direct medical care to patients, teachers provide the core service of direct instructional delivery to students. Often in the background is a large team of support and operations personnel who are responsible for facilitating the conditions where teachers are able to teach and students can learn. Understanding how school-level administrators interact with and lead non-instructional support staff may be important to informing future professional learning for administrators as well as district-level policy decisions. This literature review explores the leadership challenges faced by today's school administrators in managing non-instructional functions.

### **Review of the Literature**

The objective of a literature review is to present a logical argument based on a comprehensive review and understanding of the current state of knowledge about a particular topic (Machi & McEvoy, 2012). This literature review is organized by multiple topical areas that are explored to better understand the particular leadership dynamics associated with school-level administrators supervising non-instructional personnel. These topical areas include: (1.) competing priorities for school administrators; (2.) aspects of school-level administrator leadership styles; (3.) challenges for school leaders leading non-instructional operations and support personnel; and (4.) the impact non-instructional operations personnel have on school-community relations. These broader topical categories are further broken down into multiple subcategories. The literature review categories and subcategories are closely aligned with and are intended to inform the research questions for this study. Some subcategories are included that

may not readily appear to speak directly to the established research questions, but are necessary to frame the larger research discussion. The research questions addressed in this inquiry were:

**RQ1.** What leadership challenges do school-level administrators encounter when supervising non-instructional personnel?

**RQ2.** Are the dominant leadership styles used by school-level administrators for leading non-instructional personnel comparable to those used for leading instructional personnel?

**RQ3.** How can school-level leaders be more effectively prepared to lead non-instructional personnel in the performance of essential school operational functions?

### **Competing Priorities**

It is widely expected that today's school principals serve as instructional leaders in their schools (DuFour, 2002; King, 2004; Schlechty, 2009). Some of the core responsibilities of the principal as instructional leader include guiding curriculum and instruction, overseeing assessment and accountability, and leading school climate and improvement efforts. Often in direct conflict with the somewhat quixotic notion of principals as champions for instructional leadership and perhaps less recognized as being directly related to school climate is the daily management of the non-instructional tasks and functions that dominate many principals' work days. In a 2000 federal study of what activities principals engage in on a daily basis, 80% reported dealing with facilities and security issues every day, while only 53% reported that they were able to facilitate student learning on a daily basis (Archer, 2004a). Samuels (2008) describes a study, which found the school principals spent only an average of approximately one third of their workday in classrooms or otherwise interacting with teachers and students.

Furthermore, few of the interactions that actually did take place in the classroom were of sufficient length to have appreciable instructional importance.

Among the myriad of school-level non-instructional operations and support functions that most principals or their designees routinely coordinate or manage include, student transportation, food service, facilities maintenance, custodial services, school security, and information technology support. Although these services have a direct impact on individual schools, these non-instructional support functions are often managed at the district level and are performed by a relatively large number of employees who work behind the scenes in support of the educational environment. It is estimated that as many as half of all school system employees nationwide are non-instructional business, operations, and support staff (Loeb, 2016). Their jobs span the spectrum from bus drivers and custodians to accountants and human resources specialists.

Given the numerous competing priorities that principals must contend with throughout their workdays, their leadership styles may have implications for the engagement of non-instructional support personnel at the school level. It is important to understand similarities and differences between administrators' predominant leadership styles as they lead and interact with instructional faculty as well as non-instructional personnel. There is limited academic literature currently available specifically relating to these topics.

## **Leadership Styles**

Leadership is a cornerstone of building and maintaining successful organizations. Today's educational organizations are no exception. James M. Burns, considered by some to be the father of modern leadership theory (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005), said of leadership, "...to control *things* – tools, mineral resources, money, energy – is an act of power, not

leadership, for things have no motives. Power wielders may treat people as things. Leaders may not.” (Burns, 1978. p. 18). Although Burns was speaking more universally, his comments are certainly applicable to leadership in modern schools. The contrast between those who wield power to control employees and those who lead individuals helps to frame the discussion of the most predominant leadership styles utilized by school administrators in American public schools today.

### *Instructional Leadership*

The fundamental expectation for public schools today is that they facilitate student learning by providing quality instruction and learning opportunities for students. With much research finding that the instructional leadership provided by principals can positively impact student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; King, 2002; Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Schlechty, 2009; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003), instructional leadership is commonly considered to be one of the fundamental responsibilities of school principals in the twenty-first century (Rigby, 2013). Countless job descriptions and mandates by some state legislatures designate principals as the person solely responsible for the instructional leadership of their schools (DuFour, 2002).

Defining the instructional leadership model is difficult. There is no universally accepted definition or definitive list of characteristics or tasks used to recognize instructional leadership (King, 2002; Southworth, 2002). Approaches to instructional leadership often depend upon the context of the individual school and the administrator exercising leadership in the particular setting (Hallinger, 2003; King, 2002). In comparison to the other more participatory styles of leadership, some researchers criticize instructional leadership as being a top-down approach to

leading in schools because it can emphasize the principal's control over of instruction (Barth, 1990; Hallinger, 2003). Under the assumption that it seems to emphasize the principal's control and coordination of instruction, Hallinger (2003) asserts that instructional leadership requires principals to control rather than to empower teachers and staff members in their buildings.

Although not frequently addressed by the literature, some researchers view operations and support functions as an inclusive part of the contemporary school leader's instructional duties. Hess and Kelly (2007) see the performance of duties, including facilities and bus service management by principals as "an identifiable, significant element of instruction" (p.248). In a study of urban school improvement, researchers found that the management of non-instructional school operational functions was "vital to ensuring that an infrastructure for learning improvement was in place" since they "put the right kind of resources at the disposal of school staff, teachers, teacher leaders, and other support staff alike" (Portin, Knapp, Dareff, Feldman, Rusell, and Samuelson, 2009, p. 104).

Over the last several decades, school leadership styles have evolved from those tending to be directive in nature to being more participatory and empowering for participants. Some of the more participatory leadership style labels include shared leadership, collaborative leadership, and distributed leadership. Following on this trend of shared leadership, the transformational leadership style has become one of the most widely utilized leadership styles in American public schools (Hallinger, 2003). The two predominant leadership styles with significant empirical inquiry over the last 40 years are the *transformational* and *transactional* leadership styles (Hallinger, 2003). Included within these two broad leadership style categories are several more descriptive leadership characteristics and styles.



### *Transformational Leadership*

The preeminent researcher in the field of transformational and transactional leadership, James McGregor Burns defined *transforming* leadership as occurring “when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (Burns, 1978, p. 20). Researchers Bernard M. Bass and Bruce J. Avolio advanced the concepts of Burns by developing a means of measuring transformational and transactional leadership characteristics and their effects on followers. Bass and Avolio’s Full Range of Leadership model, which includes a continuum of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles, is used to assess characteristics of individual leaders. The eventual development of the Multiple Leadership Questionnaire Form 5X (MLQ 5X) provided a quantitative instrument that can be administered to followers in order to rate their leaders’ style of leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

According to the research of Bass, transformational leadership is considered to be more effective and “satisfying” to the follower than elements of transactional leadership (Bass, 1998, p. 3). Numerous types of entities, including military, corporate, and educational organizations have adopted transformational leadership as their primary models for leading organizational advancement (Bass, 1998). Transformational leaders usually exhibit one or more of the following characteristics in their leadership styles: charismatic leadership (CL), also known as idealized influence leadership (II), inspirational motivation (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS), and individualized consideration (IC) characteristics. These elements are collectively referred to by the author as the “Four I’s”. Due to the importance of the individual leadership characteristics

to the study, a brief summary of Full Range of Leadership components is included in Table 2.1 (Bass, 1998. pp. 5-8).

Table 2.1

***Characteristics of Transformational Leadership:***

***Charismatic Leadership (CL) or Idealized Influence (II)***

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Role model for followers

Admired, respected, and trusted by followers

Willing to take risks

Consistent rather than arbitrary

Demonstrate high standards of ethical and moral conduct. Can be counted on to do the right thing

Followers identify with leaders and want to emulate them

Followers believe leaders have extraordinary capabilities, persistence, and determination

***Inspirational Motivation (IM)***

---

Behave in ways that motivate and inspire those around them

Provide meaning and challenge to their followers' work

Arouse team spirit

Display enthusiasm and optimism

Involve followers in envisioning attractive future states

Create clearly communicated expectations that followers want to meet

Table 2.1 (Cont.)

Demonstrate commitment to goals and a shared vision

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***Intellectual Stimulation (IS)***

Encourages followers to be innovative and creative

Questions assumptions

Reframes problems and approaches old situations in new ways

No public criticism of individual members' mistakes

Followers are included in the creation of new ideas and creative problem solving

Followers are encouraged to try new approaches and their ideas are not criticized because they differ from the leaders' ideas

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***Individualized Consideration (IC)***

Acts as coach and mentor to followers

Recognizes individual follower's needs and desires for achievement and growth

Develops followers and colleagues to higher levels of potential

New learning opportunities and supportive climate created for followers

Demonstrates acceptance of individual differences

Two-way communication is encouraged. Manages by walking around work spaces

Interactions with followers are personalized (leaders remembers previous conversations and followers' concerns).

Leader views the individual as a whole person

Table 2.1 (Cont.)

Monitors delegated tasks to see if followers need additional direction or progress. Followers do not feel they are being checked on

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Bass (1998)

The intent of transformational leadership is to influence followers by inspiring them to transcend from focusing on their own self-interests to the best interests of the group or organization (Bass, 1985). The implementation of transformational leadership is commonly observable through empowerment of others, thoughtful configurations of teams, development of people through delegation, and inclusive organizational decision-making (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

In the context of school restructuring, Leithwood (1994) states that commitment rather than control is called for. He indicates that transformational leadership can lead to heightened commitment from followers as opposed to the need to control that is often inherent in instructional leadership (p.500). Although Leithwood does not specifically mention school operations or support personnel, the implications of his ideas would seem pertinent to non-instructional support staff engagement in a given school community.

### *Transactional Leadership*

As compared to transformational leadership, transactional leadership involves *quid pro quo* agreements where leaders direct subordinates to perform certain jobs or tasks in exchange for rewards or under threat of disciplinary action for failure to perform as directed. Transactional leadership styles include contingent reward (CR), management by exception– active (MBE-A), management by exception – passive (MBE-P), and *Laissez-Faire Leadership* (LF) leadership

characteristics. Each component included in the transformational and transactional leadership styles are included on Bass and Avlio's Full Range of Leadership continuum. The transactional leadership style may be associated more with the traditional *carrot and stick* approach to leadership and management. *Laissez-Faire* or the passive avoidance leadership style may be defined as an absence of leadership. It is the least desirable and least effective of the three Full Range of Leadership components (Bass, 1998). Table 2.2 describes each transactional leadership style and their corresponding characteristics.

Table 2.2  
*Characteristics of Transactional Leadership:*  
***Contingent Reward (CR)***

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Leader assigns or gets agreement on what needs to be done

Promises rewards in exchange for satisfactory completion of assignment

***Management by Exception (MBE)***

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Corrective Action

Management by Exception – Active (MBE-A):

Leader actively monitors deviations from standards, mistakes and errors and takes corrective actions as necessary

Management by Exception – Passive (MBE-P)

Leader waits passively for deviances, mistakes, or errors to occur then takes corrective action

***Laissez-Faire (LF)***

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Table 2.2 (Cont.)

Avoidance or absence of leadership

Necessary decisions are not made

Actions are delayed

Responsibilities of leadership are ignored

Authority remains unused

Bass (1998)

Most leaders likely favor the use of certain leadership styles in the normal course of their work, but no individual leader utilizes only a singular leadership style. Every effective leader utilizes most, if not all, of the elements of both transformational and transactional leadership styles at different times and under various conditions (Bass, 1998). Elements of the Full Range of Leadership model in order from least to most effective are:

LF – MBE-P – MBE-A – CR – IC – IM – IS - II

### **Relationship of School-Level Administrators' Leadership Styles to School Culture**

Martin (2009) examined the relationship between principal leadership style and school culture as perceived by school faculty. Martin compares school culture survey data administering the Bass & Avolio Multiple Leadership Questionnaire Form 5X (MLQF 5X) to school faculty members to determine correlations between principal leadership styles and school culture. The school climate survey assessed participant perceptions regarding: collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, unity of purpose, professional development, collegial support, and learning

partnerships. The MLQF 5X was used to classify principals' primary leadership styles as being transformational, transactional, or laissez-faire. Survey results indicated a positive relationship between all factors involved with the transformational leadership style and school culture. Contingent reward was the only transactional leadership style characteristic positively correlated with school culture. All factors of the laissez-faire leadership style correlated negatively with all factors of school culture (Martin, 2009). This information is significant to the research due to it suggesting a potential validation of the transformational leadership style in educational leadership.

### **Leadership Challenges**

Considering the expectations surrounding student achievement, assessment, and accountability, one who is uninitiated in the realities of public education might assume that principals would likely spend most of their time engaged in activities that directly influence instruction or other student learning activities. In addition to influencing the facilitation of quality student instruction, principals are obligated to ensure that basic services such as transportation, clean schools, and school meals are provided to students on a consistent basis. With so many variables involved in the production of these services it is common for myriad issues to arise requiring the school administrator's attention. These non-instructional functions consume a large amount of many school administrators' workday (Archer, 2004a; Archer, 2004b; Lashway, 1998; Samuels, 2008). In addition to their time consuming nature, these basic service tasks present other challenges for principals who must manage them.

## **Administrator Preparation for Leading Non-Instructional Personnel**

Instructional leadership skills are at the heart of most principal preparation programs, but the necessity exists for school administrators to manage non-instructional functions of their schools. With this in mind, it would seem reasonable for one to inquire as to how principals are prepared to manage non-instructional functions. An additional question may be whether principals are adequately prepared to effectively lead and interact with the non-certified personnel who perform the basic services in the school community. Some differences between non-instructional personnel and school-level administrators that may cause leadership and communications issues could be the potential lack of a professional lexicon common to both employee groups, differing levels of personal education, and perceived power dynamics that present barriers to effective communication. One of the focuses of this study relates to whether and in what manner current school administrators have been prepared for these types of leadership challenges. Both formal and informal school leader preparation methods and programs were investigated. These findings may help to inform the manner in which aspiring school leaders are prepared in the future.

In an analysis of course criteria of principal preparation programs, Hess and Kelly (2007) questioned whether building-level administrators are taught the management fundamentals necessary to manage critical areas, including accountability, teacher quality, and achievement in the modern context of school leadership. Although their study was not focused directly on non-instructional personnel leadership, they did find that very little time was dedicated to teaching aspiring administrators the management of day-to-day non-instructional tasks, which they classified as “technical knowledge”. School law, school finance, and facilities management were



the specific areas of technical knowledge mentioned as necessary for principals to know how to manage.

Hess and Kelly's (2007) study of 210 course syllabi from 31 principal-preparations programs demonstrated that an average of 29.6% of course time was spent on teaching technical knowledge (p. 254). Of the total technical knowledge instructional time, facilities management accounted for 4% with 5% dedicated to technology. School law dominated the technical knowledge instruction with 45% of the course time. School finance (27%) and data research skills (17%) rounded out the remaining technical knowledge time in the principal preparation programs (p. 261) involved in the Hess and Kelly study (2007).

Although Hess and Kelly's work explored principal preparation for managing non-instructional functions, it did not specifically investigate their preparation for leading the people who perform those technical tasks. Except for those school districts that take the initiative to thoroughly train or intentionally mentor aspiring leaders to acquire the leadership skills necessary to lead non-instructional personnel in the running of schools, many school-level administrators may be left to obtain this experience for themselves through informal networks or through trial and error. Fortunate school administrators may have had a mentor who served as a strong example for leading non-instructional personnel. Others may be left to learning by trial and error or may be less than effective leaders of non-instructional personnel.

A working group commissioned by the New Zealand Education Institute studied what they referred to as a "whole-of-school" approach which included engaging school support staff as active members of the school community (New Zealand Education Institute, 2018. p.5). Among their overarching recommendations was that future professional development for

principals and aspiring leaders incorporate the “strategic management of support staff” (p.7). Such strategic management would include the balancing of instructional leadership responsibilities with leading support personnel toward taking responsibility for contributing to the education of students. The New Zealand study’s definition of support staff focused on teacher aides, librarians, nurses, career counselors, and administrative office personnel. Their project did not include those non-instructional operational employees who are the subject of this dissertation. The recommendations of the working group, however, do have potential applications for school administrators leading non-instructional personnel such as maintenance, custodial, transportation, and school nutrition employees.

### **Leading Outsourced Employees**

School-level administrators in the school system where this study was conducted are tasked with overseeing the work done by non-instructional personnel who report to school system-level departments or who work for third party service providers. These complex organizational dynamics may sometimes exacerbate otherwise routine service or personnel issues. Although the research is lacking relating to the leadership and management of outsourced school operational services, the literature relating to the management of outsourced functions in other organizations helps to inform the research. In their study of nursing in long-term acute care hospitals, Alvarez, Kerr, Burtner, Ledlow, and Fulton (2011) found that hospitals had greater financial success when outsourced nurses worked collaboratively with “full time” hospital staff nurses. This finding had relevance with the school nutrition department of the subject school district where nearly half of all front-line school nutrition associates are managed by school system supervisors but employed through a private staffing service.

In their qualitative study of leading internal and outsourced staff in the corporate training department of an early childhood multi-service healthcare company, Yap and Weber (2015) found that leaders who continually treat all employees with respect, individual consideration, and a sense of belonging are successful in engaging all employee groups. This was true regardless of whether the personnel were employed internally or by an outside provider. Specifically, Yap and Weber found leaders who were successful at engaging outsourced and internal employees do the following:

(1) lead to the specific needs of each staff, whether internal or external, (2) create an environment of “fun”, (3) create an environment that purports familial ties with all team members, (4) ensure that learning exists continually, (5) honor the employees who have worked in the industry the longest, and most importantly, (6) lead as a socially and emotionally intelligent leader (p.43).

It is noteworthy that the aspects described by Yap and Weber as being successful in internal and external employee engagement meet the description of many of the transformational leadership characteristics included in the Full Range of Leadership model (Bass, 1998). Specifically, the findings enumerated by Yap and Weber align with the transformational leadership elements of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration of the Full Range of Leadership model (Bass, 1998).

Other literature relating to management of outsourced services focused primarily on “offshoring” where services are outsourced and performed overseas. Although many of the issues raised do not relate directly to the scenario that is the subject of the study, there are some parallels. Disruptions of organizational and leadership cultures can occur when internal and outsourced employees work concurrently (Contractor, Kumar, Kundu, & Pedersen, 2011; Farrell, 2006). This concept is likely to be true whether the outsourcing occurs in an overseas factory or within a local public school kitchen.

### **Alternative Approaches: Restructuring Resources and Principals' Time**

In attempts to salvage instructional leadership time for principals, some school districts have begun to separate non-instructional support tasks from the principal's day-to-day work by delegating operations management tasks. Some school districts in several states, including Kentucky, Maryland, and the District of Columbia, have begun hiring school administration managers (SAMs) or school operations directors to handle school-level operations tasks such as food service, bus coordination, facilities issues, and security procedures (Archer, 2004b; Samuels, 2008; Walker, 2009; Westervelt, 2017).

Although this is not yet a mainstream trend, the separation of instructional leadership tasks from operational management tasks does demonstrate the seeking of alternatives that would prevent principals from spending the majority of their time working on problems and tasks outside of instructional leadership. The approach of delegating all school operations and support functions to a single administrator and segregating non-instructional functions and staff from school instructional business may serve to free the principals' time for other functions that are presumably more beneficial to student learning. Data is not yet available that demonstrates whether this approach will actually lead to more effective instructional leadership and result in better outcomes. Although the SAMs approach to delegating non-instructional tasks is not yet commonplace in all school systems, it is not unusual for principals to delegate many non-instructional functions to assistant principals in their schools.

### **Impact of Non-Instructional Personnel on School-Community Relations**

The idea that school leaders have a direct impact on the success of their schools and the perception of their schools in the broader community is a widely accepted concept (Stronge,

Richard & Catano, 2008). Increasing interest and involvement in schools by parents and community stakeholders make it necessary for effective principals to be more engaged and to build stronger relationships with families and the broader community than ever before (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Stronge et al. 2008).

School leadership is also widely believed to make a difference in school climate and culture as evidenced by the prevalence of leadership development programs and principal assessment systems at the local and state levels as well as included emphasis in national education initiatives. Goldman (1998) supports this idea in her statement that, “leaders may call their leadership style whatever they wish – transactive, transformational, top-down, bottom-up, but ultimately their deep-seated values and beliefs are mirrored through the school” (p. 21). Stakeholder groups can have a direct impact on school climate and culture. Such impact may be influenced by instructional staff, parents, community stakeholders, and policy makers. Perhaps among the least recognized and researched groups that can have a direct impact on the school community and climate are non-instructional support and operations employees.

Considering nearly half of all school system employees in the United States work in positions outside of classroom instruction (Loeb, 2016), it may be reasonable to assume that the work efforts and interactions that non-instructional personnel have with students, staff, administrators, and community members at-large could have an impact on the students, schools, and communities that they serve. In her doctoral dissertation that explored the “voice of the classified employee,” Barakos-Cartwright (2012) asserts that classified employees “have the potential to impact an organization either negatively or positively” (p. 3). The type and degree of impact classified employees may have can be influenced by how they perceive that they are acknowledged and valued in the school community.

## School Climate and Culture

School climate and school culture are terms that are sometimes confused with one another in discussions pertaining to school improvement and leadership. Both are important elements of successful schools. School climate can be described as the atmosphere or personality of a school, while one definition of school culture relates to the traditions and shared experiences of a school and its community (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Barth (2002) emphasizes the importance of school culture.

A school's culture has far more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the president of the country, the state department of education, the superintendent, the school board, or even the principal, teachers, and parents can ever have. (p. 1)

There is no singular definition of school culture, but there are a number of common characteristics associated with school culture. Among the aspects generally recognized as being a part of school culture are norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, patterns of values, ceremonies, traditions, heroes, myths, and cultural network (Barth, 2002; Deal & Peterson, 1991; Dongjiao, 2015) "that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization" (Barth, 2002. p. 7). School culture is an important element in building a sense of commitment among staff, students, and parents and can have an effect on all aspects of school and student success (Peterson, 2002).

Emphasizing the impact school culture can have, Peterson and Deal (1999) state, "School culture affects every part of the enterprise from what faculty talk about in the lunch room, to the type of instruction that is valued... to the importance of learning for all students" (p. 7). Dongjiao (2015) further emphasizes the importance of school culture as, "the power to promote sustained and stable development of school and, it is the only way for school to get cohesion and competitiveness and to building learning community" (p. 1). Unhealthy school environments and

cultures can lead to increased dropout rates and failure of students to pursue higher education (Barth, 2002; National School Climate Center, 2007). Among the potential benefits of a positive school culture are support for student self-esteem and self-concept, positive emotional and mental health outcomes, and positive impact on reducing the frequency of student substance abuse issues. In addition to the benefits to individual students, the desired outcome of positive school environments aids in the reduction of student absentee rates, greater student academic achievement, and higher graduation rates (Thapa, 2013).

Although teachers and administrators may play the most predominant role in face-to-face student influence, non-instructional support and operations staff also have the potential of affecting individual students, culture, and learning environment of a school. In his research of successful high poverty schools, Reeves (2003) emphasizes the value that every adult in the system can have. Reeves recognized that some of the better school-level leaders recognized that “the student’s day does not really begin in a classroom, but on the bus or perhaps during free breakfast” (p. 12). These exceptional school leaders were more likely to show “profound respect” for their non-instructional staff by including them in school activities such as professional development in classroom management and student behavior. Reeves also asserts that effective principals understand that every adult in the building, including custodians, cafeteria workers, and bus drivers, are teachers. By virtue of the manner in which they behave and interact with parents and students, support staff can have an educational influence (Reeves, 2010). Depending on the level and manner of employee engagement, this potential influence could have a positive or negative impact on students, the school culture, and the community.

Non-instructional support staff members have the ability to influence students in a positive or negative way on a daily basis. Crispeels (2004) emphasizes this point by stating, “For

children, there is no shortcut to becoming thoughtful, responsible, and intellectually accomplished adults. What it takes is keeping company with adults who exercise these qualities in the presence of adults-to-be” (p. 3).

Within a group of schools being studied, (Portin, et al, 2009) noted common characteristics among the principals of schools that had climates “hospitable to learning.” These school demonstrated, “a sense of staff and student safety; respect for all members of the school community, without regard to the professional status or position” and made “an effort to invite and involve staff in various school-wide functions” (p.59). Although non-instructional support staff members were not explicitly discussed in the report, the implications would suggest the leadership of the schools routinely involved, intentionally demonstrated respect for, and the engaged of all members of the school community including non-instructional staff. Similarly, the standards for school leadership from the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) make mention that all individuals should be treated with fairness and respect. Again, non-instructional personnel are not explicitly identified, but it may reasonably be assumed that they should be included in the grouping of “all individuals” (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 2008).

### *Employee Engagement*

In the context of his military and public leadership experience, former Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell describes the need for common purpose among all members of an organization:

Every good leader I know understands instinctively the need to communicate to followers a common purpose, a purpose that comes down from the leader and is internalized by the entire team. Armed with a common purpose, an organization’s various parts will strive to



achieve that purpose and will not go riding off in every direction. I have also seen organizations that resemble nothing less than warring tribes. They usually fail (Powell & Koltz, 2012 p. 151).

Applied to the school setting, Powell's unity of purpose statement would likely apply to teachers and administrators as well as non-instructional support personnel. By including support staff as full members of the school community, leaders may gain advocates who support the "common purpose" of which General Powell speaks. Actively engaged support employees may also become positive contributors to the culture of the school as well as ambassadors in the community (Bartlett & Herlocker, 2010).

In order for non-instructional school personnel to support the school culture and to serve as a positive voice in support of schools and the school system, they must feel that they are respected members of the school community and professionals in their own rite. Bartlett and Herlocker (2010) discuss situations where school system documents inadvertently diminished the perception of importance of non-certified employees by designating them as "other" types of employees. This designation led to alienation of some otherwise dedicated employees. Although, by definition, non-instructional support staff do not usually possess teaching or educational leadership credentials, every employee group should be expected to perform and behave as professionals. Support employees should therefore be treated and respected as such. (Bartlett & Herlocker, 2010).

In addition to the theoretical discussion of transformational and transactional leadership by Bass, Avolio, and Burns, practical leadership applications for enhancing school improvement are also discussed by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005). Among the proposed steps are 21 responsibilities of school leadership where Marzano et al. (2005) lay out planned steps for effective school leadership. One step in the plan toward the attainment of effective school

leadership is to develop a strong school leadership team. Foundational to the design of an effective leadership team is the creation of a “purposeful community.” An important element of the term’s definition is that purposeful communities “develop and use all available assets” and “accomplish goals that matter to all community members.” Although non-instructional support personnel are not specifically mentioned in the text, use of the word “all” in the context of assets and members of the purposeful community made this text potentially impactful to my research topic (Pp. 99-100). According to Marzano’s assertion, all members of the school community should be genuinely involved in shared leadership efforts. Fredericks (2010) also warned that only occasionally inviting support staff to meetings could demonstrate a tepid effort at inclusion that may be perceived by some to be a disingenuous “standard of tokenism” (p. 29).

Friesen (2002) described the approach one community college took in order to more fully engage their classified staff through professional development opportunities especially tailored for the needs of individual classified employees. Through their strategic planning process, the community college declared that in order to be “fully participating members of the organization” all employees needed a common understanding of the core values and constituencies of the college (p. 44).

### *Voice in the Community*

Because public support helps to promote strong public schools, it is important for principals to bolster public confidence in schools by actively enhancing communication between schools, their stakeholders, and their communities (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Stronge et al, 2008). It is also imperative for school-level administrators today to be sensitive to and have the ability to manage the political and public relations aspects of school and community relationships. Hoy

and Miskel (2005) state that, “understanding the existing and budding environmental influences is of extreme importance to school administrators” (p. 241). Whether directed intentionally or not, the numerous non-instructional support and operations personnel employed by most school systems often serve as an informal voice of the school system for some in the community. These employees likely have family members and friends with whom they shop, attend church, and watch tee-ball with whom they also share information from their workplaces. The employees’ perspective and the quality of information available to them could determine the veracity of the information shared in the community and its effect on public perception. Whether their information source is a direct communication from the principal or scuttlebutt and rumors from the kitchen or bus garage, the sharing of “news” by the employee in the community is to be expected. It behooves school administrators to intentionally utilize this communications conduit for purposes beneficial to the school.

According to a 2001 survey conducted by the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), the most common sources of news dissemination or other information from local schools is from school secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and classroom aides. Teachers, principals, central office administrators, and school board members are cited as the least frequent sources of public information distribution. The recognition that non-instructional support personnel have a voice in the community, suggests that their active engagement and understanding of school initiatives, programs, and news may play a significant part in a community’s understanding and potential support of the school.

As with most organizations, both formal and informal communication networks exist within schools, school systems, and the community. Hoy and Miskel (2008) discuss the advantages and disadvantages of informal networks or “grapevines.” The authors point out a

disadvantage being the potential uncontrolled spread of rumors. There are advantages for administrators utilizing grapevines as intentional information conduits in order to serve the community with information needs that are not being fully met by formal information sources (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). In their step-by-step book providing direction on how support staff members can become “engaged ambassadors” for their schools in their communities Bartlett and Herlocker, (2010) suggest that active engagement by school leaders can lead to non-instructional support and operations personnel “building bridges of goodwill for their school system” in the community (p. 207).

Although they are not the providers of the school system’s core business of classroom instructional delivery, non-instructional operations and support personnel do perform tasks that are essential for a safe and effective learning environment. Of additional importance is that non-instructional employees account for nearly half of the public school workforce in the United States and they can have either a positive or negative impact on school communities and culture. By appropriately engaging this large employee group as important members of the larger school community, administrators may create advocates for the positive programs and initiatives going on in their schools. These advocates could serve as valuable communications resources in their communities.

This inquiry exploring the challenges faced by school-level administrators and the manner in which their leadership styles are similar or different when dealing with instructional versus non-instructional personnel served to provide a better understanding of the leadership dynamics that affect both school administrators and non-instructional school staff members. Furthermore, the enhanced understanding of these dynamics has the potential of informing future professional development for principals and assistant principals in their interactions with non-

instructional support personnel. The implications of this study have the potential of effecting school climate and culture and ultimately student learning outcomes.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Ravitch and Riggan (2017) define a conceptual framework as “the overarching argument for the work – both why it is worth doing and how it should be done” (p. 8). Using their model as a guide for developing a conceptual framework for research, the personal interests, goals, identity and positionality of myself as the researcher was joined by the review of the literature to inform the methodological design for the inquiry. The intended result was that the conceptual framework would articulate a planned path for answering the guiding research questions of the study.

My professional leadership experiences in both public and private sector organizations, especially those with my current position as assistant superintendent for operations at the school system being studied, have provided me with insights that helped to spark my interest in the topic. Examining the leadership interactions of school-level leaders and non-instructional operations and support personnel is a topic of inquiry that has the potential of informing more advanced educational leadership professional learning efforts. Although I am not routinely involved in most day-to-day interactions, the purview of my job involves overseeing the interrelationships between school-level administrators and operations department directors and coordinators (transportation, facilities maintenance, school nutrition, information technology, procurement, and safety/ security). Given that my preferred personal leadership style allows me to empower my leadership team members, I make every effort to avoid micromanaging so that

they may effectively lead as much as possible. There are, of course, occasions when circumstances dictate that I play a more direct role in these interactions.

It is not unusual for the issues that I assist with to involve conflict between operations leadership team members and/or operations non-instructional employees, contracted service providers, and school-level administrators. These conflicts often involve misunderstanding by one or both parties regarding the motives and actions of the other. Non-instructional support staff members and school-level leaders sometimes find it difficult to understand the perspective of the other. Based on years of observation and involvement in these types of situations, my theory when entering into this research process was that those on either side of these conflicts could lack the experience and perspective to empathize with the job responsibilities of the other.

Conflicts such as those described are by no means indicative of all non-instructional personnel and building-level leader interactions. Most, if not all, principals and assistant principals in the school system have a positive working rapport with the operations and support employees who serve their schools. The crux of the research was to better understand: the challenges school-level administrators face when leading and interacting with non-instructional staff, how leadership styles are employed and affected by these interactions, and how aspiring principals and assistant principals should be prepared to lead non-instructional operations and support employees in the future.

The available academic literature paints an adequate picture of the competing priorities that school administrators must manage every day. Expecting school-level administrators to serve as transformative instructional leaders while leaving them to manage essential transactional

tasks such as bus problems and facilities maintenance issues can create an ideological juxtaposition between the two ends of the responsibility spectrum.

While not overly abundant, there is literature that informs the discussion of the necessity for administrators to manage non-instructional tasks, but very little exists that addresses the leadership of and interpersonal interactions with the individuals who perform those functions. Whereas it is necessary to understand what the literature says about managing non-instructional tasks in order to better comprehend the interpersonal leadership elements involved, the lack of existing research leaves the discussion of leadership dynamics between school-level administrators and non-instructional operations staff ripe for further inquiry.

There is an abundance of academic literature addressing leadership styles in the educational system context. Among the many leadership styles commonly discussed in the contemporary educational leadership field are: instructional, collaborative, participatory, servant, emotional, shared, autocratic and democratic, directive and participatory, transactional and transformational. It is important for school leaders to stay abreast of changing leadership trends, but these trends change rapidly often making it difficult for principals to fully adopt one style before they are urged to shift to another (Lashway, 1998).

Although instructional leadership is one of the most popular styles discussed, its definition and components vary among scholar and researcher opinions. Transformational and transactional leadership are included as components of a continuum known as the Full Range of Leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Leadership characteristics can be measured along this continuum to determine a given leader's predominant leadership style under various conditions

and contexts. The Full Range of Leadership is the theoretical framework upon which the comparison of leadership styles were measured in this phenomenological qualitative study.

Given the relatively limited amount of academic literature specifically addressing the research questions, the methodological gathering and analysis of data was even more important in this inquiry. Principal and assistant principal interviews and focus groups consisting of non-instructional operations and support personnel followed by teacher focus groups were utilized as the primary means of data collection for this phenomenological qualitative study.

Individual school-level administrators from three high schools within the school system were interviewed. The focus groups that followed administrator interviews utilized a double layer design (Krueger & Casey, 2015) where comparison and contrasting of data were based on geographic region (different high schools) and participant type (non-instructional and instructional personnel). Analysis of all three sets of interviews and focus groups were analyzed using *verbatim* transcripts coded as base data.

The intent of the inquiry was to explore and answer research questions relating to challenges, leadership styles, and leader preparedness guidance for school administrators leading non-instructional personnel. By conducting this phenomenological qualitative study, the research sought to gain insights, beliefs, and opinions of those administrators and employees who possess the knowledge and experience needed to inform the inquiry and answer the established research questions.

Today's schools have a mandate to provide quality student instruction and support. Principals are in the challenging position of being responsible for the somewhat dichotomous responsibilities of leading instruction in their schools while also ensuring that students have the



essential physical services and supportive learning environment they need in order to succeed. It is likely that few principals went into the education field to become managers (Walker, 2009). The reality is, however, that many spend a majority of their workday managing functions other than those expected of visionary instructional leaders. Although perhaps less conspicuous than the school principal, non-instructional support employees also play critical roles in supporting students and the culture of the school.

There is literature that describes the amount of time principals spend away from instructional matters, but there is little that addresses the research questions associated with this inquiry. Understanding the specific challenges and leadership style modifications of principals dealing with non-instructional support functions may serve to inform future professional development for current and aspiring school leaders. Likewise, understanding the extent to which support staff members are engaged in the school community may help to reinforce the importance of the impact that non-instructional personnel currently have on the school community or may encourage the enlisting of this sizable group that may be otherwise “untapped” (Barakos-Cartwright, 2012) or underutilized.

## CHAPTER THREE – INQUIRY METHODS

### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the leadership dynamics experienced by school administrators supervising non-instructional personnel in the performance of essential school operations functions. In the current era of school accountability, today's school administrators are commonly perceived to be and are expected to serve as the instructional leaders in their schools. The public's expectation is that the core business of modern public schools focuses on teaching, learning, assessment, and the professional development of teachers in order to enhance student learning in the classroom (Schlechy, 2009). As instructional leaders, principals are expected to focus their efforts and resources on these essential educational elements. The actual reality faced by many school principals is that a majority of their working time is consumed by the management and coordination of non-instructional support functions, including issues related to school buses, food service, janitorial services, and facilities maintenance. If schools are to be safe environments conducive to student learning, it is essential for them to be orderly and capable of providing well-managed basic, operational services. Non-instructional support staff members routinely deliver these services. The time and resources required of administrators to perform these invaluable management functions can exert significant drain on time that could be otherwise spent in classrooms or directly supporting teachers with student instruction. In order to ensure that the operational needs of the school are properly met, principals or their designees must frequently communicate with and lead non-instructional employees and contractors. The leadership dynamics between building-level administrators and the non-instructional operations personnel providing services at their school have the potential of impacting the climate and culture at any school in either a positive or negative manner.

Challenges faced by school-level administrators leading non-instructional personnel and the comparison of principal leadership styles when leading instructional and non-instructional employees were explored in this inquiry. Discussions comparing school-level leaders' leadership styles when dealing with instructional and non-instructional personnel were an important element of the inquiry methodology. These questions helped to inform the final research question which sought to ascertain how school districts and principal preparation programs may better prepare school-level administrators to lead non-instructional personnel.

Some of the key features that made a qualitative research design the best suited design type for this study is that qualitative inquiry is conducted in the participants' natural setting. Researchers have face-to-face interaction with participants, and seek to provide a more holistic account of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2014). Considering that this study addresses questions that require more detailed and nuanced answers than can be reasonably expected from quantitative surveys as well as the fact that the study focuses on the actual experiences of participants, a phenomenological qualitative analysis was the research paradigm utilized (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; ). The following served as guiding research questions for the inquiry.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1.** What leadership challenges do school-level administrators encounter when supervising non-instructional personnel?

**RQ2.** Are the dominant leadership styles used by school-level administrators for leading non-instructional personnel comparable to those used for leading instructional personnel?

**RQ3.** How can school-level leaders be more effectively prepared to lead non-instructional personnel in the performance of essential school operational functions?

The organization of this chapter opens with an introduction of and rationale for the study and its relationship to the selected methodology. Details of the problem setting and context of the study location are described for the reader. The methods used to select participants and data sources are also discussed in detail. Specific details of the types of information collected and the research design precedes sections detailing data collection and analysis methods. The final sections discuss ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness as well as limitations and delimitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a concise summary.

### **Problem Setting / Context**

The research location for this study is a public school system located approximately 70 miles outside of a large metropolitan area in a southern state. Situated in an industrial region of the state, the school system is made up of approximately 13,000 students distributed among 23 schools. The relative poverty rate for the district is demonstrated by the fact that over 72% of its students qualify for the free or reduced priced school meal program. The racial and ethnic makeup of the school system is predominantly white (53%) and Latino/Hispanic (41%) with African American (2%) mixed races (3%) and other races or ethnicities (1%) making up the difference. Schools range in size from the smallest elementary school with 305 students to the largest of the district's three traditional high schools with a population of 1,402 students. Of the school system's 1,676 full and part-time employees, approximately 585 of them are non-instructional personnel. In addition to school system employees, approximately 190 support staff members who work for the schools are employed by private staffing services and contracted service providers.

Most non-instructional operations functions are managed at the school district level. The district's operations division is tasked with providing student transportation, facilities maintenance, school nutrition, and information technology services to all schools in the district. Most operations employees are employed by the school system itself. Functions such as janitorial services and a large portion of grounds maintenance are outsourced to private companies through contracts administered by the school district's operations division. The remainder of the grounds maintenance services are provided through intergovernmental agreements with the local county government. Additional organizational complexities are caused by approximately half of all school nutrition line worker positions and 60% of all special needs bus monitor jobs being filled through a contract with a private staffing service. Like the other outsourced services, these contracts are also administered at the school system level.

With most essential non-instructional functions being performed by personnel working at the central level for the school system, private contractors, staffing agencies, or other local governmental agencies, few school operations personnel report directly to school-level administrators. Although non-instructional support staff, whether they be in-house school system or outsourced employees, make up over 41% of all employees in the school district a study of the manner in which principals communicate with and lead non-instructional operations employees was warranted given the reporting complexities of the organization. Table 3.1 demonstrates the breakdown of instructional and non-instructional personnel in the three subject high schools.

Table 3.1  
*Staffing at Subject High Schools*

	<b>HS A</b>	<b>HS B</b>	<b>HS C</b>
Principals	1	1	1
Assistant Principals	2	3	3
Instructional Staff	53	74	75
Custodians (outsourced)	8	8	8
School Nutrition (in-house)	5	4	3
School Nutrition (outsourced)	7	6	7
Bus Drivers	11	14	18
Bus Drivers (Special Needs)	2	3	4
Bus Monitors (Special Needs)	2	3	4
Non-Instructional Operations Staff Total	35	38	44

A final point important to the clarity of the research context is that the school district has only recently begun to provide training to assistant principals and other aspiring leaders in managing non-instructional school operations functions and leading non-instructional personnel. Senior leadership at the district level has recognized that some principals have been more successful than others at balancing instructional leadership with necessary leading of non-instructional personnel in the performance of their tasks. The results of this inquiry may potentially inform future iterations of the district's aspiring leaders program and other professional development for school-level administrators.

### **Research Sample and Data Sources**

Due to the inquiry being qualitative in nature with its focus limited to leadership dynamics within one school system, selection of research participants or samples were accomplished through purposeful sampling of employees within the school system (Bloomberg

& Volpe, 2016; Patton, 1990; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In order to produce results that are comparable between research sites, each of the school system's three traditional high schools served as research settings for the study. High school administrators were invited to participate in individual administrator interviews were followed by separate focus groups consisting of non-instructional operations employees and finally instructional faculty. Both principals and those assistant principals who are frequently tasked with supervising and coordinating school operations functions were asked to participate in face-to-face interviews. All interviews and focus groups were conducted on site at the high school where the participants work. In order to encourage hearty participation and robust conversation, it was important for the focus group settings to be comfortable and familiar for participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

The rationale for the selection of traditional high schools as research sites is based on the assumption that the daily logistical necessities that often accompany the larger student populations at the high school level may necessitate more frequent interaction between school-level administrators and non-instructional personnel as compared to that of elementary and middle schools. It was assumed that the potential of there being increased regular interaction between the groups involved in the study would likely lead to richer and more nuanced conversations than there might have been at those schools where there are less frequent professional interactions.

It is a common practice for high school principals in this district to delegate much of the day-to-day supervision of school operational functions to one or more assistant principals. Since he or she is ultimately responsible for the operation of their school, the primary school-level administrator to be interviewed was the principal of the school. When principals indicated there was an assistant principal tasked with the responsibility of coordinating or supervising

operational functions, that assistant principal was asked to participate in the interview process. All administrators who were invited did voluntarily agree to participate in the individual face-to-face interviews.

Following interviews with school-level administrators, focus groups comprised of operations employees who provide non-instructional services for the school were convened. According to Krueger and Casey (2015), focus group participants should be of a homogenous group, but with “sufficient variation among participants to allow for contrasting opinions” (p.80). Non-instructional operations employees were invited to participate in the focus group of the schools they serve based on the assumption that participants share certain characteristics and experiences relevant to the study’s questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). These desired characteristics of focus group participants included representatives from the various non-instructional operations functions who perform essential operations services benefiting students and staff within a school. Non-instructional participants included custodians, school nutrition associates, bus drivers, and maintenance workers. While their common mission of providing operational support services to the selected schools demonstrates the requisite homogeneity of the group, their diverse job functions and separate work areas provided the necessary variation of participant perspectives relative to the research questions (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Final focus group participant invitations were determined by *screens* established to ensure that focus group participants met the demographic requirements and met the observable characteristics requirements of the study (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Screening criteria for the operations personnel focus groups required that prospective participants work in a non-instructional operations capacity within or for the direct benefit of the school being discussed and that they have the potential for having some degree of contact with school-level administration in



the course of their duties. Bus drivers, school nutrition, maintenance, and custodial employees were selected as participants of the three non-instructional focus groups.

Subsequent to the non-instructional personnel focus groups, a second set of focus groups were conducted at each participating school. These focus groups comprised of instructional faculty were convened with the purpose of collecting comparative data to answer Research Question #2. This research question seeks to understand whether the leadership styles of school-level administrators is similar for non-instructional personnel as compared to instructional faculty. Participants of the instructional faculty focus group were purposefully selected from various academic instructional departments within the school. Selection screens required that teachers represent the various academic departments within the high schools. The mathematics, science, English language arts, foreign language, physical education, career-technical, and social studies departments were represented within the three focus groups. In addition to their status as teachers in the schools being studied, the screen for participation in this focus group considered the length of tenure of each educator. There was a mix of seniority ranging from novice teachers with two years of experience to veteran teachers with more than 20 years of experience. In alignment with the ideas of Krueger and Casey (2015), the homogeneity required of these focus groups was accomplished by virtue of all participants being active instructional professionals working in the same school district. The variation in career length and academic field provided enough professional diversity within the group to allow for differing opinions and perspectives. Table 3.2 depicts the interview plan that was used to coordinate and perform qualitative data collection.

Table 3.2  
*Phenomenological Qualitative  
 Interview Plan*

<b>Location</b>	<b>Individual Interviews</b>	<b>Non-Instructional Focus Groups</b>	<b>Instructional Focus Groups</b>
High School A	Principal	Bus Driver Food Service (outsourced) Food Service (in-house) Maintenance Technician Custodian (outsourced)	Novice Teacher  Teacher Teacher Veteran Teacher
High School B	Principal	Bus Driver Food Service (outsourced) Food Service (in-house) Maintenance Technician Custodian (outsourced)	Novice Teacher  Teacher Teacher Teacher Veteran Teacher
High School C	Principal	Bus Driver Food Service (outsourced) Food Service (in-house) Maintenance Technician Custodian (outsourced)	Novice Teacher  Teacher Teacher Teacher Veteran Teacher

In order to address any ethical considerations and potential issues relating to this study, approval from the University of Arkansas's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained prior to the initiation of data collection activities. Potential ethical issues that could arise from research participation are always of concern and were given careful consideration. Participants of individual interviews and focus groups were assured that there would be no ramifications for

their participation or lack of participation in the study. Anonymity of focus group participants, although impossible to guarantee, was given the utmost priority (Krueger & Casey, 2015). In order to protect their privacy, pseudonyms were used when referencing participants, principals, schools, and the school system in research reporting.

It was made explicitly clear to all potential participants that participation in either individual interviews or focus groups was completely voluntary. No employee of the school system or other entity contracted with the school system was required or otherwise coerced into participating in any research activity related to this study.

Prior to interview or focus group participation, each participant was given written information regarding the research process, the manner in which the data would be utilized, and any risks that participants may be exposed to as a result of their participation. Participants were afforded the opportunity to have their questions answered prior to being asked to sign an Informed Consent Form (Appendix E). Their written signature serves as acknowledgement that the participants understood the circumstances surrounding their involvement in the research process and agreed to voluntarily participate. Instructions for participants to obtain additional information on or to express concerns with the research study were included within the informed consent acknowledgement.

Butin (2010) cautions researchers conducting interviews that interviewer characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, tone, and body language may impact the manner in which participants respond to interviewer questions. In order to balance the gathering of quality interview data and the minimization of potential interviewer or interviewee bias while maintaining interview flexibility, semi-structured interview protocols were utilized for both face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions (Appendices A, B, and C).

Finally, positionality of the researcher must be considered when discussing the potential for ethical concerns. The process known as bracketing or *epoche* allows the researcher to divulge a full written description of their experiences relating to the research topic. By gaining clarity of their own perceptions, the researcher can hope to effectively bracket their experiences from those of research participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

I currently serve in system-level administration within the school district being studied. My responsibilities include providing leadership for the directors who oversee most of the non-instructional operational departments within the district. Additionally, I have frequent interaction and communication with building-level administrators throughout the school system. Considering my unique position relative to the study, participants were assured that the purpose of this research is an academic pursuit and not an employee evaluation or any type of work-related assessment being used to determine employee conduct or job performance. These assurances were made explicitly clear during participant recruiting and in the orientation briefings prior to interviews and focus groups. Most importantly, in order to protect the integrity of both the research and researcher, the promises made to research participants must be kept with fidelity.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The constructivist or social constructivist worldview is commonly associated with qualitative research (Creswell, 2013, 2014). In this approach to academic inquiry, the researcher relies on broad, open questions to facilitate the unimpeded sharing of views and experiences directly by participants. The researcher then must interpret and establish a “pattern of meaning” based on data gathered from participants (Creswell, 2014, p.8). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), qualitative research “attempts to understand individuals, groups, and phenomena in their

natural settings in ways that are contextualized and reflect the meaning that people make out of their own experiences” (p. 2).

The focus of the study examined the dominant leadership dynamics and professional interactions between school-level leaders and non-instructional support personnel in a public school system in a southern state. Qualitative inquiry methods were selected as the research methodology for the study due to the need for eliciting in-depth and nuanced information from participants. The complexity of the research settings as well as the need to gain a complex understanding of the issues and dynamics involved made qualitative inquiry most appropriate for the study (Creswell, 2013). The nature of the interpersonal communications, organizational complexities, culture, and leadership styles in the study make a qualitative exploration of the research more useful than the measurement of data that quantitative research methods provide. Creswell (2014) makes the comparison by acknowledging the useful application of quantitative analysis but noting its limitations since it “does not tell us about the processes that people experience, why they respond as they did, the context in which they responded, and their deeper thoughts and behaviors that governed their responses” (p. 48).

The additional complication of non-instructional operations employees working in different physical areas inside and around their schools, having limited levels of access to technology, and potentially varying degrees of written communication skills eliminated quantitative surveys from consideration as the most appropriate option for this research inquiry.

A phenomenological research design was selected as the most appropriate methodological approach for this study due to phenomenology’s purpose of seeking to explore the perceptions and descriptions of individual experiences (Creswell, 2014; Marshall &

Rossman, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A phenomenological qualitative study was conducted of administrators' experiences leading non-instructional staff in three high schools. The lived experiences of the non-instructional personnel as well as focus groups of teachers in the schools were also investigated.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The research approach chosen for this inquiry was a phenomenological qualitative study of the leadership interaction between building-level school administrators and non-instructional operations personnel from three high schools within a single school system in a southern state. The exploration of the direct experiences of individuals and groups of individuals who have interacted and who would self-report their accounts of their own experiences led to the selection of phenomenology as the qualitative research design for this inquiry (Creswell, 2014). Based deeply in psychology and philosophy, the phenomenological research approach commonly involves the researcher describing and interpreting accounts provided by individuals who have experienced the phenomenon that is the subject of the research. Specific emphasis is placed on the manner in which participants remember, judge, describe, make sense of and feel about the experienced phenomenon. As was the case in this study, these data are often gathered through face-to-face interviews and discussions with participants (Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the primary purposes of qualitative interviews are to “gain focused insight into individuals' lived experiences, understand how participants make sense of and construct reality in relation to the phenomenon... and explore how individuals' experiences and perspectives relate to other study participants” (p. 146). In-depth interviews also

“allow the researcher to understand the meanings that everyday activities hold for people” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 150). This description of interviews as a data collection method is near perfectly aligned with the goal of eliciting experiential and perceptual information from school-level administrators who must lead both instructional and non-instructional personnel in the normal course of their duties.

High school principals and assistant principals were invited to participate in individual face-to-face in-depth interviews where they were asked to share their own perceptions regarding their leadership styles and challenges that they have experienced leading non-instructional operations personnel in their schools. Their experiences of being trained or prepared as well as their perceptions of how school-level administrators should be prepared to lead staff members whose duties are routinely outside of the instructional realm were also sought during the interviews. Interviews were an appropriate method for gathering data for answering these research questions due to their ability to gain deep insights into the perceptions of school administrators and the context in which they work (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The complete School-Level Administrator Interview Protocol is located in Appendix A.

A potential drawback to conducting individual interviews is that interviewers in face-to-face individual interviews may tend to lead the conversation and may inadvertently steer the participant away from potentially important conversations or topics that they might have otherwise discussed. The interview protocol was designed to be a semi-structured format which would allow the conversation to go where participants may lead it within the parameters of the research questions. Another potential disadvantage of personal interviews is that honest and candid interactions depend on trust (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). It is my belief that the positive professional rapport that I enjoy with the school-level administrators participating in the study,

served to facilitate open and honest dialogic engagement. Although a basic level of trust is believed to exist, there is always the possibility that interviewees may be less than candid with some answers since there exists a working relationship outside of the research study.

Focus groups lend themselves to a less directive style of questioning which should allow participants to inherently have more control over the conversations (Krueger & Casey, 2015). According to Krueger and Casey (2015), the purpose of focus groups is to “better understand how people feel or think about an issue, idea, product, or service” (p. 2). They go on to state that focus groups may be more effective than individual interviews in eliciting meaningful and honest data from individuals within the group. The authors theorize that focus groups allow for individuals to be influenced by others just as they normally are in their real lives.

Potential issues to be considered in focus group design are the anticipated dynamics and interaction among group participants. Groupthink is a condition which occurs when group participants form a “group understanding” of a particular topic (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 167). Forming a group consensus around an issue may come from a process where all participants have provided their own input or it may come from group deference to one or a few dominant personalities in the group. It is incumbent upon researchers conducting focus groups to carefully moderate the group to ensure that all participants are provided with the opportunity to fully express their own views and opinions (Krueger & Casey, 2015). During the focus group processes, I elicited discussion in order to ensure that all participants had opportunity to comment and contribute to all topics discussed by the groups.

Another potential issue involving focus group dynamics is the concern that participants may not view themselves as equals within the group thus causing some participants to withhold



their comments and contributions. Krueger and Casey (2015) warns researchers to “avoid mixing people who may feel they have different levels of expertise or power related to the issue.” (pp. 23-24) In a non-instructional staff focus group, for example, it may be ill-advised to place school resource officers or technology specialists in the same group with bus drivers and custodians. The perception that SROs and technology specialists may have a higher level of training and/or education than other focus group participants could potentially lead to reluctance by some participants to provide input or challenge ideas discussed by the group.

Focus group participants should be individuals who “share certain characteristics relevant to the study’s questions” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 153). This study consisted of two separate sets of focus groups conducted at three high schools. The first focus group at each school consisted of employees whose primary job duties are to perform non-instructional operations functions within or in support of the high schools. Participants included a cross-section of school employees who perform essential basic functions such as driving school buses or preparing student meals, but who do not work in an instructional capacity in a classroom. The protocol for the Non-Instructional Personnel Focus Group containing all questions and facilitation information is located in Appendix B.

Following the non-instructional focus group, a second focus group consisting of instructional faculty was conducted at each of the three high schools. The purpose of these focus groups were to gather data to answer the second research question posed by this inquiry. Are the dominant leadership styles used by school-level leaders for leading non-instructional personnel comparable to those used for leading instructional personnel? At the time the instructional faculty focus groups were convened, data from principal interviews and non-instructional personnel focus groups were already gathered. The final data-gathering step was to obtain the

perspectives of teachers in the school. It was important to understand what instructional staff perceive to be the predominant leadership styles of their school administrators and how these perceptions compare to those of non-instructional personnel and those of the administrators themselves. Questions and focus group facilitation details are contained within the Instructional Faculty Focus Group Protocol located in Appendix C.

Due to group interactions and dynamics, focus group interviews may produce data that individual interviews might not (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Furthermore, providing a private setting close to the participants' workplace is intended to promote a more relaxed environment than participants may experience in "artificial experimental" circumstances or in one-on-one interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Among the other benefits of utilizing focus groups in qualitative research is the researcher's ability to observe participants' body language, demeanor and voice inflection as they respond to questions and other participant comments. Finally, group interaction is considered critical to the data collection process. Focus groups provide researchers with the flexibility to explore unanticipated issues and topics as they arise during group discussions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Information gained from the individual interviews and focus groups at each school was collected and analyzed comparing information provided by principals, non-instructional operations staff, and instructional faculty from the same school. Information garnered from an ongoing review of the literature relating to the research topic has also served to inform the collection of data in this inquiry. Although the literature is not to be considered data to be collected (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016), ongoing literature review aided in the constant refinement of the research questions and data collection methodology.

Before conducting any individual or focus group interviews, individual informed consent was obtained from all participants. The Informed Consent Form is included in Appendix E (Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). After obtaining informed consent, participants were engaged either in individual interviews or in focus groups. All six interviews and six focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed in order to ensure accuracy of data synthesis and analysis. Physical media containing collected research data is locked in a filing cabinet within a secure facility. Electronic data will continue to be secured on a password protected hard drive and backed up to a secure server. After being transferred to the secure server, digital audio files were deleted from the portable recording device to prevent unauthorized or accidental access to inquiry data.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

Data obtained through participant interviews were organized and analyzed based on *verbatim* transcripts of audio recordings from all individual and focus group interviews. The large amount of text data gathered were analyzed inductively without any predetermined hypothesis or theory developed in other contexts. Analysis was directed by the development of the data itself. In order to mitigate the effect that my own subjectivity could have on the study, I as the researcher followed the guidance of Seidman (2013) by “coming to the transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important of interest from the text” (p. 119). In order to get to the essence of the phenomenon, it was necessary to fully reflect on and disclose my experiences with and potential biases concerning the topic and participants involved in the study. This process of self-disclosure is referred to as “bracketing” since the researcher brackets or separates these potential influences from the analysis of the data that emerges from the study

itself (Seidman, 2013; Stringer, 2014). A bracketing statement is included in the Trustworthiness and Bias section of this chapter.

Once interview recordings were fully transcribed, data were sorted, grouped, and organized using qualitative analysis codes. Seidman (2013) recommends not analyzing data until all interviews are complete while Krueger and Casey (2015) recommend constant analysis in order to refine data collection questions and procedures. Subscribing to the latter point of view, I transcribed and analyzed data throughout the process. This ongoing process allowed for potential procedural modifications in future interviews and focus groups along the way if necessary. Coding is accomplished by creating a category system then identifying themes by analyzing every line of each transcript *verbatim* (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Stringer, 2014). Interview response information was coded and recorded using a matrix for data organization in preparation for data analysis. Coded data points were then be compared with that of other participants. Multiple extensive readings or “immersive engagement” with the data was necessary in order to thoroughly analyze all aspects of data gathered from multiple sources (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 245). Ideally, analysis of the interview and focus group data results in a point of saturation where little or no new information is being produced (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Points of saturation were reached resulting in findings confirmed by both sets of focus groups and multiple administrator interview statements.

### **Trustworthiness and Bias**

Issues of trustworthiness in qualitative research frequently relate to credibility, dependability, and transferability of the information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Credibility pertains to how objectively participant perceptions correlate to the manner in which the

researcher portrays them in the reporting of the research. Whereas experience with the functions and people involved in the study may produce the benefit of deeper understanding of the research setting, there is also the possibility of bias affecting research findings. In order to ensure credibility of my research, I “bracketed” my personal perspective by providing full disclosure of my positionality and potential biases that could emerge from the possibility of having varying degrees of prior familiarity with the building level administrators, non-instructional operations personnel, and teachers involved in the research (Seidman, 2014; Stringer, 2013).

I currently serve as assistant superintendent for operations in the school system to be studied in the inquiry. My responsibilities include overseeing the directors responsible for various non-instructional operations departments that provide services throughout the school district. The organizational structure provides for separation between my position and those employees participating in the study. Most employees have a direct supervisor and a director to whom they report. The directors then report to me on the organizational chart. The benefit of this organizational structure relative to the research is that none of the participants report directly to me and my normal contact with them would be intermittent at best. Furthermore, I do not evaluate any of the employees participating in the inquiry.

My duties do require me to work with principals and assistant principals on a regular basis, but I am not in their organizational chain of command. I perceive that my professional relationship with all principals and assistant principals is generally positive, but there are times when the nature of our interactions are less pleasant than others. There have been no recent issues that would interfere with my objective analysis of the data yielded from administrators from the three high schools to be studied.

The concept of dependability pertains to the documenting of research processes so that readers may understand the manner in which research procedures were conducted. In order to ensure dependability of my research findings thorough explanations of the processes used to collect and analyze research data are included in this chapter as well in the appendices. The data gathered through my inquiry will also be retained for potential future review by other researchers.

As is the case in this study, the scope of qualitative research is often limited to particular settings such as a specific case study site or a phenomenon shared among a particular group of individuals. For this reason, qualitative research is not intended to be generalizable as quantitative research often is (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research can be transferable to other settings that share similar circumstances or contexts as the research site. In order to provide transferability so that others may find use of my research outside of a single school system, a thoroughly detailed “thick” description of the setting, circumstances, background, and other context is provided to the reader in the Problem Setting / Context section of this chapter. By understanding the context of the research setting, others may find parallels or correlations that make the findings of this research transferable to their own work or research settings.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of the study include the fact that this study reflects only the culture, context, and circumstances of a single school district. Although the findings may be transferable depending on whether another site has commonalities with this research setting or context, it is not expected that the findings of this inquiry will be transferable to all public school systems.

Other limitations inherent to qualitative interviews and focus groups are that not all participants are equally articulate and perceptive, information is filtered through the perspectives of individual participants, and the presence of the researcher may bias participant responses (Creswell, 2014). I sought to mitigate each of these potential issues by facilitating the focus groups and through approaching the interviews in an open and unbiased manner and by asking probing questions. As necessary, all participants were prompted to participate in focus group conversations (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Other potential limitations of conducting focus groups are the prospects of “groupthink” and the potential that group power and influence dynamics may unduly influence member participation. Groupthink is described by Ravitch and Carl (2016) as occurring “when an individual introduces a topic and the rest of the group focuses on this topic and ultimately generates a group understanding” (p. 167). Groupthink may have positive and negative impact on the research. Focus groups can collectively construct conversations and ideas in order to build “robust and rationally grounded” data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Careful moderation of the focus group helped to ensure that all participants were given ample opportunity to be heard thus increasing the likelihood that a group consensus was more representative of all or most participants’ opinions and perspectives (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

### **Delimitations**

The primary delimiting factor of this study is the selection of one school district in one state as the site of the study. Additionally, only three high schools in the school system of twenty three schools were selected for inclusion in the study. This decision was made in order to ensure the quality of qualitative data collection and analysis in lieu of quantity. Furthermore, only a

sampling of non-instructional and instructional employees were afforded the opportunity to participate in the planned focus groups. In order to facilitate the best opportunity for rich conversation, the qualitative design of the study limits the number of participants. Krueger and Casey (2015) recommends that focus groups ideally range in size from 5 to 8 participants. All focus groups in this study fell within these recommended parameters.

### **Summary**

This study of dominant leadership dynamics of principals leading non-instructional operations personnel was accomplished through a phenomenological qualitative study of three high schools in a public school system in a southern state. Data for the case study were collected through individual interviews of school-level administrators and separate focus group interviews of selected non-instructional personnel and instructional faculty. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed *verbatim* for subsequent use in coding and cataloguing of data. Qualitative data were analyzed in order to identify themes and trends that led to a saturation of the data. Findings may serve to inform future professional development initiatives for school leaders within the school system as well as other school systems with similar contexts and circumstances.



## CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS

### Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the leadership dynamics experienced by school administrators supervising non-instructional personnel in the performance of school operations. Chapter Four provides data that inform the established research questions of this study. The following research questions were the focus of the study.

**RQ1:** What leadership challenges do school-level administrators encounter when supervising non-instructional personnel?

**RQ2:** Are the dominant leadership styles used by school-level administrators for leading non-instructional personnel comparable to those used for leading instructional personnel?

**RQ3:** How can school-level leaders be more effectively prepared to lead non-instructional personnel in the performance of essential school operational functions?

Individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews with principals and an assistant principal from each of three high schools within a single school system provided much of the research data for the study. Administrator interview questions were of an open-ended and semi-structured nature intended to provide flexibility for the researcher to pursue ideas and conversations as they developed during the interviews. Questions were designed to provide a better understanding of administrators' experiences relating to non-instructional school personnel as well as perceptions of their own leadership styles (Appendix A).

In addition to administrator interviews, focus groups comprised of non-instructional personnel (Appendix B) and separate focus groups consisting of instructional faculty (Appendix C) were conducted at each of the three high schools. Focus group questions were also designed to be semi-structured and open-ended to stimulate engaging conversation among focus group participants.

Data relating to the first research question were gained through detailed discussion of perceptions shared by principals and assistant principals regarding their own educational leadership experiences. Non-instructional operations personnel were asked separately to share their experiences relating to challenges affecting their jobs and the school or school administration. Similarly, instructional staff focus groups from each of the three high schools were asked to share observations and experiences relating to non-instructional functions and personnel as they may relate to school administrators.

The second research question sought to compare administrators' leadership styles when dealing with instructional staff with their predominant leadership characteristics interacting with non-instructional operations employees. This question was also investigated through interview and focus group questioning as well as a brief leadership characteristic exercise adapted from the Bass and Avolio Full Range of Leadership model (1994). The exercise document (Appendix D) summarized in bullet point format the primary leadership characteristics associated with the various transformational and transactional leadership styles that make up the Full Range of Leadership model. Participating principals and assistant principals were asked to read the descriptions and identify the single leadership characteristic that best described their own predominant leadership style. Instructional and non-instructional focus group participants were each given the same exercise document to read and review. Brief explanation of each leadership

style and characteristic were provided verbally along with opportunity for clarification and the answering of any questions participants may have had. Each focus group member was then asked to mark the two leadership styles that described their principal and the assistant principal involved in the study from their school. Data from the leadership characteristic exercise were compiled (Table 4.2) comparing the frequency instructional and non-instructional staff identified each characteristic relating to their administrators. Their perceptions were compared with principal and assistant principal responses. Perception data were also analyzed comparing responses from non-instructional focus groups with that of instructional focus groups.

In addition to the ratings selected on the leadership characteristic exercise, quoted statements from all interview and focus group transcripts were analyzed and categorized also using the Full Range of Leadership model as a theoretical framework. Frequency of characteristic identification is included along with exercise responses in Table 4.2 in Presentation of Findings section of this chapter.

In order to maintain confidentiality, participant and school names were substituted with pseudonyms. High schools were randomly labeled as High School A, High School B, and High School C. Accordingly, participants were given pseudonyms describing their professional position and the school they are associated with. Examples of the naming schema include Principal B (principal of School B) and Custodian A (custodian at School A). Since all instructional focus group participants were teachers. Members of their focus groups were assigned personal alphabetical designations in addition to their school identifiers. As an example teachers from High School B participating in the focus group were identified as Teacher B-A, Teacher B-B, Teacher B-C, etc. Demographic data of all participants is included in Table 4.1. Participant information includes work location, participant pseudonym, years in the field of

education, gender identification, and age. Academic discipline for teachers (math, English language arts, etc.) for teachers is also included. Both sets of focus groups were made up of a demographic cross-section consisting of novice and veteran teachers and non-instructional staff as well as representatives from various operations service units and academic departments.

Table 4.1

*Participant Demographic Information*

School	Participant	Years in Education	Years in Administration	Gender	Age	Subject
HS A	Principal A	22	18	M	40-50	
HS A	AP A	20	6	M	40-50	
HS A	Nutrition 1A	13		F	30-40	
HS A	Nutrition 2A	<1		F	20-30	
HS A	Maintenance A	2		M	20-30	
HS A	Custodial A	23		F	50-60	
HS A	Transportation A	4		F	40-50	
HS A	Teacher A -A	19		F	40-50	
HS A	Teacher A -B	20		F	40-50	ELA
HS A	Teacher A -C	6		M	40-50	History
HS A	Teacher A -D	12		M	30-40	Math
HS A	Teacher A -E	6		F	30-40	Art
HS B	Principal B	27	15	M	40-50	
HS B	AP B	29	15	F	40-50	
HS B	Nutrition 1B			NA		
HS B	Nutrition 2B			NA		
HS B	Maintenance B	18		M	40-50	
HS B	Custodial B	<1		F	30-40	
HS B	Transportation B	21		M	60-70	
HS B	Teacher B -A	20		F	40-50	Serv. Lng.
HS B	Teacher B -B	N/A				
HS B	Teacher B -C	4		F	20-30	ELA
HS B	Teacher B -D	2		M	20-30	Science
HS B	Teacher B -E	9		M	40-50	Math
HS C	Principal C	28	11	F	40-50	
HS C	AP C	24	10	M	40-50	

Table 4.1  
(Cont.)

School	Participant	Years in Education	Years in Administration	Gender	Age	Subject
HS C	Nutrition 1C	6		F	30-40	
HS C	Nutrition 2C	<1		F	20-30	
HS C	Maintenance C	18		M	50-60	
HS C	Custodial C	2		M	30-40	
HS C	Transportation C	6		F	40-50	
HS C	Teacher C -A	15		F	30-40	Soc Studies
HS C	Teacher C -B	15		M	30-40	ESOL
HS C	Teacher C -C	2		M	40-50	Special Ed
HS C	Teacher C -D	4		F	20-30	French
HS C	Teacher C -E	N/A				
HS C	Teacher C -F	12		M	30-40	STEAM

### Data Analysis

*Verbatim* transcripts were coded to indicate schools and position codes for each statement uttered in individual interviews and focus groups. First cycle coding (Saldana, 2013) was conducted by electronically cutting and pasting transcript quotations onto a spreadsheet organized according to focus group or interview question criteria. Sub-codes describing secondary characteristics of each statement were also utilized (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

As a second cycle of coding and data review (Saldana, 2013), the multiple spreadsheet pages addressing interview and focus group questions were synthesized into another table arranged by topic areas utilizing Research Questions 1, 2, and 3 as a basis for categorization.

Subsequent coding cycles included annotation of the Full Range of Leadership Characteristics Exercise results. Tables documented the leadership characteristics reported by principals and assistant principals as being their own dominant leadership styles. The same tables

also quantified the perceptions of all instructional and non-instructional focus groups regarding the administrators' primary leadership styles.

Following the exercise instrument analysis, the next phase of analysis focused on the *verbatim* focus group and individual interview dialogic data. All statements were analyzed for content that may indicate that participating principals or assistant principals may demonstrate or be perceived by other participants to demonstrate leadership characteristics enumerated in the Bass and Avolio (1994) Full Range of Leadership model. Serving as a researcher aid, analysis memos and notes were made throughout the coding, analysis, and synthesis processes.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

Principals and assistant principals have the complicated task of ensuring the core business of the school is accomplished by serving as instructional leaders for their staff and students. There are, however, the realities that school administrators must also ensure that the learning environment is safe, clean, and well organized. Students require transportation, breakfast and lunch, and numerous other services which are not directly related to teaching and learning. With these necessary operational tasks comes the need to effectively lead and interact with the non-instructional personnel who perform these support functions. Nearly half of all employees in the school system studied work outside of the instructional environment. Many of these employees perform job tasks that are essential to the efficient operation of any school, but which may not often be associated with student learning. As an aid to the reader, the findings of this study are presented in relation to the study's research questions. A brief summary of all findings is first presented followed by a detailed discussion of each.

Findings 1 and 2 inform Research Question 1: What leadership challenges do school-level administrators encounter when supervising non-instructional personnel?

Finding 1: Most administrators report that organizational complexities present challenges that sometimes hinder their ability to manage non-instructional school operational functions and to lead non-instructional personnel. Among the complexities discussed were the school system's outsourcing of custodial services and personnel staffing in the school nutrition department. Also causing some challenges for administrators are system-level services that have personnel reporting to supervisors outside of the school and the necessity for principals to delegate responsibility for many non-instructional tasks within their schools. These organizational complexities can create physical and relational distance between some administrators and the employees who perform operations tasks within their schools.

Finding 2: Some employee groups consider themselves to be isolated and not included as members of the school community. While they may be engaged as employees of their respective departments, some feel no connection to the schools that they serve. Such isolation is not the norm for most non-instructional personnel, but for those affected results range from attitudes of indifference to a mutual lack of trust between the employees and school administration.

Finding 3 relates to Research Question 2: Are the dominant leadership styles used by school-level administrators for leading non-instructional personnel comparable to those used for leading instructional personnel?

Finding 3: Although most administrators and employee focus groups acknowledged that the content of the routine communications were dependent on the nature of the job at hand, there was little difference in the general trends describing how non-instructional staff and instructional employees viewed the manner in which their administrators lead them.

Finding 4 speaks to Research Question 3: How can school-level leaders be more effectively prepared to lead non-instructional personnel in the performance of essential school operational functions?

Finding 4: None of the six administrators ever received formal training in graduate school or in professional development for leading non-instructional support staff. Recommendation for future professional development or principal preparation program addition in the importance of engaging non-instructional support staff as members of the school community or “whole-of-school” leadership (New Zealand Education Institute, 2011).

### **Organizational Complexities - System Services and Outsourcing**

The school system provides centralized facilities maintenance, transportation, school nutrition, and custodial services to schools. One of the benefits of this arrangement according to most of the administrators involved in this study is that they receive usually high levels of service in most of these areas. Common exceptions discussed were service failures of the previous custodial service contractor. The school system had the same custodial service provider for over ten years before changing companies less than one year ago. Both administrators and employee focus groups discussed challenges with staffing, training, and quality consistency issues with the previous custodial company. Making these situations more frustrating for administrators is that they were at the mercy of the contractor to recruit, retain, train, and terminate employees and to ensure that schools were clean. Nearly all study participants provided accounts of high custodial employee turnover rates. Principal A described the issue. “If you’ve got constant turnover, you never get that (quality custodial service) established. You never get those routines established for those folks.” Principal B concurred. “There may not be



some training there or the training is kind of sparse only because the turnover is so great in those positions.” Assistant Principal B responded to a question about frustrations over custodial issues, “Just the transition of different people in and then trying to figure out who is who and how long are they going to be with me and are they here to stick it out.” The administrators acknowledged that the level of custodial service has improved and become more stable with the new company, but all had negative experiences from the past that affect their perspective regarding outsourced services in their schools.

The district’s facilities maintenance department is responsible for both preventative maintenance and responding to facilities issues in schools. There are a total of twenty-one maintenance employees with responsibilities ranging from electrical and plumbing repair to logistics and courier service. Fourteen of the maintenance department employees do actual repair work for the 22 school buildings and 3 administrative facilities. Service requests are managed by an electronic work order system. Maintenance supervisors review and prioritize work orders before assigning work to the department’s technicians. Although maintenance department staff members are frequently in the schools, they are not assigned to a particular building.

Although there is a formal work order system, it was made clear that most administrators (2 of 3 principals and all 3 APs) routinely contact maintenance workers by cell phone rather than waiting for their repair orders to be processed through the system. The maintenance representative for School B stated, “They’re (administrators) all the time wanting us to do something, the principals does, without going through proper channels... the work order system.” Receiving calls such as this from school administrators puts maintenance staff in the awkward position of having to refer administrators to the formal work order system, to their

departmental supervisors, or trying to please the customer by accommodating their request. This work would be in addition to all other work orders assigned them that day.

School nutrition services are provided within the high school cafeterias, but the kitchen staff are directed by the district's school nutrition department. Principals and assistant principals have frequent contact with the school nutrition staff, but they do not have direct supervisory authority over them. None of the administrators mentioned the lack of authority as an issue, but several commented that the kitchen staff seemed separate from the rest of the school.

School bus services are also managed from the school system level. Like school nutrition, transportation is a part of the district's operations division. Since elementary schools start and end approximately an hour earlier than middle and high schools in the district, bus drivers normally service two different schools on a daily basis. A common example would be for a driver to run an afternoon route from an elementary school beginning at 2:30 then picking up their middle or high school students at 3:30. This limited amount of time on campus is likely a contributing factor to the isolation described by two of the high school bus drivers and two of three principals who admit to not knowing who their bus drivers are.

High school bus drivers (2 of 3) described their experience of delivering students to and picking them up from high school every day for several years without having any meaningful contact with school administrators. Two of three principals corroborated the bus driver's assertions. Principals B and C acknowledged that they do not know bus drivers at their schools nearly to the extent to which they are familiar with operational employees who work inside the school building during work hours (school nutrition employees, daytime custodians, maintenance employees, activity bus driver with a close relationship to school administrators).

## **Delegation of Administrator Responsibility**

High schools with student populations ranging from 1,100 to nearly 1,400 are so busy, they often require principals to delegate some responsibilities to assistant principals and others. Various functions such as administering student discipline, facilities management, school safety coordination, and student transportation facilitation are usually delegated to assistant principals in this district's high schools. Two of the three high schools have three assistant principals. One of the high schools has two APs and each school has a different pattern of delegated tasks among them.

A perhaps unintended consequence of delegating the principal's authority is the creation of an additional barrier for principals to be familiar with those non-instructional personnel performing some operational functions. Principal B summed up the issue by saying, "I don't know as many bus drivers here as I did at (the middle school), because I don't have to. Assistant Principal B is out at the buses every day. So, he knows them. He knows who does what."

The three principals reported that due to delegation of duties to assistant principals and because most operations functions are handled at the system level, the average portion of the school day they spend dealing with non-instructional operations tasks is 10%, 2%, and 25% respectively. Given that there are at least two assistant principals at each of the high schools, the assistant principals participating in this study do not all share the same areas of responsibility at their respective schools. Assistant Principal A reported about 15% of their day is usually spent dealing with operations functions. Assistant Principal B deals primarily with facilities and safety concerns and spends the majority of their day dealing with non-instructional operations functions. Assistant Principal C also spends the majority of their day managing non-instructional

functions, but mainly due to their additional duties as the school's athletic director. Principal B shared his experience that led him to delegate as a leader along with a description of the school's delegation arrangement relating to non-instructional functions and responsibilities.

The first year or so (as an administrator) I felt like I needed to go and do almost everything and I think everybody does that to begin with. But eventually you figure out, I just can't do it. I can't physically do it... (One assistant principal) deals with buses. (Assistant Principal B) deals with facilities, custodians, and that. I typically, (Assistant Principal B) deals a lot with technology too. I deal with a lot of that just because I know a little bit about it.

While all administrators stated that it is necessary to effectively operate a safe and orderly school, delegation of administrator duties can affect communication between non-instructional staff and school administrators. Due to the delegation of different responsibilities to various assistant principals, several non-instructional staff members were unfamiliar with the specific assistant principals participating in the study and unable to comment about their leadership characteristics. A custodial supervisor representing School C described the various administrative arrangements at different schools for which he is also responsible.

Every school is different. "I got some schools that the principal talks to me directly and I got others that their AP talks to me whenever they've got concerns about one of the custodians not cleaning right or something. It's just different depending on the school.

### **Engagement of Non-Instructional Employees**

Principals and assistant principals were asked if they perceived that non-instructional operations staff are included as members of the school community. Responses were split between the belief that the non-instructional personnel are generally considered to be part of the

school to the opinion that operational personnel are not given enough input when it comes to events or issues that might affect their areas of responsibility.

Principal A presented evidence of inclusion by pointing out that he often invites custodians and school nutrition employees to holiday dinners and maintenance appreciation breakfasts hosted every year at the start of school. All three principals along with Assistant Principals B and C spoke of eating in the school's cafeteria on a daily basis and making it a point to talk to the school nutrition staff while they are getting their food.

Assistant Principal B, one of the administrators of the opposing opinion that non-instructional staff members are not allowed adequate input when it may be beneficial to them or the school explained:

They're not included on things where I think they need input. For example on a leadership team setting I think they can bring things to the table that I think maybe... A lot of times teachers and other people are just focused on the instructional side of things and they don't think about how... For example a Spring musical...

The implication being that if, for example, custodians and maintenance staff were to be included early in the planning process for special events, many service failures or delays may be prevented. Assistant Principal B made it clear that she viewed this lack of communication and engagement as a failure of the administration to appreciate the importance of non-instructional functions that benefit the school.

Most members of the non-instructional focus group indicated that they felt like members of the school community. They elaborated by describing how school administrators and others often make them feel welcome and appreciated by speaking to them and respectfully

acknowledging them wherever they may encounter them. The school nutrition manager at School C described her relationship with Principal C.

She's usually in there for breakfast or she comes through and we chat during lunch and her office is always open. I can always go in there and talk to her any time I need to. Some of them you have to make an appointment and do this and do that. I have never had that problem with her since I took over. She's always been right there and done everything that we needed to do.

There were some exceptions, such as a school nutrition representatives from Schools A and C who complained that administration sometimes forgets to let them know when state testing is expected to alter the lunch schedule. The lack of communication has occasionally resulted in the loss of product due to food safety timing standards being exceeded. In those instances, unnecessary overtime expenses also resulted when kitchen staff had to work over their scheduled time to cook additional food for students who were late to lunch due to the testing schedule. School C's school nutrition manager provided a vivid description of the issue from her perspective.

The first testing we went through they didn't let me know even though they were testing that day really. To go through testing and have to wait on... half to back everything down from cooking. We usually have everything done at 11:00, okay they didn't come until 12:30 one day. I was not even told. When the AP came and asked me, I was like can you please get me a schedule? I'd like to know what's going on.

The kitchen manager said that after the discussion with the assistant principal and her supervisor in the school nutrition department, she did receive a testing schedule prior to the following week's test.

With few exceptions, most non-instructional operations employees expressed a general sense of being kept informed regarding events and issues that directly affect their jobs. Their discussion primary centered around transactional items such as field trips, lunch schedule changes caused by standardized testing, and after-hours events affecting custodial operations. One custodian who expressed a relatively high degree of satisfaction with the manner in which she is kept “in the loop” was content with having the portable radio to hear when administrators were calling each other from different parts of the building. None of the non-instructional participants expressed any interest in being included in more school related gatherings such as staff meetings.

Non-instructional staff had been invited to a holiday staff luncheon at one of the schools, but were otherwise not included in staff meetings and were not informed about school-wide initiatives. During a conversation about administrators’ support of bus drivers and student discipline issues arising on the school bus it was discovered that none of the non-instructional focus group participants were familiar with Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which is in its third year of implementation district-wide. PBIS is a program intended to involve all areas of the school community.

Many non-instructional staff members stated that they felt that their contributions are appreciated. One maintenance employee stated, “We had so many people over the last few years teachers and principals calling and telling what a great (job) we’re doing and how much better things are getting.” Others described friendly and humorous interactions that they often have with the schools’ administrators. With the exception of those non-instructional employees who describe feelings of personal isolation (bus drivers) relative to school administration, most

operations employees were satisfied to receive information that relates directly to their job functions.

Instructional employee focus group members at Schools A and C expressed less satisfaction with the amount of information they routinely receive from their administrators. Teachers at both schools discussed the need to seek answers from the administration or to utilize informal communications channels to find out what is going on in the school.

Teachers of all instructional focus groups also described their observations of administrators interacting with non-instructional staff members. A teacher at School C stated, “On maintenance, I see them out here talking with them, joking around with them. I mean it’s positive interaction. I think that makes those folks work harder for you.” Another School C teacher said, “custodial, school maintenance, I mean it’s just a peer to peer interaction is what I see”. A School A teacher discussed Principal A’s interactions with operations staff.

I’ve seen the principal interact with lunchroom staff and custodians and he seems to know them very well. He knows what’s going on in their lives. He knows their names. He knows their children. So, there’s a very personal relationship that he seems to have with those individuals.

### **Employee Isolation**

Some operational employees have frequent interaction with administration by virtue of their job being inside the school during normal working hours. There are, however, some employees who said that they rarely see their school’s principal or assistant principal. A couple of such isolated jobs are night-shift custodians and bus drivers at certain schools.

Two of three principals indicated that they do not routinely interact with their bus drivers. Principal B admitted that he does not know his bus drivers very well. Principal C stated that she



does not know them at all. Principal A indicated that he has delegated bus duty responsibilities to Assistant Principal A and that AP A keeps up to date with what is going on with bus drivers. There was no evidence that either principal ever intended to exclude or alienate any employees. The communication disconnect seems to have come from the physical isolation of certain employee groups, such as high school bus drivers, from the day-to-day operation of the school. Since bus drivers in the district serve multiple schools and due to bus duty tasks being among those that are frequently delegated to assistant principals, principals sometimes have limited or no contact with the bus drivers at their school.

Evidence of isolation becoming an issue was presented by a bus driver and trainer from School C who indicated that after four years of driving for School Co she never met the principal or assistant principal.

I drove four years for (School C) and I drove the same bus...I went those four years and never even met either one of them (the principal or the AP)... I never met anybody in the school. I couldn't tell you who any of those people are after four years. But then at other schools I can tell you who everybody is because they come out and they actually... when they see somebody new they come out and introduce themselves.

Since routine student disciplinary issues are managed via written communication between bus drivers and school administration, face-to-face contact with school bus drivers and this school's administration is relatively rare unless the driver comes back to the school after route time and asks to see the principal. Bus Driver C also indicated that there is a consensus among bus drivers at School C that the administration does not adequately support them with matters of student discipline.

Student discipline I think is my biggest frustration. We're noticing a lot of things we are correcting with the drivers, but the principals... some of them don't seem like they take it

as seriously as they should. A lot of times we don't know the discipline that they get. Say they're suspended then the principals don't ever come out and tell us then we pull up to pick them up.

Principal C expressed regret that she is not more familiar with the school's bus drivers and acknowledged that the lack of engagement can lead to issues of mutual mistrust. When asked about what she views as the greatest challenge with leading non-instructional personnel, she spoke about bus drivers that serve her school.

I would just say not being able to see them on a daily basis or not having direct contact with them... You know we base what we do on a (bus surveillance) video or somebody telling us about it and I think... if we were in direct contact with them and they were in our building like cafeteria workers are, it would make things easier. Not really having a relationship with every bus driver since we have so many makes that difficult. If you know somebody and you kind of have an idea how they handle kids, whether it be discipline-wise or how they treat students you've got a better understanding of kind of what you're dealing with as far as problems go. They'll write it on a piece of paper and turn it in to us if there's a discipline problem, but we don't have a chance to get to know each other. Whereas when you're dealing with people in the cafeteria, you see them. You see them on a daily basis if you want to. You can talk to them, greet them... so you've got some kind of rapport with them. Whereas when you have people outside your building like our bus drivers it's harder that way.

Principal B stated his belief that it is the responsibility of the bus driver or any other employee to choose whether or not to be engaged in the school community. "It is what you make of it." Like Principal C, Principal B also eluded to issues of trust that sometimes exist between school administrators who may believe that certain bus drivers overreact to student discipline issues and the bus drivers themselves, some of whom feel as though they are not adequately supported by school administration. "I mean sometimes bus drivers get some training on how to deal with kids but they don't get a ton of training on how to deal with kids. And typically it is not... it is a kid issue, but typically it could have been (resolved in a better way)."

Most principal statements relating to leadership focused on leading instructional staff. An example emphasizing this point was Principal C's statement that, "I think the most important part of what I do as far as overarching is being able to build those relationships. I think it's important to know what's going on in the lives of your teachers." Assistant Principal A emphasized the importance of leaders possessing effective interpersonal communication skills by stating, "I have good relationships with teachers." When prompted by researcher questions, the assistant principal discussed the importance of treating all employees fairly and equitably. These types of statements were typical of most administrator conversations prior to being prompted by specific questions regarding interactions with non-instructional staff members. When asked if she believes that non-instructional personnel are included as members of the school community, Principal C made a statement that seemed to summarize much of the discussion surrounding engaging non-instructional staff and the complicating factors of organizational complexity and work isolation.

Probably not as much as teachers and (paraprofessionals). I'm not directly responsible for bus drivers and cafeteria workers, but at the same time I do want them to feel a part of what we do here. I want them to know that they're a part of us and we care about them. It's just a different kind of expectation, I guess, because I am not directly involved with them. It's easier since the people in the cafeteria are in the building to keep in communication with them than it is with bus drivers.

By stating that she is "not directly responsible" for bus drivers and cafeteria workers, Principal C's statement also demonstrates how complicated reporting structures can affect school-level leadership of non-instructional personnel.

When asked about the working relationship between non-instructional staff and school administrators, the bus driver representative from School A stated that, "I felt like we were kind

of on our own and that's kind of (pause)... we were expected to do our job. They might care about us and they might not, we didn't really know." It should be noted that the principal from this school stated that he makes it a point to know his bus drivers. "I am out at bus duty every day so I go out and I talk to the bus drivers on a regular basis so I am able to call them by their name."

Whereas most non-instructional employees expressed general satisfaction with the relationship they have with their school administrators, bus drivers at schools A and C felt no connection to the principal or assistant principal at either school. The bus driver representing School B discussed having a strong rapport with the school's principal. This is likely due to the bus driver being the "activity driver" for the school. He described having frequent contact with the principal and coaches because he is the primary driver for most out-of-town sporting events and field trips. Bus Driver B described his relationship with the principal.

I would have to call mine (relationship with Principal B) immaculate. He and I have a good relationship. I know what his good side is and I always stay on it. I know as long as I go in his room if I say, "YES!, YES!" (gesturing with his hands over his head) I'm on his good side because he and I both like Daniel \_\_\_\_\_ and wrestling.

### **Administrator Leadership Styles with Instructional and Non-Instructional Personnel**

Given the opportunity to review and rate themselves using the Full Range of Leadership characteristics exercise instrument (Appendix D), administrators were more likely to rate themselves as having Idealized Influence (II) (charismatic) as their predominant leadership style (4 of 6). Assistant Principal B rated her dominant leadership style as being Individualized Consideration (IC) while Principal C rated herself as being a leader predominantly driven by the Inspirational Motivation (IM) leadership style. Administrators gave themselves these ratings as they read from the Full Range of Leadership exercise instrument. The dialogic evidence provided

by principals, assistant principals, and both instructional and non-instructional staff provided indicators that varied among all of the transformational leadership categories. Reading from the exercise instrument, principals and assistant principals rating themselves as II viewed themselves as being role models for others to emulate, believed themselves to primarily be admired, respected, and trusted by followers, and showed integrity and consistency in their leadership styles.

Statement analysis of administrator interview statements as well as those of both sets of focus groups produced representative quotations indicating most transformational (II, IM, IS, IC) and some transactional leadership styles (CR, MBE, and LF) across the Full Range of Leadership continuum. The predominant leadership style repeatedly described by administrators and focus group participants in interview and focus group dialogue was Individual Consideration (IC). There was far more discussion of positive relationships, caring for follower needs, mentoring, and positive communication between the administrators and employees than there were characteristics from the charismatic or Idealized Influence (II) leadership style. The following statement from Principal A demonstrated this trend.

It depends on the nature. For me it goes back to that relationship piece and I have worked to build with all staff, whether it's a teacher, whether it's a paraprofessional, whether it's a custodian or a bus driver... I have worked to build relationships with all of those people and have made sure to know their names... Every morning I go down and walk through the kitchen after breakfast to make sure I talk with the cafeteria ladies and have a conversation with them. I do that every morning, just to say, "Hey, good morning ladies. How are ya'll doing? Anything I can do for you?"

Table 4.2 summarizes leadership style ratings given to school administrators by instructional and non-instructional focus group participants as well as the self-ratings of all administrators. The table also provides frequency data derived from analyses of *verbatim*

interview and focus group transcripts. Occurrences of behavior or characteristic descriptions meeting the basic criteria of a given leadership style on the Bass and Avolio (1994) Full Range of Leadership model were tallied for each administrator being described and separated by the participant focus group providing the description. Table 4.2 presents these data by denoting principal (P) and assistant principal (AP) self-ratings with an asterisk. The numerical values listed in the administrators' rows represent the frequency with which they themselves described the various leadership characteristics during their interviews.

The rows beneath the P and AP self-ratings and discussion frequency contain focus group ratings and descriptions of their administrators' leadership styles and characteristics. Both non-instructional (NI FG) and instructional focus group (I FG) participants rated their principals and assistant principals based on the same exercise instrument used by administrators for self-evaluation. Focus group ratings of their administrators from the exercise instrument are presented as Exercise Ratings.

Following exercise ratings, Discussion Frequency is provided for both focus group types. These data represent the frequency that focus group (NI FG and I FG) members described administrator leadership behaviors or characteristics that aligned with the leadership characteristic descriptions on the Bass and Avolio Full Range of Leadership model (1994).

Leadership style codes:

II = Idealized Influence (Charismatic)

IM = Inspirational Motivation

IS = Intellectual Stimulation

IC = Individualized Consideration

CR = Contingent Reward

MBE = Management by Exception

LF = *Laissez-Faire*

Table 4.2  
*Leadership Characteristic Exercise Rating and  
 Discussion Frequency*

	<b>II</b>	<b>IM</b>	<b>IS</b>	<b>IC</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>MBE</b>	<b>LF</b>
P A - Exercise Rating & Discussion Frequency	5*	3		10			
NI FG A - Exercise Rating P A	4	3	1	1		1	
Table 4.2 (Cont.)							
I FG A - Exercise Rating P A	1	2	1	4	1		
NI FG A - Discussion Frequency P A	1	3		1	1		
I FG A - Discussion Frequency P A				2			
AP A - Exercise Rating & Discussion Frequency	4*		1	2			
NI FG A - Exercise Rating AP A			1	1	2	2	
I FG A - Exercise Rating AP A		1	2	3			1
NI FG A - Discussion Frequency AP A							
I FG A - Discussion Frequency AP A				2			
P B - Exercise Rating & Discussion Frequency	2*	2		7	1		
NI FG B - Exercise Rating P B	2		2	2		1	
I FG B - Exercise Rating P B	2	1		1			
NI FG B - Discussion Frequency P B		1		7	1		
I FG B - Discussion Frequency P B	2	2	3	12			
AP B - Exercise Rating & Discussion Frequency	1	4		3*	1		
NI FG B - Exercise Rating AP B		1	1	2		1	
I FG B - Exercise Rating AP B	1	1		2			
NI FG B - Discussion Frequency AP B				3	1		
I FG B - Discussion Frequency AP B	5		1	10	1		
P C - Exercise Rating & Discussion Frequency	2	1*		10	3		
NI FG C - Exercise Rating P C	1	3	2	1		1	
I FG C - Exercise Rating P C	4	3	1	2			
NI FG C - Discussion Frequency P C	1			6			

Table 4.2 (Cont.)

	<b>II</b>	<b>IM</b>	<b>IS</b>	<b>IC</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>MBE</b>	<b>LF</b>
I FG C - Discussion Frequency P C	1		2	6			
AP C - Exercise Rating & Discussion Frequency	4*	2		2	4		
NI FG C - Exercise Rating AP C	2	3	1		1		
I FG C - Exercise Rating AP C	4	2		4			
NI FG C – Discussion Frequency AP C	1		2	7			
I FG C - Discussion Frequency AP C	1		2	6			

\* Administrator Exercise Self Rating

P = Principal

AP = Assistant Principal

NI FG = Non-Instructional Focus Group

I FG = Instructional Focus Group

Although the topics and context of their interactions are often different, the leadership styles used by school-level administrators for leading non-instructional personnel are comparable to those used for leading instructional personnel. Although the numerical frequencies are dispersed across the Full Range of Leadership spectrum, the exercise instrument demonstrates that there are no significantly consistent differences between instructional and non-instructional focus group perceptions that could be considered conclusive differences in leadership style dealing with the two different groups.

Dialogic evidence from focus groups and interviews also paints a picture of relative consistency in the way most employees are treated by school administrators. The notable exceptions identified in focus group and principal interviews deal with bus drivers who, due to the nature of their jobs, feel isolated and ignored by the high school principals and assistant



principals. Two of three principals acknowledged that they have not made specific efforts to engage these employees. These administrators and Assistant Principal C perceive that bus drivers, maintenance technicians, and school nutrition employees work independently of the schools. Assistant Principal C explained his perspective.

I've always felt that I'm really not in a leadership role when it comes to my relationship with them (Operations staff). I kind of see them as parallel roles. Like they have their responsibilities and they give me some direction. I tell them what our needs are here.

Comments made by administrators and bus drivers make it clear that this isolation has led to mutual trust issues between some bus drivers and the administration at their schools. The issue does have potential consequences relating to student discipline on school buses.

According to the transportation representative from School C, some drivers have begun to handle student discipline concerns "on their own" because they do not have confidence in the school administrators at their schools to effectively handle bus discipline problems. Principals B and C both expressed concerns that some bus drivers overreact to student behavior problems on buses. Principal B attributed the problem to a lack of bus driver training in the area of student management. Principal C said it was likely a lack of trust since the administrators and bus drivers were not very familiar with one another.

Most non-instructional personnel are relatively satisfied with the relationship they have with their school administration and the communication they receive from them. They frequently rated their principal and assistant principal as having transformational leadership characteristics. It is, however, clear that the leadership style used for leading some bus drivers at some high schools is transactional at best.

### **Administrator Preparation for Leading Non-Instructional Personnel**

The overarching finding relating to how school-level leaders can be more effectively prepared to lead non-instructional personnel in the performance of essential school operational functions is that school administrators in the district do not receive adequate preparation through graduate studies or through professional development in this area. Administrators participating in the study had never received any formal instruction on leading or interacting with non-instructional school personnel. Study participants (2 of 3 principals and all three assistant principals) indicated that there is a need to include the topics of engaging non-instructional operational personnel in principal preparation programs and professional learning opportunities. Principal A's statement was typical of administrator statements regarding their preparation for leading non-instructional staff members.

Well... of course you have conversations in those classes about... you always want to keep your custodians happy. You always want to keep your bookkeepers happy. You have conversations about those things and those people are recognized as important groups. But, as far "oh, today we're going to teach you how to deal with custodian"... none of that.

The study confirmed that the principal preparation programs attended by the six participating administrators included very little content on managing operational functions and even less on leading non-instructional personnel. Likewise, the school district has provided few professional learning opportunities for managing support functions such as custodial, transportation, school nutrition, and maintenance services and have provided none on leading non-instructional staff members.

This lack of formal preparation and professional development is important in that a lack of employee engagement may lead to a lack of trust between school administration and the non-

instructional staff. A majority of non-instructional focus group participants expressed a general sense of feeling appreciated by and having positive perceptions regarding the way their school administrators treat them. There were, of course, notable exceptions with certain employee groups who felt that they are isolated from the school community.

Two principals and three assistant principals say they never received any formal training in their graduate studies relating to management of non-instructional operations functions. The same five of six administrators involved in the study stated that they believed such preparation would be beneficial for all administrators to better understand what non-instructional personnel do and how they as administrators can support them. They also indicated that due to the support they have from system-level services such as maintenance, transportation, school nutrition, and management of the custodial contract, they had never viewed the need for additional skills development on operations management as a critical need.

Several administrators recalled a professional learning session approximately 13 years prior where a janitorial demonstration was conducted for principals and assistant principals. The intent of the presentation was presumably to train school administration on how to manage quality control issues with their custodians. Principal A felt that type of training was beneficial for administrators while Principal B used it as an example of the antiquated image of facility manager principals as opposed to the current expectation that principals serve as the instructional leaders of their schools. Assistant Principal B described her preparation for managing operations functions and leading non-instructional staff.

Now professional development, we have done some things within the system that has helped with that. As far as schoolwork, graduate work and so forth I can only ever remember that being mentioned one time. "Those are the people responsible for cleaning the toilets that you sit on, so you might want to be nice to those people."

Principal A also had a vague recollection of a graduate school conversation arising in a course unrelated to non-instructional matters where the professor casually mentioned, “You know you’ll have to work with custodians and you have to treat them good too.” There was no further discussion on that topic.

Principal B, an administrator with 27 years of experience in public education with fifteen of it as an administrator, indicated that he had received some facilities management training in his master’s program approximately 12 years prior. Although there was some coursework involving facilities, there was no discussion of dealing with non-instructional support staff.

Principal B went on to say the role of principal has changed and that principals are now expected to be instructional leaders for their schools more than school operations managers. Principal B reported that due to delegation to assistant principals and the support of system-level services, he spends only approximately 2% of his workday dealing with non-instructional operations functions. He is not, however, free to spend the remaining 98% of his time solely on improving teaching and learning in his school. Coordinating and dealing with issues relating to athletics takes up a significant amount of his time on a daily basis. Principal B spends a significant portion of his time dealing with upset parents and managing athletic events. Principal B described his opinion that previous generations of principals were primarily “good managers” and not necessarily instructional leaders. He related his reflection of past administrators with his perception of principals today.

The principals were all, for the most part, really good but they were all, for the most part, just very good managers. I think we probably have some folks that love that manager side of it. I’m sure we do. I’m not in other buildings enough to say, but that would drive me insane. I don’t want any part of that. I can deal with it, but that’s not why I feel like we’re here. That whole instructional piece, that’s what’s important to me because that is what we are hired to do.

None of the six administrators ever participated in a course or professional learning session that addressed leading or interacting with non-instructional personnel. Assistant Principal A, who has been a school administrator for six years, described his graduate school experience.

There was not much preparation in those courses for things like that. The graduate work was more about school finance and school law and those kinds of things. How to equip a building to be successful educationally, but there was not much about just dealing with the day-to-day non-educational aspect.

Principal C provided her perspective by sharing that although she never received formal instruction on leading non-instructional personnel, it may not be possible to prepare administrators for every eventuality any more than it is feasible to prepare teachers for every conceivable classroom issue that may arise.

I got my Ed S in leadership, but I don't remember any training for dealing with non-instructional employees. It's kind of like going through a teacher education program. I don't know how prepared you are to step into a classroom. You just kind of feel your way through it and find out what works best for you...and that's what you go with."

Principal A had a similar graduate school experience, but also recalled the early attempt by school system personnel to provide custodial management training to administrators.

I don't know that we had even one class specifically, I know we didn't, that was designed to deal with non-instructional staff. I think it was more about instruction and teachers and dealing with the parents and how to work with the kids. I don't know that there's ever been any kind of real, formal training professional learning on that. I remember we went to (an elementary school) a few years back. It was early on in my administrative career... when (a retired principal) was still working because we were (joking around). And they were showing us how to strip and wax floors and what it should look like. So, I do remember that...

When asked if he thought such custodial supervision training was overkill or valuable, Principal A stated "Oh no, I think it's definitely valuable because I don't know all of that. I

never... I don't know what that looks like." Some administrators described their training and experience relating to operations functions and supervising non-instructional personnel as coming from what Principal C called "trial and error". Assistant Principal A said, "You just learn it on the fly. It's... as you go you deal with things." Assistant Principal C shared a similar opinion, "Those things may be common sense, but most of it is learned by mistakes."

It may also be assumed that everyone brings their own experiences to bear that affect them as leaders. Assistant Principal B described other influences on her preparation for leading non-instructional personnel.

My grandfather was actually one of the first custodians at one of the schools in our system. He had a 3rd grade education, but I always thought he was one of the smartest people that I ever dealt with because he just had that people wisdom. As I got into education I had a couple of principals early on when I was in the classroom and I saw kind of that same thing from them. You know the way that they treated the extra staff, the custodial staff, the cafeteria staff, encouraging teachers to eat in the cafeteria some to support our cafeteria workers. I just picked it up from watching the good people I guess.

The New Zealand Education Institute (2011) conducted a study involving the engagement of support staff to affect student outcomes. Although the study's definition of "support staff" did not include the same employee group that is the subject of this study, its "whole-of-school" recommendation for leadership professional development could be a useful model for developing current and aspiring school-level administrators in the United States.

The impetus for the New Zealand report seemed to be of a political and fiscal nature relative to student outcomes. The objective of the working group was to, "...optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of the support staff workforce in contributing to learning outcomes for students" (p.iii). Although there is emphasis placed on "the utilization of *all* resources to

further educational outcomes” (p.1), only teacher aides, librarians, instructional support staff, school secretaries and clerical staff were identified as support staff in this study. Other non-instructional personnel were not in the scope of this project. Even with the focused employee groups having different responsibilities, parallels exist that make the findings of the New Zealand working group pertinent to this study.

The New Zealand Education Institute (2011) working group set about their work under the premise that, “Ideally, management practices with support staff would mirror good practice with teaching staff, though there are clearly some characteristics of support staff employment which mean the equivalency can be challenging to achieve.” (p. 2). The study found that employees feeling respected, valued, and supported are the keys to ensuring that the support staff workforce is highly productive. The group concluded that a

School’s ability to retain good support staff is likely to rest in large part on their ability to manage them professionally and to make them feel respected and valued for the skills, attributes, and commitment they can bring to the positions.” (p.3)

The report also acknowledged the challenges principals face in “finding the balance between focusing on pedagogical and administrative matters to create a whole-of-school system that optimizes outcomes” (p. 5). The result of the study was an extensive list of recommendations which included national Kiwi Leadership model and principal preparedness and professional development programs include “strategic management of support staff” in their curriculum (Recommendations 15 and 16, p.7 ) and “whole-of-school professional development” for all school employees (Recommendations 3 through 7 p.6 ). With their primary objective being maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of support staff, the primary focus areas recommended by the New Zealand working group were: induction and training of support staff;

role definition, guidance, and mentoring; right person / right job specialization; teamwork and culture; productivity; capability for change (p.9). Of the highly engaged support staff in the involved in the New Zealand study one described the source of their satisfaction coming from being a part of “the life that flows through the school” (p.15).

### **Summary**

Results of this phenomenological qualitative study indicated that a generally positive relationship exists between high school principals, assistant principals, instructional employees, and non-instructional operations staff members. There are organizational complexities that present both benefits and challenges to school administration. District-level services being supervised and managed outside of the school allows for efficient use of resources and provides a relatively high level of customer satisfaction as reported by principals and assistant principals. A likely unintended consequence of some operations employees not reporting to school administration is that working relationships sometimes do not develop between school administrators and certain isolated employees such as school bus drivers who spend little time on the high school campus. This isolation has led to some degree of trust issues between some bus drivers and the administrators at their schools, particularly in relationship to bus drivers’ perception of student discipline support from administrators and administrators’ lack of confidence in bus drivers’ ability to manage such issues. Other organizational complexities that present challenges for principals and assistant principals are the complications that come with having outsourced custodial services and partially outsourced cafeteria staff. This along with limited personnel resources in transportation and maintenance has created some level of frustration among principals and assistant principals.



With the notable exception of those isolated bus drivers, both instructional and non-instructional focus groups held school administrators in relatively high regard when describing their leadership styles and characteristics. Both employee groups ranked their administrators as stronger in the area of Individualized Consideration (IC) emphasizing their respect for individual employees and apparent care for their wellbeing.

None of the administrators involved in the study have ever received any formal training or instruction on leading non-instructional personnel. Some administrators expressed the perspective that they are “not responsible” for transportation and school nutrition services. While the district’s organizational chart would corroborate this assertion, school administrators have to communicate and coordinate with these various groups on a regular basis in the course of school operations. The majority of administrators participating in the study agreed that professional development in the area of leading non-instructional personnel would be useful. The following chapter will discuss implications and provide recommendations for future practice and research.

## CHAPTER FIVE – IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

### Problem Statement

The problem of practice of school-level administrators having to balance their responsibilities as instructional leaders with leading non-instructional operations staff in the performance of their duties and responsibilities presents challenges that are worthy of further inquiry. Public school systems are complex organizations made up of employees who perform functions ranging from classroom instruction and school administration to food preparation and janitorial cleaning services.

Among the myriad responsibilities of school administrators is the necessity for overseeing the creation of conditions conducive to student learning. In addition to leading and facilitating the core business of teaching and learning, principals and assistant principals must ensure that the essential services necessary for healthy school environments are available to students. Such services range from counseling and therapeutic supports to school operations services such as transportation to and from school, the provision of nutritious meals, as well as maintaining safe learning facilities. Even with most of the operations services being directly managed by departments at the school district level, as is the case in this school system, school administrators must continually interact with non-instructional staff members in order to ensure satisfactory service delivery or to rectify service failures.

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership dynamics experienced by school administrators supervising non-instructional personnel in the performance of school operations functions. In order to better understand these leadership dynamics, this phenomenological qualitative study explored the following research questions.

**RQ1.** What leadership challenges do school-level administrators encounter when supervising non-instructional personnel?

**RQ2.** Are the dominant leadership styles used by school-level administrators for leading non-instructional personnel comparable to those used for leading instructional personnel?

**RQ3.** How can school-level leaders be more effectively prepared to lead non-instructional personnel in the performance of essential school operational functions?

### **Results in Light of the Literature**

Existing research specifically addressing the leadership of non-instructional personnel in schools is limited. In order to provide a framework for this work, the Full Range of Leadership model was adopted from the work of Bass and Avolio (1994). Although not specifically focused only on educational leadership, the Full Range of Leadership model defines various levels and categories of transformational and transactional leadership utilized in organizations ranging from business and industry to the military and educational institutions. By providing definition to the various types of leadership that make up the broader transformational leadership concept, the Bass and Avolio model provided a viable conceptual framework from which to conduct this research.

### **Results in Light of Context**

This research sought to explore various leadership dynamics concerning school-level leaders as they relate to non-instructional staff in their schools. The context of the study involved individual face-to-face interviews with principals and assistant principals within a single school system in a southern state. Additionally, separate focus groups were conducted consisting of non-instructional staff followed by focus groups made up of teachers at three high schools.

Thorough statement analysis of transcripts from each of the interviews and focus groups yielded insights into the experiences, relationships, and challenges involved with the interactions of the various individuals and employee groups. A key element of analyzing the research data was “phenomenological reflection” (Van Manen, 1990. P. 77) on the *verbatim* transcriptions of all interviews and focus groups. This reflection was an iterative process, which led to a constant revisiting of the research in order to grasp the meaning of research findings as they evolved. This chapter describes the implications of the research findings followed by recommendations for future practice in the school district being studied. Finally, future research based on the study’s findings and implications will be discussed.

### **Organizational Complexities**

Organizational complexities and the limited intentional engagement of some non-instructional employee groups by school leadership are contributing factors that complicate school administrators’ ability to effectively lead non-instructional personnel in the performance of their operational functions. As previously described, non-instructional personnel may report to managers and directors at the system level while many within the district work for an outside private service provider that contracts with the school system. With the exception of some experiences with communications failures between a previous custodial services contractor and building administrators, principals, assistant principals, and both instructional and non-instructional personnel described well-adapted processes where administrators generally felt supported by services provided from outside the school. This seemed to be the case even considering the complex organizational structures and relatively high turnover rates of some private janitorial and school nutrition service personnel.

One implication that likely impacts these administrators' satisfaction with the services they receive from the district's maintenance department may be that school leaders have created their own informal work order system for requesting repair and maintenance work in their buildings. All three principals and all three assistant principals indicated that instead of utilizing the district-wide electronic work order system they commonly call individual maintenance department personnel with issues they are having at their schools. One assistant principal described purchasing school baseball caps for the maintenance crew to incentivize their paying special attention to his school's facility needs. One maintenance representative expressed frustration by the overwhelming numbers of work orders they perpetually have holding, the lack of labor resources they have available to them and the school administrators who constantly attempt to usurp the established work order process to get to the head of the line. While the administrators at these three schools may enjoy expedited service due to the rapport they have with individual maintenance employees, it is unclear if the other 19 principals in the school district receive the same level of personalized service.

### **Employee Engagement Expectations**

Employee expectations of engagement and communication from their leaders vary according to employee roles. Non-instructional personnel were generally satisfied if they were acknowledged by and received kind words from school administrators on a regular basis. Members of the instructional focus groups, on the other hand, praised the principals who led collaboratively and shared information with them. Some members of one teacher focus group were quick to criticize the "lack of transparency" from the administration at their school. Instructional personnel at Schools A and C described their efforts to seek out information regarding "what is going on" in the school. When information is not readily provided by the

administration, members of these instructional staffs utilize informal communications channels based in their individual academic departments. Three teachers indicated that they routinely go to the principal or an assistant principal for more information in such cases.

With the exception of two school bus drivers who perceived themselves to be excluded from the school community, nearly all other non-instructional focus group participants were satisfied to receive only the information that pertains to their jobs. One example included the activity bus driver for School B who was appreciative that his school always lets him know as early as possible if field trip plans change. Counterexamples were provided by two separate school nutrition department representatives discussing instances when school administrators had failed to inform them that lunch schedules would need to be changed due to school-wide testing. The issues were rectified and have not been repeated since the isolated occurrences. Custodians showed great appreciation for their administrators usually letting them know when a special event was scheduled that would require extra custodial services. Although the communication was sometimes lacking, the interactive expectation from most non-instructional participants was transactional in nature. They generally did not have the same concerns as instructional staff relating to goings-on throughout the school or involvement in school decision making processes.

Although the expectations of both employee groups were different, these perceptions do not fully answer the question of whether and to what extent non-instructional operations staff are included as members of the school community. Assistant Principal B indicated that she believed that non-instructional staff should be more involved in staff meetings especially when they pertain to the jobs they do. All three principals presented examples of friendly interactions and occasional invitations to holiday meals as evidence that their non-instructional personnel are included as members of the school community.

Although most non-instructional focus group participants report feeling appreciated and treated well at work, they are not being engaged in school-related functions or initiatives outside of their immediate areas of work responsibilities. Some researchers assert that every adult in the school can make an impact on students and school culture (Crispeels, 2004; Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 2008; Portin, 2009; Reeves, 2003, 2010). The three high schools involved in the study were not actively engaging non-instructional staff members in concerns of the school as a whole.

At the time of data collection, the school district involved in the study was finishing the third year of implementation of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. Having attended annual strategic implementation meetings as a member of the school system's administration, I was aware that the PBIS concept had been intended to include school bus drivers, school nutrition associates, and other non-instructional personnel having potential interaction with students on a routine basis. School-level teams were to conduct this implementation. Only two individuals in all three non-instructional focus groups were vaguely familiar with "something to do with positive behavior". Neither had been involved in any training.

As an example of the confusion related to the program and the lack of training for non-instructional personnel, one bus driver gave an account of a student who had misbehaved and was sent to the principal's office only to promptly return with candy allegedly given them by the principal. Whether or not the facts of this account are accurate is beyond the scope of this study. What is clear is that the district's PBIS implementation seems to be an example of non-instructional support staff being less than engaged as full members of the school community. Failing to consider the value of non-instructional personnel as contributors and ambassadors for

the school may put the principal at a disadvantage by having resources at their disposal that go unutilized.

### **Employee Isolation**

Circumstances surrounding the necessary delegation of certain non-instructional functions to assistant principals also presented some considerable complications. In instances where employees reported feeling isolated and excluded as members of the school community, nearly all administrator interaction and responsibility for student transportation had been delegated to assistant principals. In one of the cases, a principal believed that his assistant principal had a positive working relationship with the bus drivers serving their school. The bus driver representative of that school indicated otherwise stating that bus drivers rarely see or interact with the assistant principal. Another principal indicated that she did not feel that she was responsible for transportation or school nutrition since those departments have district-level managers and directors. This same principal reported trust concerns between school bus drivers and the administration at her school especially relating to driver judgment and student discipline issues on school buses.

It is clear that trust issues exist between some school administrators and employees who perceive themselves to be isolated from the school community. Two out of three representative school bus drivers perceive that they are outsiders. Two out of three high school principals acknowledge that they do not know the names of and are not familiar with the bus drivers that serve their schools. Both the bus driver representative and principal from School C discussed a lack of trust that exists surrounding student discipline issues that arise on the bus. This driver's perception was that the school's administration was not supportive of bus drivers who had issues



with students on the bus. The driver made the point that a conduct incident on a school bus can quickly rise to a serious threat to student and public safety whereas the same conduct in a classroom may be little more than a disruption. She went on to say it is a common belief among bus driver at the school that school administrators “won’t do anything about” discipline issues that occur on the bus.

The principal of the same school acknowledged that she was aware that there is a mutual sense of distrust between some school bus drivers and school administrators. Several school administrators (2 out of of 3 principals) described cases where some bus drivers overreact to relatively minor situations on the bus and then demanded school administrators take severe disciplinary actions against the students involved. The school bus driver representative from School A described the usual consequence for serious behavioral problems on her bus as a “slap on the wrist”. According to the representative from School C, many drivers have begun “handling it themselves” instead of reporting disciplinary incidents to school administration.

Although the limited scope of this study revealed it only with drivers who interact with school administrators solely through written discipline referrals, there is a pervasive sense of mistrust between transportation employees and school administrators at two of the three schools. These issues of trust occur at the same locations where both administrators and school bus drivers describe a lack of familiarity with one another and the bus drivers report feeling isolated from the school. Barakos-Cartwright (2012) specifically points out that classified (non-instructional) employees “have the potential to impact an organization either negatively or positively” (p.3). One may assume that unhealthy relationships between school administration and isolated non-instructional staff would not likely result in positive impact on the school’s climate or culture.

Since the symptom resulting from this issue involves the management of student discipline for issues arising on school buses, it is conceivable that the seeds of mistrust could grow into bona fide student, employee, and public safety concerns. The job of a school bus driver can be more complex than some may realize. Not only are bus drivers responsible for safely operating large vehicles on public roadways, they are charged with transporting the most precious of cargo. Whereas teachers or paraprofessionals usually have the benefit of looking directly at the students in their classrooms, school bus drivers must supervise up to 84 students through an interior rearview mirror while also continually monitoring roadway conditions and students at school bus stops.

It is important for all principals and assistant principals to understand the importance of maintaining order and discipline on moving school buses. It is equally as important for school bus drivers to be equipped with basic student management skills and to be trained to exercise good judgement regarding their decisions to address and report student discipline incidents. Additional professional learning and enhanced intentional communication will likely be necessary in order for school bus drivers and administrators to understand and mutually trust one another.

### **Leadership Styles**

Constant emphasis on instructional leadership may lead some school-level administrators to fail to fully appreciate the importance of effective engagement of every employee serving the school. Principal B made it clear that he viewed his primary duties to be instructional leadership and administration of athletic programs. In his discussion of the importance of preparing future administrators to be effective instructional leaders, he stated that the “stuff” would “take care of

itself". The stuff he was referring to were the non-instructional support functions in the school. The lack of emphasis on the importance of the non-instructional tasks being performed may lead one to infer that it is less important to engage the employees performing those tasks.

Principal A and Bus Driver A provided contradicting statements about employee engagement. The principal was under the impression that his assistant principal had a positive rapport with the bus drivers serving their school. Bus Driver A indicated that she had limited contact with the assistant principal and that she did not feel as though the school administration cared anything about her or other bus drivers. This contradiction speaks to the role that perception plays in interpersonal communication and relationships.

### **Administrator Preparation for Leading Non-Instructional Personnel**

All of the six school administrators interviewed reported having no formal training for leading non-instructional personnel. Most reported learning to treat all people with respect as being a fundamental tenet whether employees are certified or classified. Most also reported learning to manage non-instructional tasks and to lead non-instructional personnel through trial and error. If the school district wishes to effectively engage "all" members of the school community as their vision, mission, and beliefs statement indicates, consideration should be given to how current and future administrators are prepared to lead non-instructional employees.

### **Results in Context of Methodology**

This study's phenomenological qualitative methodology was selected with the goal of investigating leadership dynamics of school-level administrators and non-instructional personnel. Given the context of this study involving personnel ranging a wide spectrum of educational level, professional skill, and societal strata the decision to utilize personal interviews of school

administrators and both instructional and non-instructional focus groups was well founded. The opportunity to engage in and observe lively conversations with all focus groups and interviewees yielded rich data from which to aid in answering the established research questions.

The delimitations of the study involving only three high schools in one school system do not allow for generalizable findings as a broader quantitative study might have. At the conclusion of the detailed data collection and analysis required by this study, it is my opinion that a quantitative study could not have attained the depth of information involving the lived experiences of the research participants. The flexibility inherent in semi-structured, open-ended interview and focus group questions allowed conversations to reach topics and depths of detail that were unexpected at the outset of the research and which likely could not have been collected through a quantitative instrument.

## **Implications for Future Professional Practice and Research**

### **Professional Learning**

School-level administrators involved in this study did not actively engage non-instructional operations staff members in the same manner that teachers were engaged in school climate and improvement efforts. Although it would be reasonable to expect that non-instructional personnel would receive information modified to ensure it pertains to their professional perspectives, as members of the community at-large non-instructional employees have value they could potentially bring to the organization as positive contributors to the school culture (Barakos-Cartwright, 2012). They also have varying degrees of influence in the community through their lives outside of work. Such influence could be beneficial in the creation of advocacy for the school or school system in the community (National School Public Relations

Association, 2001). Given the potential for enhanced engagement of non-instructional employees, organizational complexities, and some employees from the departments who serve their schools expressing feelings of isolation from the school community, it is likely that school administrators would benefit from new professional development relating to leadership of the whole school community to include non-instructional support staff.

A study by the New Zealand Education Institute (2011) focused on leading support staff to maximize outcomes for students. The working group conducting the study recommended that principal preparation and professional development programs emphasize the importance of engaging support staff as members of the school community. Their “whole-of-school” approach embraces the basic tenets of employee engagement through respect, gratitude, and appreciation. Perhaps it should be the objective of all principals to intentionally instill in all employees a sense of belonging.

This study also indicated some of the challenges to be addressed in professional development and principal preparation programs might include; organizational complexities including multiple tiered reporting structures, managing outsourced personnel and functions, and effective delegation of responsibilities. In addition to addressing organizational complexities is the need to ensure that school administrators understand the importance of engaging all members of the school community, including those who are not classroom teachers. Perhaps a deeper element of non-instructional employee engagement is the understanding that some employees may be isolated by virtue of their duty assignments. It is incumbent upon principals and assistant principals to make specific efforts to engage these employees as members of the school community. Although some principals do not have contact with bus drivers in the normal course of their workday, it will be important for administrators to make efforts to intentionally engage

employees who tend to be otherwise isolated from school administration or personnel. These will include bus drivers, but may also include other employees such as night-shift custodians and others who administrators may not see on a regular basis. Doing so may help operations employees view their jobs as more than transactional. By viewing their work as a part of a unified effort, non-instructional personnel may become advocates who contribute positively to the community's perception of the school and school system.

Principals and assistant principals admit that their formal training in both managing non-instructional functions and leading non-instructional personnel is extremely limited. A symptom of their lack of training and proficiency in the non-instructional realm is the example of administrators calling individual maintenance employees instead of using the electronic work order system. Usurping established systems such as these demonstrate either a lack of regard for administrators at other schools who follow procedures or a lack of understanding of the overall picture of the school district. Although this determination is beyond the scope of this study, these issues may be mitigated through professional learning opportunities that focus on school system business and operations. Understanding the operational complexities, limited resources, and heightened operational demands of the district as a whole may help school administrators to view these functions and those who perform them as essential to supporting classroom instruction.

Additional professional learning or principal preparation program material should address the challenges faced by school-level administrators leading non-instructional personnel in the performance of their operational duties. In addition to professional development for administrators, professional development for school bus drivers concerning student management and discipline issues is needed. Some principals complain that certain school bus drivers are overzealous and "cry wolf" with school administrators by over-reporting student bus incidents. Both

transportation department representatives and some school administrators indicated that the opposite is sometimes also perceived to be the case. One focus group participant said that some bus drivers do not do enough to maintain student discipline to the point that students on some buses “run wild”. Advanced professional development designed by school and transportation department administration specifically for bus drivers and monitors could provide immediate benefits to school bus drivers as well as school administrators.

### **Program Evaluation**

In addition to enhanced professional learning, periodic program evaluations may be of benefit in the addressing of issues related to the organizational complexities identified in the study. Program evaluations can be formative or summative and in this case could be used to evaluate the need for organizational improvement (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011). A periodic evaluation of the organizational structure in light of current policy, political, operational, and financial factors could help to affirm the structure or identify the need for modification in current organizational arrangements. Decisions made at an earlier time using assumptions that were once valid may no longer be appropriate.

Examples of evaluation criteria would be the examination of specific decision-points involved in the outsourcing of services or staffing and school system-delivered services versus school-based service management. It may be assumed, for example, that having school buses serve more than one school each day may be more cost-effective than assigning buses to individual schools. A periodic program evaluation would help to challenge those assumptions in order to ensure the most efficient and responsible use of resources while taking into account the

potential impact such organizational arrangements may have on students, staff, and learning environments.

### **Future Research**

Among the possible recommendations for future research stemming from this study, the effects of employee engagement on employee turnover, public perception, and student perceptions could have value in this school system. Whereas this study identified some opportunities for improving employee engagement, the effects that employee engagement may have on non-instructional employee retention rates and community perceptions are well beyond the scope of this inquiry.

Another potential continuation from this study would be an inquiry of the effects that administrator and non-instructional employee relationships may have on student discipline and school climate. Of particular interest would be discipline referral data and administrator perceptions of the efficacy of school bus drivers who perceive themselves to be isolated from the school community compared to those who see themselves as being engaged by their administrators.

In addition to those bus drivers who perceive themselves to be isolated, it would be important to understand whether other non-instructional groups, which were not a focus of this study, experience the same perceptions of isolation from the school. Other potentially isolated employee groups may include night shift custodians and school nutrition employees who do not routinely work outside of the kitchen.



## **Conclusions**

The findings of this research have implications that could impact employee engagement, professional practice, as well as school climate and culture. Because the existing research and school system emphasis is limited relating to the leadership dynamics of school-level leaders interacting with non-instructional employees, additional research is warranted.

Professional relationships matter. This assertion is true regardless if the employee formally reports to the school principal or to a system-level manager or even a private service provider. Conditions where groups of employees perceive themselves to be isolated from the school administration and the school community have the potential for negative implications in the school community itself. This is especially true for employees who have direct contact with students, such as school bus drivers. All members of the school community should feel that they are a part of “the life that flows through the school” New Zealand Education Institute (2011, p.15).

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Interview Protocol - Individual School Administrator

Adapted from Barakos-Cartwright (2012)

#### Interviewer's Frame of Mind

- Understand the leadership dynamics between school administrators and non-instructional operations personnel from the administrator's point of view
- Learn what the participant knows and be sensitive to the way in which the participant expresses what he or she knows
- Understand the meaning the experience has to the participant and how that experience impacts others i.e. community, students, teachers, school administrators, etc.
- Throughout the interview process, the participant is the interviewer's teacher. Participants will help me to understand the school administrator's perspective.

#### Goal:

The goal of the interview is to "have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study." (Seidman, 2013, p. 14)

#### Selection Criteria:

- Principals from each of the three traditional high schools within the school system will be interviewed.
- Assistant principals, identified by their principal as having direct responsibility for supervising or coordinating school operations personnel or tasks, will also be interviewed.

#### Administration:

Participants will be asked to fill out a consent form prior to the start of the individual interview process. They will be asked not to sign the form until invited to do so.

#### Welcome:

Good morning/ evening / afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is Mike Ewton and I am a doctoral candidate in the educational leadership program at the University of Arkansas as well as the assistant superintendent for operations in this school system. I invited you to this interview to seek your help in better understanding how school administrators lead non-instructional operations employees in the performance of their duties. Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your



professional or employment standing in any way. You may feel free to end the interview at any point without any consequences.

At this time, I am going to give you a pseudonym name of \_\_\_\_\_. Your school will be referred to as \_\_\_\_\_. I ask that you refrain from using real names during the course of the interview. With your permission the interview process will be audio recorded. This will help me to more accurately recall and analyze the information discussed here today. Your interview responses will be kept confidential and available only to me and the my dissertation chair for analysis purposes.

I request that you agree to and observe the following ground rules (ground rules are posted in the interview room):

- In order to protect the integrity of the research, participants are requested to maintain confidentiality of individual questions asked during the interview.
- I have fourteen questions to ask you. Please tell me if you wish to skip a question at any time. Please also let me know if you would like to have any questions repeated. The whole process will take approximately 60 minutes

If you are willing to participate, I would ask you to sign and date your consent form at this time.

1. Tell me about your background in education, especially in educational leadership.
2. What are your favorite aspects of your work?
3. What are the most important of your responsibilities?
4. What are your greatest frustrations and why?
5. How much of your average workday involves managing non-instructional school functions such as buses, custodial, food service, security, or technology issues?
6. [Principals Only] Do you delegate primary responsibility for these types of functions to an assistant principal or do you routinely manage them yourself?
7. Take a moment to read these descriptions of leadership styles (Appendix D) and tell me which best describes your primary leadership style(s).
  - a. Follow-up with clarifying “extension” questions (Stringer, 2014).

8. Given your leadership style characteristics, do you think you use the same leadership style(s) when leading non-instructional personnel as you do with instructional staff?
  - a. Do the nature of their jobs require variations of leadership style?
9. When there are issues with non-instructional functions, what do you do?
  - a. Direct to employees, manager, district level directors, contractor / outsourced provider management, etc.
10. What have been your greatest challenges leading non-instructional personnel?
11. Are non-instructional operations staff included as members of the school community?  
(included in staff meetings, celebrations, school initiatives, etc)
12. Thinking back to your graduate studies and professional development work, what preparation have you had for leading non-instructional personnel and managing non-instructional functions?
  - a. Was there a mentor who guided you along your professional path to becoming a school administrator? If so, did they offer guidance with regard to supervising non-instructional tasks and employees?
13. If you could talk to the younger you who just graduated college and was entering the field of education for the first time, what advice would you give yourself?
14. What else should we have talked about that we haven't?

## **Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol - Non-Instructional Personnel**

Adapted from Barakos-Cartwright (2012)

### Interviewer's Frame of Mind

- Understand the leadership dynamics between school administrators and non-instructional operations personnel from the non-instructional employee's point of view
- Learn what the employee knows and be sensitive to the way in which the employee expresses what he or she knows
- Understand the meaning the experience has to the employee and how that experience impacts others i.e. community, students, teachers, school administrators, etc.
- Throughout the focus group interview process, participants are the my teachers. They will help me to understand the non-instructional employees' perspective.

### Goal:

The goal of the focus group is “encourage participants to have a conversation in response to a question, building on one another's comments, rather than directing each comment to the moderator” (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 41).

### Selection Criteria:

- Representatives from the following non-instructional operations personnel groups working within the school will be invited to participate. Potentially adverse power dynamics will be accounted for during the selection process. Ideal participant numbers will range from 5 to 8 (Krueger & Casey, 2015).
  - School nutrition kitchen employee (in-house)
  - School nutrition employee (outsourced)
  - Bus driver
  - Custodian
  - Maintenance technician

### Administration:

Participants will be asked to fill out a consent form prior to the start of the focus group interview process. They will be asked not to sign the form until invited to do so.

### Welcome:

Good morning/ evening / afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is Mike Ewton and I am a doctoral candidate in the educational leadership program at the University of Arkansas as well as the assistant superintendent for operations for this school system. I invited you to this

focus group to seek your help in better understanding how operations employees interact and work with school administrators. Your participation is completely voluntary. Your decision of whether or not to participate will not affect your standing as an employee in any way. You may feel free to leave the interview at any point without any consequences.

At this time, I am going to give each of you an assumed (provide employee with table tent with pseudonym written on it). During the focus group process, the school will be referred to as \_\_\_\_\_ (also include school name on table tent). I ask that you don't use anyone's real name, including your own, during the course of the interview. With your permission, the interview process will be audio recorded. This will help me to more accurately recall and analyze the information discussed here today. Your interview responses will be kept confidential and available only to the me as the researcher and my research supervisor for analysis purposes.

It is asked that all participants agree to and observe the following ground rules for the group (ground rules are posted in the interview room):

- Participants are asked to maintain confidentiality of individual and group conversations. In order for everyone to express themselves openly and honestly, there needs to be an expectation that participants will not discuss other participants' responses outside of this room.
- Disagreement can be a positive element in research, but all participants will be treated with respect. Everyone should feel free to express their own opinions and to disagree with those of others, but it must be done without value judgement or disrespect.
- I have ten questions to ask you. Please tell me if you wish to skip a question at any time. Please also let me know if you would like to have any questions repeated. The whole process will take approximately 60 minutes

If each of you are able to agree to these ground rules and willing to participate, I would ask you to sign and date your consent forms and give them to me. If not, you are free to leave at this time.

1. Remembering to use your assumed name, please introduce yourselves to the group. Prompts (Avoid questions that introduce rank or power dynamics (Krueger and Casey, 2015):
  - Tell us about your background working in the school system.
  - What attracted you to your career field?
2. Tell us what you do at work?

Prompts:

- Do you have a daily routine? If so, describe it for us.
- What tasks do you perform on a normal day?
- Who do you interact with through the course of your day?

3. What are your favorite aspects of your work?

Prompts:

- Is your work interesting or exciting? What makes it that way?
- Do you consider your current employment to be a job or a career? Why?

4. What are your greatest work frustrations and why?

Prompts:

- People?
- Processes?
- Communication?
- Recognition?

5. Who do you report to?

Prompts:

- If more than one person, does this work smoothly or does it cause issues?
- Is the reporting structure clear to everyone you work with and those who may report to you?
- If you could realign the organizational chart, how would you change it?

6. When something goes wrong or there is a problem in your work area, who do you go to for help?

Prompts:

- Department / system level supervisor
- Principal
- Assistant principal or other designee
- Peers
- Why?

7. How would you describe your working relationship with the principal and assistant principal at your school?

Prompts (\*\* Make sure each of these questions are answered. \*\*):

- Do you usually communicate with the principal directly or with an assistant principal or other designee at the school?
- Do you believe that the principal or assistant principal understand the work that you and your departments do?
- Do you believe that the principal or assistant principal appreciate the work that you and your departments do?

- Do you ever receive conflicting directives from your department supervisor and a school administrator?

8. Are you “in the loop” or informed of what is going on in the school?

Prompts:

- Are you involved in school meetings, parties, training, etc?
- Are any of you familiar with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)? Could you tell the group a little about the program?
- Have any of you taken part in safety planning or training meetings.
- Do you feel like you are included as a part of the larger school community?

9. Take a moment to read these descriptions of leadership styles displayed on the sheets in front of you (Appendix D). Think of the school administrators you and those in your work area normally interact with on your job. Use the sticker dots to vote for which best describes the administrator’s leadership characteristics. Because every leader falls into multiple categories at different times, you may select the **top two** statements that best describe your administrators’ leadership style as he or she interacts with you and those in your work area. We will discuss the trends that emerge.

Note: Printed copies, adhesive stickers, and poster paper will be used to conduct a quick poll of participants in order to introduce leadership style characteristics and to stimulate further conversation. All leadership style descriptions are adapted from the Bass and Avolio (1994) Full Range of Leadership model.

Prompts:

- Looking at the trends on the poster paper, what are your thoughts?
- Are these results surprising? Why or why not?
- If you disagree with the trends, tell us why.

Keep in mind that leadership styles change depending on the circumstances. We are not making a judgment about positive or negative traits. Our intent is simply to understand how they are perceived by different members of the focus group.

10. What else would you like for me to know about you, your department, or your school?

Thank you very much for your active participation and contributions. As a reminder, the information gathered here will not be associated with one individual. The data from this and other focus groups will be collected and analyzed to help us answer the guiding research questions. I also want to remind you that at the beginning of this focus group meeting, we agreed that we would all respect one another and make every effort to maintain confidentiality of information shared by our colleagues in this room. Please remember our agreement and thank you for your time and for all you do in the service of the school community.

## **Appendix C: Focus Group Protocol – Instructional Faculty**

Adapted from Barakos-Cartwright (2012)

### Interviewer’s Frame of Mind

- Understand the leadership dynamics between school administrators and instructional faculty from the instructional faculty’s point of view
- Learn what the participant knows and be sensitive to the way in which the participant expresses what he or she knows
- Understand the meaning the experience has to the participant and how that experience impacts others i.e. community, students, teachers, school administrators, etc.
- Throughout the focus group interview process, participants are the interviewer’s teacher. They will help me to understand the operations employees’ perspective.

### Goal:

The goal of the focus group is “encourage participants to have a conversation in response to a question, building on one another’s comments, rather than directing each comment to the moderator” (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 41).

### Selection Criteria:

Representative teachers from various major academic instructional areas of the high school will be selected to participate in the focus group. Additional consideration will be given to the career longevity of those volunteering to participate. An ideal mix would include a range from novice to veteran teachers.

### Administration:

Participants will be asked to fill out a consent form prior to the start of the focus group interview process. They will be asked not to sign the form until invited to do so.

### Welcome:

Good morning/ evening / afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is Mike Ewton and I am a doctoral candidate in the educational leadership program at the University of Arkansas as well as the assistant superintendent for operations at this school system. I invited you to this focus group to seek your help in better understanding the leadership dynamics between school principals and instructional faculty. Your participation is voluntary and will not affect your professional or employment standing in any way. You are free to leave the interview at any point without any consequences.

At this time, I am going to give you each a pseudonym (provide employee with table tent with pseudonym written on it). During the focus group process, your school will be referred to as \_\_\_\_\_ (also named on the table tent). I ask that you refrain from using anyone's real name during the course of the interview. With your permission, the interview process will be audio recorded. This will help me to more accurately recall and analyze the information discussed here today. Your interview responses will be kept confidential and available only to me as the researcher and to my dissertation chair for analysis purposes.

I ask that all participants agree to and observe the following ground rules for the focus group (ground rules are posted in the interview room):

- Participants are asked to maintain confidentiality of individual and group conversations. In order for everyone to express themselves openly and honestly, there needs to be an expectation that participants will not discuss other participants' responses outside of this room.
- Disagreement can be a positive element in research, but all participants will be treated with respect. Everyone should feel free to express their own opinions and to disagree with those of others, but it must be done without value judgement or disrespect.
- I have thirteen questions to ask you. Please tell me if you wish to skip a question at any time. Please also let me know if you would like to have any questions repeated. The whole process will take approximately 60 minutes

If each of you are able to agree to these ground rules and willing to participate, I would ask you to sign and date your consent forms and give them to me. If not, you are free to leave at this time.

1. What do each of you teach and how long have you been doing it?

(Avoid questions that introduce rank or power dynamics (Krueger and Casey, 2015))

2. Reflecting on your career, what led you to the field of public education?

3. What are your favorite aspects of the work you do?

Prompts:

- Is your work interesting or exciting? What makes it that way?

4. What are your greatest work frustrations and why?

Prompts:



- People?
- Processes?
- Communication?
- Recognition?

5. When something goes wrong in your work area, who do you go to for help?

Prompts:

- Department head
- Principal
- Assistant principal or other designee
- Peers
- Why?

6. How would you describe your working relationship with the principal and assistant principals of your school?

Prompts:

- How much interaction do you have with the principal?
- Do you usually communicate with them directly or with an assistant principal or other designee at the school?
- Do you believe that the principal understands the work that you do?
- Do you ever receive conflicting directives from your department supervisor and the school principal?

7. Take a moment to read these descriptions of leadership styles displayed on the sheets in front of you (Appendix D). Using the sticker dots to vote for which best describes how the principal interacts with you and those in your work areas. Because every leader falls into multiple categories, you may select the **top two** statements that best describe your principal's leadership style as he or she interacts with you and those in your work area. We will discuss the trends that emerge.

Note: Printed copies, adhesive stickers, and poster paper will be used to conduct a quick poll of participants in order to introduce leadership style characteristics and to stimulate further conversation. All leadership style descriptions are taken from the Bass and Avolio (1994) Full Range of Leadership model.

Prompts:

- Looking at the trends on the poster paper, what are your thoughts?
- Are these results surprising? Why or why not?
- If you disagree with the trends, tell us why.

Keep in mind that leadership styles change depending on the circumstances. We are not making a judgment about positive or negative traits. Our intent is simply to understand how they are perceived by the focus group.

8. Are you “in the loop” or informed of what’s going on in the school?

Prompts:

- a. Are you involved in school meetings, parties, training, etc?
- b. What does PBIS look like here?
- c. Have any of you taken part in safety planning or training meetings.
- d. Do you feel like you are included as a part of the larger school community?

9. Do you have opportunity to observe interactions between school administrators and non-instructional operations staff? If so, please describe the common nature of their interactions.

Prompts: Operations staff include:

- Custodial staff
  - School Nutrition staff
  - Transportation employees
  - Maintenance employees
- 
- Would you describe their interactions a respectful and dialogic or directive and transactional? Explain E

10. Are non-instructional operations staff included as members of the school community (included in staff meetings, celebrations, school initiatives, etc).

11. What are the strongest points your school has going for it?

12. What areas could use more focus or support?

13. What else would you like for me to know about you and your school?

Thank you very much for your active participation. As a reminder, the information gathered here will not be associated with one individual. The data from this and other focus groups will be collected and analyzed to help us answer the guiding research questions. I also want to remind you that at the beginning of this focus group meeting, we agreed that we would all respect one another and make every effort to maintain confidentiality of information shared by our colleagues in this room. Please remember our agreement and thank you for your time and for all you do in the service of the school community.

## Appendix D: Full Range of Leadership Characteristics Exercise

(Bass & Avolio, 1994)

### Transformational

- Charismatic Leadership or Idealized Influence (CL or II)
  - Role model for followers
  - Admired, respected, and trusted by followers
  - Willing to take risks
  - Are consistent rather than arbitrary
  - Demonstrate high standards of ethical and moral conduct. Can be counted on to do the right thing.
  - Followers identify with leaders and want to emulate them
  - Followers believe leaders have extraordinary capabilities, persistence, and determination
  
- Inspirational Motivation (IM)
  - Behave in ways that motivate and inspire those around them
  - Provide meaning and challenge to their followers' work
  - Arouse team spirit
  - Display enthusiasm and optimism
  - Involve followers in envisioning attractive future states
  - Create clearly communicated expectations that followers want to meet
  - Demonstrate commitment to goals and the shared vision
  
- Intellectual Stimulation (IS)
  - Encourages followers to be innovative and creative
  - Questions assumptions
  - Reframes problems and approaches old situations in new ways
  - No public criticism of individual members' mistakes
  - Followers are included in the creation of new ideas and creative problem solving
  - Followers are encouraged to try new approaches and their ideas are not criticized because they differ from the leaders' ideas
  
- Individualized Consideration (IC)
  - Acts as coach and mentor to followers
  - Recognizes individual follower's needs and desires for achievement and growth
  - Develops followers and colleagues to higher levels of potential
  - New learning opportunities and supportive climate created for followers
  - Demonstrates acceptance of individual differences

- Two-way communication is encouraged. Manages by walking around work spaces
- Interactions with followers are personalized (leaders remembers previous conversations and followers' concerns). Leader views the individual as a whole person
- Monitors delegated tasks to see if followers need additional direction or support and to assess progress. Followers do not feel they are being checked on.

Transactional: Leader rewards or disciplines the follower depending on the adequacy of the follower's performance

- Contingent Reward (CR): constructive transaction
  - Leader assigns or gets agreement on what needs to be done
  - Promises rewards in exchange for satisfactory completion of assignment
- Management by Exception (MBE): corrective transaction
  - Management by Exception – Active (MBE-A)
    - Leader actively monitors deviations from standards, mistakes and errors and takes corrective actions as necessary
  - Management by Exception – Passive (MBE-P)
    - Leader waits passively for deviances, mistakes, or errors to occur then takes corrective action
- *Laissez-Faire* (LF)
  - Avoidance or absence of leadership
  - Necessary decisions are not made
  - Actions are delayed
  - Responsibilities of leadership are ignored
  - Authority remains unused

## **Appendix E: Participant Informed Consent Form**

### **Introduction**

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine how school-level leaders lead and interact with school staff. In the research study, we will be interviewing principals individually then interviewing separate groups of non-instructional personnel and instructional faculty. Interviews and focus groups will be conducted at several schools within the school system.

### **What Sort of Commitment Am I Making?**

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview or a focus group consisting of people in similar work positions. Individual interviews and focus groups are expected to last approximately one hour each. For your convenience and comfort, all interviews will be conducted in a quiet location at your school.

### **Researcher Introduction**

Mike Ewton is a doctoral candidate at the University of Arkansas. This research study will serve to satisfy graduation requirements of the university. Mike is also the assistant superintendent for operations within the school system being studied. This project is being conducted for academic rather than job-related purposes. Participants will experience no repercussions for participating or declining to participate in this research.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the leadership dynamics experienced by school administrators supervising non-instructional personnel in the performance of school operations.

### **Benefits of Participation**

Although no direct benefits to participants can be guaranteed, results of the research may yield future benefits to the profession of educational leadership.

### **Risks**

There are no physical risks associated with the study. Non-physical risks are limited, but may include the divulging of personal information by focus group participants.

### **Confidentiality**

To the extent allowed by law and University of Arkansas policy, all collected information will be kept confidential. The following steps will be taken to protect participant confidentiality and that of any information provided during the interview process.

- All participants will be briefed on the importance of respecting fellow participants and maintaining confidentiality of any information shared during the process.

- Interviews will be recorded for later transcription. Names will be substituted with pseudonyms in transcripts. Recorded data will be maintained digitally under password protection.
- Research reports will contain no names or personally identifiable information of participants.
- The researcher will take all reasonable steps to protect individual information and will report only data compiled from all interviews and focus groups as a whole.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in the study is voluntary. Those choosing to participate may end their participation at any time. There will be no reprisals for any employee who chooses to participate, not to participate, or ends their participation during the interview process.

### **Who to Contact With Questions or Concerns**

Potential participants are welcome to contact the researcher or the research supervisor using the contact information below.

Researcher:

Mike Ewton, Doctoral Candidate, University of Arkansas

Mobile Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Research Supervisor:

Kevin P. Brady

Associate Professor of Educational Leadership

Program Director, University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA) Center for the Study of Leadership and the Law

Faculty Affiliate, Center for Social Research (CSR)

University of Arkansas

College of Education and Health Professions

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

105 Peabody Hall

Fayetteville, AR 72701

Office: [REDACTED]

FAX: [REDACTED]

e-mail: [REDACTED]

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the Human Subjects Compliance Coordinator for the University of Arkansas, at [REDACTED].

**Agreement to Participate**

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the information contained in this participant informed consent form. I have been given opportunity to have my questions answered and I understand how to contact those who can answer my questions in the future. I hereby consent to participating in the above described research study and understand that I may end my participation at any time.

---

Participant Name

---

Participant Signature

---

Date

## Appendix F: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval




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**To:** Michael Farrell Ewton  
**From:** Douglas James Adams, Chair  
 IRB Committee  
**Date:** 06/12/2018  
**Action:** Expedited Approval  
**Action Date:** 06/12/2018  
**Protocol #:** 1805123897  
**Study Title:** Dominant Leadership Dynamics of School Administrators Leading Non-Instructional Personnel  
**Expiration Date:** 05/28/2019  
**Last Approval Date:**

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

**Adverse Events:** Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Kevin P Brady, Investigator