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## Challenges that Two Georgia Elementary Principals Face in Rasing Achievement of At-Risk Third Garde Students

Sharonlyn Jones Reese

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CHALLENGES THAT TWO GEORGIA ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS FACE IN  
RAISING ACHIEVEMENT OF AT-RISK THIRD GRADE STUDENTS

by

SHARONLYN JONES REESE

(Under the Direction of Linda M. Arthur)

ABSTRACT

Elementary principals are required to perform a variety of duties which include, but are not limited to, administrative and instructional tasks. Intense job accountability for all students to raise the achievement of at-risk third grade students has caused principals to face challenges and to use strategies to increase student achievement. The demands of the job of principal of an elementary Title I school are complex, especially when many of the students in the school are at-risk of failure. The legislative No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 mandates and obligates principals to do their best for all students enrolled in Title I elementary schools especially for those students who are at-risk.

This study revealed both challenges of principals in working with third grade at-risk students as well as strategies principals use to raise at-risk third grade student achievement. The researcher explored the challenges that Georgia two elementary principals faced in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students and the strategies that principals use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students using a qualitative, phenomenological research design. The Phenomenological research design was

appropriate for this study because it provided a means for the researcher to explore the lived experiences of two Georgia elementary principals at two Title I schools. The collection of data was obtained through school observations, interviews with two principals, eight teachers, and focus group discussions with parents, and school artifacts. Four common themes and patterns emerged from the qualitative research study in each area of challenges and strategies used. Challenges that principals faced in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students: (1) lack of teacher training to know how to work with some at-risk students, (2) inadequate funding for teaching at-risk third grade students, (3) maintaining smaller class size, (4) lack of time and knowledge to gather and analyze at-risk third grade student achievement data. Strategies that principals use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students: (1) teacher training for working with at-risk third grade students, (2) programs used to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students, (3) use of effective leadership practices by principals to raise at-risk third grade students' achievement, and (4) parent and community involvement in the schools to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students.

**INDEX WORDS:** Academic Achievement, At-Risk Learners/Students, Higher Performing School, Instructional Leadership, Lived Experiences, Lower Performing School, Meets Expectations, Minority Achievement Gap, Phenomenology

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by

SHARONLYN JONES REESE

B.A., Bennett College, 1981

M. Ed., Auburn University, 1986

Ed. S., University of West Georgia, 2005

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in  
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SHARONLYN JONES REESE

Major Professor: Linda M. Arthur

Committee: Charles A. Reavis  
Sonya S. Shepherd

Electronic Version Approved:  
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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Robert Fulton Jones and Myrtle Pless Jones. Daddy, you showed me by faithful examples how hard work, prayer and perseverance yielded wanted results. Although you are no longer with us, I know that you are smiling down on me and this great accomplishment. Momma, you inspire me to keep reaching and you taught me as a young African American little girl that I could be anything that I dared to dream of - you are the wind beneath my wings. I love you Momma, and I hope I have made you proud. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Clyde - my rock. To our children, Clinton, Victoria, Chamberlain, Chelsea and Channing-Claire, I would like to challenge you to be life-long learners and to be willing to work hard to achieve each of your goals. I love each of you very, very, much. Dororthy White Reese, you are an inspiration to me; thanks for everything.

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“The purpose of educational accountability is to improve student achievement” Douglas B. Reeves (2002, p. 39).

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### General Introduction

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Public Law 107-110, Section 101 Part 1001(2) mandated that states assess students yearly in grade 3 in reading, math, social studies, and science (GADOE, 2003). This mandate was important because, it was the first time in the elementary grades that students<sup>2</sup> passing the grade or being retained was contingent upon their test performance. Third graders in Georgia were required to pass a portion of the Criterion Referenced Curriculum Test (CRCT) in order to be promoted to the next grade (GADOE, 2003). In Georgia, 13% or approximately 7,007 third graders from 15 metropolitan districts did not meet the standards in English, Language Arts, and Reading areas. These students were at-risk of future failure (Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 2007).

To decrease at-risk student failure, Georgia’s teachers and principals received intensive training to help improve student performance in the “meets expectations” category on the Georgia Criterion Referenced Test in reading and math. Even so, many at-risk students in third grade continued to perform below the passing level. The challenges faced by principals while attempting to raise student achievement were rarely addressed in the literature. The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges that principals encounter in raising the achievement of at-risk third grade students. Therefore, this study was based upon two research questions:

1. What challenges do elementary principals in Georgia face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students?

2. What strategies do elementary principals in Georgia use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students?

There were many reasons that students were not performing well. Identifying reasons that third grade at-risk students were not performing was essential to raising achievement.

The researcher explored challenges principals face in raising the achievements of at-risk third grade students.

### *Identifying At-Risk Students in Georgia*

According to the Georgia Department of Education, elementary at-risk students were defined as the group of elementary students who qualify for Georgia's Early Intervention Program (EIP) (GADOE, 2003b). Students could be identified for EIP when they were at-risk of not reaching or maintaining academic grade level goals.

At-risk students were identified by different criteria at each grade level. In kindergarten, the terms "needs extra assistance," "not ready for First Grade," or "ready with extra instructional assistance," identify at-risk students. This was based on the Georgia Kindergarten Assessment Program-Revised (GKAP-R) (GADOE, 2007). In grades one through five, students scoring below 800 (not meeting expectations) on the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) were identified as at-risk (GADOE, 2007).

Another method used to identify at-risk students was the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning). This test was administered to third grade students in some Georgia elementary

schools. This informal test was designed to test three of the five areas of early literacy. Third grade students were asked to read an unfamiliar reading passage on third grade level (University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning,). Students were then scored on the number of words read correctly in sixty seconds. When third grade students were not able to read a pre-determined number of words within sixty seconds, they were considered at-risk (University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning). Other ways to identify at-risk third grade students included these: using portfolios, local school assessments, Student Support Team (SST) Checklists, and the Early Intervention Program (EIP) Checklist that identifies students who qualify for the Early Intervention Program (EIP)

#### *Factors Contributing To Identification as At-Risk*

Students in third grade could be at-risk because of several factors. One factor was lack of formal early school experiences. Other factors, as were related in Learner Outcomes (NCES, 2004) were (1) household poverty rate, (2) non-English primary home language (ELL students) (3) mothers' highest educational level less than or equal to a high school diploma and (4) single parent homes.

Some factors that put students at-risk were social in nature. Behavior, such as not listening and following directions, not using correct language patterns, and not practicing socially acceptable ways of problem solving (ie. talking using words rather than hitting, kicking, or biting) were negative behaviors (Lane & Menezies, 2002). Students who began school with those negative social behaviors were at greater risk of failing in school (Lane & Menezies, 2002).

Other studies about children completed by the National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, were conducted in 2000. The studies included: (1) the relationship between children's kindergarten experience and their elementary school performance and (2) school readiness. Whether or not students attended school early in life impacts their preparation for grades 1, 2, and 3 (NCES, 2000). One study reported that more than half of the gaps in achievement between Whites and minorities in high school could be attributed to the gaps that already existed at the beginning of first grade (NCES, 2000). Many students in the study did not have formal early childhood educational experiences. This finding indicates that school readiness was key to academic success in high school (NCES, 2000).

#### *Interventions Used to Help At-Risk Students*

The literature suggests that interventions could be used to help combat the negative consequences of students who were at-risk. Parental involvement encouraged by the principal was important (Feurstein, 2000). Feurstein researched several variables about the degree to which a student's parents were involved in the school. He found that children of parents who were involved in the school's activities were more successful (Feurstein, 2000; Brown, 2007). Activities such as volunteering, attending field trips, and serving on school committees kept parents involved and students achieving more (Brown, 2007). This intervention was much needed but rare among at-risk students (Feurstein, 2000; Hancock, 2002). However, this intervention has not been successful in improving the scores of many children.

Another intervention, alternate forms of assessment, was found to be successful in -improving student achievement (Smith, 2003; Brown, 2007; Thompson & Davis, 2002).

According to Smith, some forms of alternate assessment include student writings, journals, anecdotal notes taken by teachers during student interviews, peer teaching, homework and games that were used to increase a particular skill (Smith, 2003). That intervention has been successful for at-risk students in general since all students were not at the same level and, therefore, did not learn at the same rate or in the same manner; alternate assessments were necessary (Smith, 2003).

A third intervention was smaller class size. It has been argued that even though test scores did not reveal it, reducing class size was good because students learned more easily when experiencing a smaller teacher to pupil ratio (Gilman & Kiger, 2003).

There were a few options that principals had in helping students to become more successful in school, especially in test performance (Glanz, Shulman, & Sullivan, 2007). Principals needed to have knowledge of their students' weaknesses. Examining students' grades, demographics, and test data gave important information about the learners in school. It may have been that the school population was at-risk because of a language barrier. School leaders or principals could plan for English language models by providing funding in the budget for the needs of the population (Lewis, 2000).

Principals also must have a vision for what their staff's goals were and guide the staff in that direction (Hilbowitsh, 2000; Waters, 2003). Williams (2003) discussed the importance of the principal in influencing and raising student achievement through developing a school culture that was focused on learning. Also mentioned was the importance of the principal working to establish a collaborative learning community (Glanz, et.al. 2007; Williams, 2003).

Leadership Behaviors That Are Correlated With Increased Student Achievement

By establishing learning communities and fostering collaboration among teachers and staff, principals could make strides toward raising student achievement. Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2003) reported the effects of leadership practices on student achievement (Waters, et.al., 2003). These researchers developed a list of 21 leadership behaviors that were correlated with student achievement. The top five leadership behaviors were (1) situational awareness of the specific school situation and good use of this information, (2) flexibility to adopt to the situation and to handle dissent, (3) discipline to protect teachers from undue distractions, (4) outreach as an advocate and a spokesperson for the school community, and (5) monitoring/evaluating, which is a system that provides feedback on effectiveness.

Brown (2007) and Clark et.al (2000) conducted research that supported that of Waters, Morazo and McNulty (Waters, et.al. 2003; Brown, 2007; Clark, et.al., 2000). Focusing on the research found in A Nation At-Risk (National Commission of Educational Excellence, 1983), Brown recognized the emphasis in the report that called for quality leadership as instrumental in creating a positive school climate and school culture and as a correlate of high achieving schools. This report set the tone for future measures of increased student achievement (Brown, 2007). The opinion that principals' behavior in terms of situational awareness, flexibility, evaluating/monitoring, creating positive school climates/ school cultures, and communicating strong ideas/beliefs about schooling was shared by many researchers (Waters, et.al., 2003; Brown, 2007; Glanz, et.al., 2003).

Hillard stated that the quality of teachers made a difference in working with at-risk students (Hillard, 2000). Single-parent families and even threatening neighborhood

environments presented no obstacle in the attainment of excellence for students who had quality teachers (Hillard, 2000). They were willing to educate and promote learning in their students by any means necessary. These were the dedicated successful teachers who provided positive learning experiences for all students (Hillard, 2000). Principals were key in hiring teachers of this caliber and weeding out those who are not successful.

#### Statement of the Problem

This study explored the challenges that principals faced in raising the academic achievement of the at-risk third graders in their schools. The researcher also studied their strategies for overcoming these challenges. Principals were divided into two groups: those who were successful at increasing student achievement and those were still struggling with improving student achievement.

The principal of an elementary school had a role in raising student achievement. The researcher explored the challenges that principals face in raising the achievement of at-risk third grade students.

Therefore, the purpose of the study was to explore the challenge that principals faced in raising the achievement of at-risk third grade students and the strategies they used to overcome the challenges of raising achievement of at-risk third grade students.

The research questions were:

1. What challenges do Georgia elementary principals face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students?
2. What strategies do elementary principals in Georgia use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students?

### Significance of the Study

Principals were held highly accountable for the academic success of all students, especially at-risk students. This was particularly true of at-risk third grade students since third grade was a gateway for academic success in reading. State test data shows that these students were not performing in the “meets expectations” category on standardized tests

### Delimitations

The boundaries of this study were:

1. At-risk third grade students in northwest Georgia - the study was limited to third grade students who were in that at-risk category matriculating in northwest Georgia.
2. Public elementary schools principals in northwest Georgia - the principals that participated were from public schools and were elementary school principals. The study was confined to elementary principals from the selected schools in northwest Georgia.
3. Third grade teachers’ interviews- only third grade teachers from northwest Georgia were included. The study was confined to only third grade teachers from the selected schools in northwest Georgia.
4. Parent focus group- the parents in this study were parents of third grade at-risk third grade students from northwest Georgia. This study was confined to parents of third grade at-risk students from the selected schools in two northwest Georgia schools.

This study was designed to explore challenges that elementary principals faced in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students. The research method used was qualitative. Using this design did not lend itself to the research design of having a constant or a specific quantitative definable pattern. The principal interviews were

conducted in northwest Georgia by principals self-reporting on present and on past experiences. This may not accurately reflect behaviors, practices, thoughts, or ideas of all principals in Georgia, rather on the elementary principals participating in the study. The findings was situational and context specific. The results would be different if the research was conducted in a private school, in a different state/area of Georgia, or another grade level other than elementary students. The selection of the participants was based on the participants' school reading results of the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). The research responses were dependent on the cooperation and quality of responses from each participant. The results of the researcher were limited to elementary schools with similar demographics, and a significant percentage of free/reduced lunch, but differences in third grade norm referenced test scores.

#### Procedures

After Instructional Review Board (IRB) approval and permission from the school system was granted, the researcher contacted two school system principals to schedule interviews. The principals were randomly selected from schools meeting the following criteria:

- Similar demographics and significant percentage of free/reduced lunch
- Differences in third grade norm referenced test scores

The information used to determine the criteria was requested from the Georgia Department of Education. The researcher also conducted a formal focus group from a random selection of third grade teachers. The parents and the teachers were from the same school as the principal participants.

## Design

A qualitative research design was used because of the richness of information that it yielded (Weis, 2000). Using a qualitative research design, the researcher audio taped responses from the two elementary principal participants, two elementary schools with similar demographics in northwest Georgia. The researcher collected the interview data. The researcher conducted an interview with randomly selected third grade teachers from the same schools as the principals. Data were collected using a multi-method approach. Triangulation allowed the researcher to examine each participant individually using interview data. After the parent focus group met, the researcher then analyzed the data to find common themes and patterns of leadership behaviors shared by third grade teachers, third grade parents, and by the participating elementary principals.

## Population

The participants of the study were two elementary principals from two schools located in northwest Georgia. The method of selection was a purposive sampling from two elementary principals and their school populations because of their individual school characteristics based on location, demographics, and student populations.

The study included parents of third grade students who were at-risk. The parents were selected by purposive sampling and included in a formal focus group discussion. Eight third grade teachers were randomly selected by a purposive sampling and interviewed individually.

## Instrumentation

A qualitative research design was used because of the richness of information that it yielded (Weis, 2000). Using a qualitative research design, the researcher audio taped and

reported responses from two participants. The researcher collected the interview data, and the data from school artifacts. The researcher conducted a formal focus group discussion with randomly selected third grade and fourth grade parents. The researcher also conducted individual interviews with 8 third grade teachers, from the same schools as the two principals, to discuss the research. The third grade teachers were randomly selected. Data collection used was a multi-method approach; triangulation allowed the researcher to analyze each participant individually using interview data, observation data, and school artifacts (Glesne, 2006). After the third grade formal focus group discussion was held, the researcher then analyzed the data to find common themes and patterns of leadership behaviors introduced by third grade parents, third grade teachers and by the participating elementary principals.

#### Data Analysis

The researcher designed an interview matrix to identify and code common themes and patterns for each of the participant's individual responses. The researcher listened to the participant's interview responses. Then, the researcher analyzed the results by listening for common themes and patterns across each of the two principal participants' response, the responses from the leaders of the parent groups, and from the individual teacher interviews.

In conclusion, the connection between school leadership and student learning was well established. Students who were at-risk need extra help, time on tasks and hands-on learning experiences to help them be more successful in school. Researchers Waters, Marazano, and McNulty established that the elementary principal played a role as the instructional leader, builder of climate and culture, facilitator of building professional

learning communities, as well as a visionary in the improvement of achievement of third graders who were at-risk (Waters, et.al, 2003). However, even though researchers have identified various principal behaviors that can increase student achievement, the fact that many students were not achieving remains a concern and suggests that further research was needed. Therefore, the focus of the research during this study was to explore the challenges that elementary principals in Georgia encountered in raising at-risk third grade student achievement, and to study the strategies that elementary principals in Georgia used to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students.

#### Definitions

*Academic Achievement-* The term “academic achievement” is reflected in the school’s reading achievement measures. Academic achievement is defined using the Criterion Referenced Curriculum Test (CRCT) (GADOE, 2003a).

*At-Risk Learners/Students-* The term “at-risk learners/students” is defined as students who are academically performing below the score of 300 on the Criterion Referenced Comprehensive Test (CRCT) for grades 1-5 (GADOE, 2004).

*“Does Not Meet Expectations”-* the category of standardized testing that shows that a student does not meet expectations and is not performing on grade level (GADOE, 2004)

*Higher performing school-* an elementary school where third grade students are performing at 50 percentile level on standardized tests.

*Instructional Leadership-* The term “instructional leadership” is defined by behaviors, actions, and styles of the principal associated with curriculum and instruction (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003, 2004).

*Lived Experience*- The term “lived experience” is used by phenomenological research methods. The lived experience of a person is to learn about the nature or essence of an everyday experience a person lived through (deMarrais, 2004).

*Lower performing school*- an elementary school where third grade students are performing at 33 percentile level on standardized tests.

*Minority Achievement Gap*- The term “minority achievement gap” is defined as the difference in student reading achievement scores between majority students and minority students on the CRCT.

*“Meets Expectations”*- The category of standardized testing that shows that a student meets expectations and is performing on grade level (GADOE, 2004).

*Phenomenology*- The term “phenomenology” is defined as making a sense of a point of view of those who have lived the experience. It enables the researcher to examine every day human experience in close, detailed ways (deMarrais, 2004).

*Purposive Sampling*- Subjects that are selected because of some characteristic (Patton, 1990).

*Triangulation*- adding one layer of data to another to build a conformity edifice (Weis & Fine, 2000).

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RELATED LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Making academic success possible for at-risk third grade students should have been a conscious decision on the part of principals. Principals were the key in determining the success of their schools. “If we consider the traditions and beliefs surrounding leadership, we can easily make the cause that principal leadership is vital to the effectiveness of a school” (Marazano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, pp.6).

Because of the federal mandates of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001, principals were obligated to make academic learning and growth a focus for all students. Some students did not meet the requirements to move forward to the next grade level and at the “meets expectations” level.

Some students fall into the category of at-risk. These students needed a principal that was knowledgeable, effective, and supportive for students to show the growth necessary for academic improvement.

The researcher explored the challenges faced by elementary principals with regard to raising third grade student achievement and the strategies that principals could use in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students. In the following pages, the researcher delved into the literature based empirical studies and factual research on the topic.

The first part of the chapter examined the challenges that elementary principals face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students. Included in this section, were challenges such as legal mandates;; building facilities;; unalterable variables;; such as at-risk students;; cultural differences; and the autonomy gap and other barriers to effective

leadership. The second section examined strategies that principals could use to overcome the challenges to raising achievement of at-risk third grade students. This section included information on assessments, school programs, and alterable variables such as class size, use of staff, parental and community involvement, and effective leadership practices.

### Challenges Elementary Principals Face

#### *State and Federal Mandates*

During the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s principals were seen as managers of the schools, wearing many hats. Principals did the jobs of maintaining community relations with the local community including all stakeholders, overseeing the staff, promoting school improvement, making sure the facilities were safe, and managing the budget.

In today's educational arena the job of the principal has shifted to include being an instructional leader (Marazano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education). This reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA). Because of this, within the last few years, the standards--based reform movement has gained much attention. President Bush and his administrative team have promoted the increased use of standardized testing through No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). State departments of education, government officials, school boards, business leaders and parents all are drawn to the idea of increased accountability for educators, and for the public school system. This may have been due in part to the idea of preparing a more globally competitive work force (Steele, 2004).

Because of the increased emphasis on test scores, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and student performance, principals, teachers, and students were held to a higher standard of accountability (Steele, 2004). There was a great need for each U.S. classroom to meet standards. Thus, principals were required to not only maintain their previous duties and responsibilities, but added was the responsibility of being the instructional leader. This was a new challenge that elementary principals faced in raising the achievement of at-risk third grade students.

The effective principal was now perceived as an integral part of a school's academic success and instructional leadership (Whitaker, 2003). This higher standard of accountability has trickled down from the NCLB legislation to the state boards of education to superintendents in individual systems to principals.

The federal law requires that states set higher academic standards and implement in-depth testing programs which aligned with standards to measure the students' achievement (Georgia Department of Education, 2005). Because of federal mandates, principals were required to meet federal guidelines; Annual Yearly Progress, (AYP) requires schools to meet a set of prescribed standards. These standards were in the following areas: test participation for mathematics and reading/English language arts; academic performance for both mathematics and reading/English/-language arts and a second indicator (Georgia Department of Education, 2005). AYP, which made up a major portion of Georgia's Single Statewide Accountability System, held each local school district and each individual school accountable for success. This federal mandate brought about a huge paradigm shift in the manner in which principals approach their job responsibilities.

Schools made AYP by having a 95% participation rate. Each individual school and all student groups with at least 40 members must have a participation rate of 95% or above on selected state assessments in reading/language arts and in mathematics (Georgia Department of Education, 2005).

To define AYP, each state set the minimal levels of improvement that school districts and individual schools must achieve within specific time frames. These time frames met the 100% proficiency goal. By federal mandate, these levels of improvement were known as Annual Measurable Objectives and ensured that all student groups, schools and school districts, and Georgia as a whole reached this goal by the 2013-2014 school year (Georgia Department of Education, 2005).

Because of the federal mandates of NCLB and AYP, the state of Georgia implemented a new curriculum. “As required by the Quality Basic Education Act of 1985, Georgia must maintain a curriculum that specifies what students are expected to know in each subject and grade level” (Georgia-Standards.org). In addition, the state’s standardized test, the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) and the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHGST) for Grade 11 must be aligned to that curriculum.

The curriculum was revised because of a study done by Phi Delta Kappa (GADOE, 2003). The audit concluded that the former Quality Core Curriculum “not only lacked depth and could not be covered in a reasonable amount of time’ it didn’t even meet national standards” (GADOE, 2003a). Phi Delta Kappa, in their audit, found that the present curriculum would take twenty years, not twelve years to cover the topics included.

The now revised and strengthened curriculum, Georgia Performance Standards, was designed to drive instruction and assessment for Georgia's schools. "Our state wide assessments will be aligned with Georgia Performance Standards, taking the guess work out of teaching and following guidelines for our schools, students and test makers" (GADOE, 2003a). According to the state department of education, these standards were the best practices and proved to be effective in high-performing states and in the nation.

For all of these reasons, the role of the principal changed and is constantly evolving in today's schools.

Although NCLB was a federal mandate, it was not without its critics. Klein wrote an article that described a proposal that includes critics asking for an overhaul of No Child Left Behind (Klein, 2007). This article released in February, 2007 was a proposal by NCLB. The proposal asked congress to scrap the accountability system that held individual schools responsible for improving teacher training and parental involvement. This idea of improving teacher training and increasing parental involvement was held by many researchers (Whitaker, 2006; Feurstein, 2001; Brock & Johanson, 2003; Craig & Connor, 2003;-Harmon, 2002). The group that wrote this proposal included the National Educational Association and the National School Boards Association (Klein, 2007). It also suggested changes in the way that states set and measure annual achievement targets. Another group consisting of 10 demographic sectors and members of the State Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee criticized NCLB's heavy reliance on standardized testing (Klein, 2000). This became an ongoing debate and literature for further consideration in the future.

Because of state and federal mandates, some districts were narrowing the curriculum at the elementary level. A survey of principals found that some middle and high school leaders were likely to increase social studies and science instruction (Jerald, 2006). This practice was accepted because elementary principals within the same districts were narrowing social studies and science to increase time spent on reading comprehension, decoding, and phonics. However cognitive psychologists found that there was another step between fluent decoding and reading comprehension (Jerald, 2006). During this step, elementary readers call on background knowledge about a topic to understand its meaning. Cognitive psychologists warned that elementary readers without adequate background knowledge might comprehend some of the text, but they would not fully understand it (Jerald, 2006). Although this practice may be accepted by some districts to utilize more time for preparing elementary students for subjects that they would be tested on it in the elementary grades, there were hidden costs for these students as they progress to middle school.

#### Building Facilities as a Challenge to Raising Third Grade Student Achievement

Another challenge that elementary principals faced in raising student achievement was with their building facilities. The condition of the building could affect student achievement (Chaney & Lewis, 2007). Principals were interviewed to determine their perceptions of how the use of space, age of the buildings, and building design affects student achievement. Specifically, the principals were asked about the topics of artificial lighting, acoustics, ventilation, heating, air-conditioning, and the condition of the building with regards to safety. They were also asked about the relationship of the building facilities to the delivery of instruction from the teacher (Chaney, et.al., 2007).

Principals concluded that, because of inadequate funding, some facilities were in disrepair. Principals further concluded that the absence of heating and air-conditioning and the general physical condition of the building did impact the ability of the school to provide instruction, therefore impeding student achievement (Chaney, et.al., 2007).

Building safety could be a barrier to student achievement. This was true because what happens in our schools today was a reflection of our society. There was a safety issue in some schools today. Protheroe (2007) described the need to provide an emotionally safe building for students as well as a physically safe environment. She suggested bullying prevention; staff modeling of care, concern, and respect for others; routine school schedules; and high expectations for student behavior (Protheroe, 2007). The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) also had, as one of its six standards, “a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring the management of the organization, operations, and resources of safe, efficient and effective learning environment” ([www.umsl.edu/mpea/pages/aboutISLLC](http://www.umsl.edu/mpea/pages/aboutISLLC)). This standard was correlated with the idea of Maslow’s hierarchy (Marion, 2002). Safety was a necessary component to increased student achievement.

Relating to building facilities was the phenomena of class size. Administrators may not have had a voice in this decision of class size because it may have been a budgeting decision from the state. It was said that, even though test scores do not reveal it, reducing class size was a good idea and that students learned better with a smaller teacher to pupil ratio (Gilman & Kiger, 2003).

Among the challenges that elementary principals faced in raising achievement of at-risk students were some unalterable variables. Challenges such as cultural differences,

socio-economic status, and ethnicity of students, and the amount of time principals have to raise student achievement are unalterable variables.

#### Cultural Differences as a Challenge to Raising Third Grade Student Achievement

Because of the diversity in schools across the United States, students' cultural background may have impacted their academic achievement. For example, in a community that had Native American, Korean, Chinese, and South Asians, the students may have been affected because of a language barrier (Lewis, 2000). The Hispanic community was growing at a fast pace. In some states, the growth percentage of Hispanic ranged from 204% to 394% (Lewis, 2000). Most schools were more diverse than they were over a decade ago. Principals were faced with educating these students and raising their achievement, as well as that of other students.

Researchers Lee, Silverman, and Montoya (2002) wrote a report about English Language Learners. In their report they stated that school principals are becoming educational leaders in culturally, ethnically, and linguistically in more diverse settings (Lewis, 2006). As this diverse population became greater, this challenge may have become further complicated because many of these students had limited English proficiency.

An interview was held in an Iceland school at Keykjavik Elementary School with a principal who was facing the challenges of intercultural education. The principal's vision for school improvement was to promote mutual respect of all cultures (Adalbjarnardo & Runarsdottir, 2006). He emphasized learning the cultures in his school by providing continuous opportunities for professional growth of staff. It was important to this leader

to lead by learning about the students and the challenges that they faced (Adalbjarnardo & Runarsdottir, 2006).

There are times that students were economically disadvantaged. Some of the problems that students faced in schools today included family violence, housing, health care, personal safety, alcohol and drug abuse, parental employment issues, and poverty. These situations that students face helped to put them at-risk. Consider Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy lowest level of needs.

They were physical (hunger, thirst and, sleep), safety (emotional and physical), and love (social relationships) (Marion, 2002). It was only when these needs are met that students could begin to seek higher levels of satisfaction (Boykin, 2006). Many students came to school motivated to learn but when they are neglected, hungry, abused, or their parents were currently going through a divorce, it was difficult for them to focus on learning.

The neighborhood that these students came from reflects some of the problems that Americans face in today's world. This created a greater challenge to overcoming the barrier of cultural differences.

Principals were aware of some of these researched challenges. A report entitled "Primary Progress, Secondary Challenge: A State-by-State -Look at Student Achievement Patterns" revealed achievement gap patterns from 2003 to 2005. Researchers Hall and Kennedy outlined student achievement patterns in thirty states across the United States (Hall & Kennedy, 2006). Their report stated that, in elementary school, 26 of the 30 states narrowed the minority-white math gap. Twenty-four of 29 states narrowed the minority-white reading gap and most states improved the achievement of white students while they also raised the achievement for minority

students (Hall & Kennedy, 2006). In Georgia, during 2004-2005, the gains for minority students were approximately 12 to 13% (Hall & Kennedy, 2006). The researchers credited the overall gains by principals ensuring that all students had access to rigorous classes, making literacy a priority for all students and by using students' academic data and needs to divide instruction.

Two studies were found that identified achievement gaps among minority and white students (Hall & Kennedy, 2006; Barton, 2005). In each of the studies minority students achieved lower than white students.

Barton found achievement gaps in the past and present (Barton, 2005). He found that student achievement gaps among racial and ethnic groups were vast and persistent. This researcher made the following conclusions using National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), "In mathematics, the average minority fourth grader was likely to be able to subtract whole numbers with regrouping; the average Hispanic fourth grader could identify cylindrical shapes and measuring instruments; and the considerably higher-scoring white fourth grader could represent a situation algebraically. Four years later, when the same students were in eighth grade, the minority student was likely to be able to round decimals to the nearest whole numbers; the Hispanic student was likely to be able to use multiplication to solve problems; and the white student could use a pattern to draw a path on a grid" (Barton, 2005, p. 4). The contrasts in reading were similar. For example, the average minority and Hispanic fourth graders could recognize a story type as an adventure; the average white fourth grader could use story evidence to support an opinion about a character (Barton, 2005).

What was just described represents gaps in achievement based on race and ethnicity. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2000), gaps have been persistent, but even larger gaps were formed around 1970 to the mid 1980s (NCES, 2000).

In 1984, there was an improvement in reading according to NAEP (Barton, 2005). The suggested reason was that children born in the mid to late 1960s entered school during a time when Head Start was reaching at-risk or disadvantaged pre-schoolers and when Title I programs of the Elementary and Secondary Act were reaching at-risk students in the early grades.

The reason that gaps persisted, according to Barton, can be related to cognitive development from birth (Barton, 2005; Rathburn & West, 2004). In their studies, these researchers found that children's<sup>2</sup> early school experiences, including whether or not they attended a half day versus a full day of kindergarten, impacted their academic achievement (Rathburn, et.al., 2004). Their findings were also consistent with Barton's citing about minority students achieving less than their white counterparts (Barton, 2005; Rathburn & West, 2004).

Both sets of researchers, Barton & Rathburn and West, concluded similar reasons for the gaps. Rathburn and West (2004) found in addition to ethnicity as a barrier to student achievement, was a student's academic history in the early grades. They suggested that just a change in schools and a change in the type of schools and a change in the type of schooling made a negative difference in academic growth (Rathburn, et.al., 2004).

Barton found fourteen factors that affected achievement. Some factors that affected achievement were: the rigor of the curriculum, the extent of teacher preparation in the

subject matter being taught, the amount of teacher experience, class size, the availability of technology, assisted instruction (which was found to be an socio-economic barrier for minority and disabled students), and safety in school (Barton, 2005).

Innovative programs of school reform and research for diverse students could tend to concentrate on specific local communities. Some-times because of the culture in a community, the at-risk students at the school living in that community had similar reasons to be at-risk. For example, in a community that had Native Americans, Korean, Chinese, and South Asians, the students may have been at-risk because of their language barrier. Conclusively, some students were at-risk because of cultural disadvantages.

#### Some Characteristics of At-Risk Students

“At-Risk” means that for some reason(s) a student may have had a disadvantage that keeps them from learning as well as other students or from learning as easily as some students..

According to some researchers, problem behavior hampered learning and the normal development of attaining competencies and skills (Knivsberg, Iverson, Noland, & Reichelt, 2007). This group of researchers studied 31 Norwegian students enrolled in a “high risk” program for children (Knivsberg, et.al, 2007). They used standardized tests to obtain information on the students. Social problems, attention problems, anxiety, and depression were frequently reported behavioral traits (Knivsberg, et.al. 2007). These characteristics, along with linguistic delay, lower than normal cognitive scores, and poor motor coordination were also found. The researchers found that the attention problems were most frequently correlated to cognitive linguistic and motor functioning.

If principals were required to improve student achievement, the relationship that they had with their teachers and with at-risk students was important. A study found in the *Journal of School Psychology* was done to look at the association between student-teacher relationships and outcomes for minority students (Pecker, Dona, & Christen, 2007). Participants- 44 students, and 25 teachers were from two and three urban elementary schools in a mid western state (Pecker, et.al., 2007). Some teachers noted students had socially negative behavior and were not engaged in learning. But as the teachers reported of student/teacher quality relationship improvement, the behavior and engagement outcomes increased. Principals needed to support teachers of at-risk students by observation and setting of high expectations for both teachers and at-risk students (Marazano, 2005).

Children in low-income communities were at-risk. The teachers and facilities were unequal. According to researcher Jonathan Kozol (2000), some schools were not equal. Kozol found that some schools were located in low-income, possibly crime ridden areas; even the neighborhood facilities, such as the public libraries were unequal (Kozol, 2000). He found that in New York State, schools remain the most unequal. This was where principals could make a difference in the education of students in these types of communities.

#### Testing of Third Grade Students and Identifying At-Risk Students in Georgia

In Georgia, students were tested in grade three. Reading was the target subject in third grade. Testing young children could have given an indication that there was a problem or a deficiency. As early as in kindergarten, students in Georgia took a test; abnormalities could be noted through the use of the GKAP, Georgia Kindergarten

Assessment Program. Students were tested throughout the year on mathematics and reading skills ([www.ga.doe.org](http://www.ga.doe.org)). This was a type of informal assessment that was given by the students' certified classroom teachers. Students were also tested in grades 1 and 2, formally and informally.

Because of Georgia Performance Standards and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) two types of standardized tests were administered in Georgia elementary schools.

Standardized testing was a means of deriving information from students about what skills they have accomplished. The two types of standardized tests administered in Georgia were norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced tests (GADOE, 2007). These tests were useful for placing students in appropriate programs and for identifying students who may have needed the Early Intervention Program (EIP) and who were not at-risk (GADOE, 2003b). In Georgia, students in third grade took the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (I.T.B.S.), a norm-referenced test and the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). Principals could disaggregate the data from these tests to identify students who were at-risk.

Another type of test administered in third grade was the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). This test was designed to assess three of the five areas of early literacy. It tested Phonological Awareness, Alphabetic Principle, and Fluency with the connected text. At the third grade level, oral reading fluency was also assessed. These reading skills were important for third graders in order to master to be successful. According to Webster's Dictionary, fluency means to speak read or read quickly and easily (Geddes & Grosset, 2005). The most researched, efficient, and standardized

measure of reading proficiency was Oral Reading Fluency (University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

During this section of the tests, third grade students were asked to read an unfamiliar passage on the third grade level for sixty seconds. The scoring was based on the number of words read correctly in sixty seconds. Proponents of the DIBELS believe that it was valid and helpful in identifying students who were having difficulty or who are at-risk of reading deficiencies.

Researchers showed that a student's reading development was very, very important. The student's language skills on the DIBELS determined whether or not the student would become a proficient and fluent reader in later elementary years (University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

In third grade, in Georgia, students were tested on Reading, English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies (GADOE, 2003a). Although they were tested on all of these subjects, reading was the focus because they should have had a passing score in reading to pass third grade. Recalling Information, Reading for Meaning, and Reading for Critical Analysis were all areas that were tested. This information was used to compare students within classes and within schools. Accountability is the key word in today's educational setting (Mazzeo, 2002). Because of NCLB and state accountability, the use of standardized tests continued to grow.

These tests were useful for placing students in appropriate courses for pointing students toward special instructional programs such as the Early Intervention Program (EIP).

## Final Challenges

### *The Autonomy Gap and Having Time to Spend Increasing Student Achievement*

The final challenges were having time to spend in increasing student achievement and autonomy. Time was a valuable asset to principals when used wisely. An organization addressed the idea of use of time in the following study. The Wallace Foundation established a job description for School Administrative Manager (SAM) requiring business management training rather than education training. The SAM was charged with aiding the principal in spending the majority of his or her time involved in activities that were connected with instruction and raising student achievement (Shellinger, 2005). This time management training program proved to be effective.

Teachers, students, and parents were surveyed before the principals were trained using this time management model. The results were as follows: the teachers increased their perceptions on the survey of principals impacting instruction by 24.2%, parents increased their perceptions in the survey by 20.5% and selected fifth-grade students increased their perceptions by 60% (Shellinger, 2005). The results of this study indicated that, with some business management training, principals could increase their use of time management and, in turn, raise student achievement.

When principals considered time as a challenge to raising student achievement, they should have also considered their autonomy. The question was whether or not school leaders genuinely had the power they needed to get the results that were demanded of them by state and federal accountability systems. In a report, Adomoswki, Therriault, and Cavama, introduced the concept of autonomy as a barrier to effective school leadership (Adomoswki, Therriault, & Cavama, 2007). These researchers studied thirty-three

principals from five urban areas in three states. The principals interviewed were from low, average, and high performing schools (Adomoswki, et.al., 2007). When asked if they felt, as principal, they had the ability to exercise leadership effectively, 90% of them agreed that they had moderately strong leadership capacity. The principals were asked to rank twenty-one school level functions by their importance in determining their effectiveness. They named hiring, assigning, discharging unsuitable teachers, and allocating time for instruction as the most important functions at 80%-100% (Adomoswki, et.al., 2007). Data showed that the principals identified union contracts, federal and state laws as sources that weakened their authority.

Considering all of the challenges that elementary principals face in raising achievement, the question could be asked whether or not instructional leaders were making the connection between challenges and raising student achievement. In a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association, this topic was discussed. A study was conducted by Glanz, Shulman, and Sullivan at an elementary school using detailed interviews, school observations, and instrumental case study (Glanz, Shulman, & Sullivan, 2007). The population at the school was diverse and the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch was on the rise, from 73% in 2003 to 93% in 2005 (Glanz, et.al., 2007). The results indicated that when leadership was successful, it appeared to have an indirect influence on student learning and achievement. Further, educational leaders who pay close attention, regardless of challenges that they faced, did positively affect learning and teaching (Glanz, et.al., 2007).

In the first section of this chapter some challenges that principals faced in raising at-risk student achievement were addressed. The challenges that researchers studied were

numerous and the question of what can be done about the challenges was examined. In section two, strategies that elementary principals can use to overcome challenges were discussed.

### Identifying At-Risk Students

“At-Risk” could be defined as students that may have disadvantages that keep them from learning. Data from assessments could help principals identify students that were performing below grade level, “below meets expectations, or who were at-risk.

One group of researchers (Serna, Nielsen, & Mattern, 2002) used six instruments to measure students who were at-risk for emotional or behavioral disorders. The students that were tested were of low socio-economic status, three to five years of age, largely Hispanic, and fifty-two percent male (Serna, et.al, 2002). The students were rated by their teachers and by their parents over a period of three academic years. The study revealed that, because the students were minority and of low socio-economic status, they were at a higher risk. A limitation of the study was that middle class pre-schoolers were not studied. With such young students as pre-school age, one limitation was that acceptable levels of behaviors may not be clearly defined yet by teachers. One of the most startling facts found by these researchers was that when the data were examined by the Office of Civil Rights, it was found that minority males were eleven times more likely to be categorized in special education more emotionally disturbed than Anglo-Saxon males (Serna, et.al, 2002).

Once students began school, some indicators helped to put some at-risk. As early as third grade, minority males were becoming turned off to school and getting a good education (Robinson, 2006). It was not considered “cool” for them to be smart or for

them to be articulate. Administrators that had a vision and goal for raising student achievements were key in this type of enrichment. “If we can build a boy, we don’t have to repair a man,” said another dedicated administrator of a single-sex minority school (Robinson, 2006, p.8).

When elementary students begin school, most teachers and principals had hopes that their students came to school with some readiness skills. Once in school, students should have taken some responsibility for their learning (Bracey, 2002). Early literacy skills such as exposure to print, alphabet, and number recognition were indicators of early success in early childhood classrooms (Bracey, 2002). Other behaviors were more social in nature, such as listening, following directions, and using “I care” language, also help students to be successful in day to day dealing with others. It was thought that having these skills would allow young students to be successful, to interact with their peers and with their teachers, as well as other adults in the elementary school setting (Lane & Menzies, 2002). Students who began school without the skills or with deficiencies in those areas were at a greater risk for unsuccessful school experiences (Lane & Menzies, 2002). Those unsuccessful experiences could range from poor relationships with peers and adults to a lack of academic success early in school.

#### Programs That Can Be Used by Principals as Strategies for Raising Achievement of At-Risk Students

Some researchers found programs that were successful in raising achievement of at-risk students. One research study revealed a plan that provided supplemental reading instruction for at-risk second grade students. Ninety students were given the Woodcock

Learning Survey in addition to their regular reading program (Thompson & Davis, 2002). The students made significant gains using this intervention (Thompson, et.al., 2002).

In Lane and Menzies' study (2002), there were over three-hundred elementary student participants. Funding was made available by principals. Teachers were trained through a District Literacy Plan to structure reading literacy in a differentiated manner. Administrators implemented a school wide behavior plan (Lane & Menzies, 2002). Students were targeted because of their ethnic identity. This effort was considered to be a school-based primary intervention program. The findings were at the midpoint of the program but seemed to indicate that where implemented, a school--wide intervention plan had a high success rate at improving academic achievement (Lane & Menzies, 2002).

Another program in a mid-western school system researched supporting at-risk students. Their program was through a positive outreach (Munoz, 2001). Minority males, who were at-risk and were economically disadvantaged, were referred by their principals. This program focused on ways to help at-risk students using resources such as school personnel and community resource personnel. All of the students were provided with an Individual Success Plan (Munoz, 2001).

This program was also successful because caring administrators worked together to support at-risk students. Therefore, educational programs that had caring, supportive adults, including administrators, and parents, role models helped raise student achievement (Brock & Johanson, 2003; Dandridge, Edwards, & Pleasants, 2000).

According to Smith, some forms of alternative assessment included student writings, journals, antidotal notes taken by teachers during student interviews, peer interviewing, homework and games that were used to increase a particular skill (Smith, 2003). Since all

students were not the same and, therefore, did not learn at the same rate or in the same manner; alternate assessments were necessary.

Researchers Gilman and Kiger studied a program entitled Project Prime Time. This was Indiana's kindergarten through grade three class size reduction programs. Presently it was one of the only state--wide class size reduction programs. In Indiana, all but one of the three-hundred schools participated. Administrators supported teachers in this project. Two studies were conducted of the Project Prime Time. One study was conducted after the first year on grade one and the other, after three years, in grades 1-3.

The results were varied. The first year the results were positive. The students made gains in the areas of self-concept, achievement, and attitude towards school (Gilman, et.al. 2003). The second study, conducted on grades 1-3, showed no favorable results. The gains that were reported earlier disappeared. A final study done of Prime Time did not find much evidence that teachers teach differently in smaller class sizes than in larger one, or that students in smaller classes perform better than those in larger ones.

Another program, in Tennessee, Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio), had received national attention. This study differed from Project Prime Time in that Project STAR was a smaller scale project for a defined period of time. During this study, approximately 79 schools, from a variety of settings- rural, suburban, urban, and inner-city - participated (Gilman, et.al, 2002). The students, teachers, and principals were selected at random and the participation was voluntary. The study yielded four findings: (1) Students in smaller classes performed significantly better on all sets of achievement measures; (2) Benefits occurred regardless of school location or student gender; (3) Some of the differences were greater for minority students; (4) There were no differences

between smaller and larger classes in student scores and motivational scales (Gilman, et.al, 2002).

Researcher Hardy took a different approach to finding ways to help at-risk students. In his article, *Children At-Risk*, he stated that, in order for U.S. public school to be effective, educators should have confronted the outside forces and a multitude of needs (Hardy, 2007). The perception that children came to school as blank slates ready to learn and to be filled with knowledge was untrue and, in today's world, unrealistic. In today's society, students came to school with a variety of problems.

Other countries use interventions to helping at-risk students. School dropout rates are high in countries such as Brazil. According to researchers Graeff-Martins, Oswald, Obst, Kieling, Rocha, Gonocalves, and Rotide, elementary students were at-risk of dropping out of school. Their study compared two elementary schools. One school used the following interventions to combat the rising dropout rate: (1) two workshops with teachers, (2) five informative letters to parents, (3) three meetings with parents at school, (4) a telephone help line at school, (5) a one day cognitive intervention. Along with interventions to decrease dropout rates, students who were absent for ten consecutive days without reason were given a mental health assessment and were referred for mental health services in the community (Graeff-Martins, et.al, 2006). At the second school, no interventions were made. Conclusively, after one year, the dropout rates lessened at both schools. At the intervention school, 18 (45%) of the at-risk students returned to school (Graeff-Martins, et.al. 2006). The researchers concluded that the interventions were useful among the programs that were aimed at students who were at-risk of dropping out of school.

Researchers Lane & Menzies (2002), and Thompson & Davis found successful strategies for helping at-risk elementary students. Meadows and Karr-Kidwell and Thompson and Davis, in their research, found supplemental reading programs, portfolios, and real life performance--based tasks and skill focused learning as some of the forms of alternate assessments.

Other researchers have found strategies that were successful in raising achievement of at-risk elementary students. Three groups of researchers, Meadow & Karr-Kidwell (2007), Thompson & Davies (2002), and Robinson (2007), all agreed that some at-risk students required alternate and supplemental assessments and non-traditional school setting.

Robinson researched the phenomena of single-sex schools for at-risk males. A new kind of school that may help at-risk males is single-sex schools. There were over a dozen of these schools located across the United States. At single-sex schools, high standards for attire, attendance, and academics were the norm. One of the schools had, as their motto, "We Believe.": With this no-nonsense, business-like approach to providing educational opportunities students could have success. For most of the students who attend these types of schools, it was a chance for at-risk males to achieve more than was expected from the lower socio-economic community and home environments (Robinson, 2006).

With achievement of at-risk males declining nationally, proponents who agree to single-sex schools were growing in numbers. "To give these boys a chance, we have to catch them earlier and earlier. If we don't, we'll lose them forever.," said one principal of

an all boys independent school (Robinson, 2006). This statement correlated with Bracey (2002) in the idea of early literacy.

One of the most significant facts about single-sex school for minority males was its leaders. These principals were serious about building self-esteem and about setting high standards for excellence. The principals, along with parents, played important roles in the students' success. Feurstein (2000) and Hancock (2002) agreed that parental involvement was the key to students' success.

These single-sex minority schools were faced with cultural and diversity issues that were common in our country today. Dandridge, Edwards, & Pleasants (2000) researched an urban school that had two African-American male principals. The school was located in a low-income, crime ridden community and was suffering with low test scores (Dandridge, et.al., 2000). The approaches of the two men were different but both men agreed on the need to raise student achievement through increased parental and community involvement. The strategy that one principal used was to contact parents and to ask them to tell "parent stories" about their lives at home with their children. Both of these principals believed that the first step to raising student achievement was to make a personal investment in students' families and in the community (Dandridge, 2000).

The idea of providing all students with opportunities for success was portrayed by several researchers - Dandridge & Edwards (2000), Nagle, Hernandez, McLaughlin & Doh (2006), and Hall & Kennedy (2006).

Alterable Variables: Strategies that Principals Can Use to Raise Student Achievement  
*Community and Parental Involvement*

Involving the community and parents, effective training of and use of staff, and displaying effective leadership behaviors were all alterable variables. Involving the parents and the community could be valuable to raising achievement of students.

In a study released by the Met & Life Foundation, principals shared what worked well through an interview format. In his studies Nagle, et.al., (2006) through the Met Life Foundation report, information on strategies that involved the community and parents to improve academic achievement was similar. In the study by Met Life, principals were interviewed on strategies that they used to increase student achievement though involving the community in the schools. Because 60% of Americans today did not have school aged children, getting the community involved in the building and in voting for issues to support schools could be difficult, (Met Life Foundation, 2006) but not impossible. Both research reports indicated that a willingness to invest personal time in the community and with the parents was vital to the success of the school (Nagle, et.al., 2006; Met Life, 2006). Another fact, stated by both reports was how important parental involvement is to the school's success. Although parents may have had negative experiences with school or had language and cultural differences, they were key components to raising academic achievement (Kells, 1991; Met Life, 2006; Dandridge, et.al., 2000; Nagle, et.al., 2006).

Researchers Meadows & Karr-Kidwell (2007), Lane & Menzies (2002), and Thompson & Davis (2000) all found successful strategies for helping at-risk elementary students. Meadows and Karr-Kidwell and Thompson and Davis, in their research, found supplemental reading programs, portfolios, and real life performance--based tasks and

skill--focused learning as some of the forms of alternate assessments (Meadows, et.al., 2007; Lane, et.al., 2002; Thompson, et.al., 2000)

#### Use of Staff to Raise Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students

The elementary principal was appointed the role of supervisor of a school. He or she was the supervisor of the teachers and other staff members. As the supervisor, one has to articulate, model, and project the vision of a cause beyond oneself. Teachers under this type of supervision did not view their work as only “their” work, but work that contributes to the greater cause of identifying students who are at-risk and who need additional help (Lick & Murphy, 2005). “In successful schools, teachers see themselves as part of the larger enterprise of complementing and working with each other to improve instruction.” (Glickman, Gordon, ~~and~~ Ross-Gordon, 2001, p. 51). Improving instruction led to improved test scores and to improved achievement for third grade students.

When third grade students enrolled in an elementary school the principal could review the students’ records and test data. If a student was performing below grade level, a red flag should have come into focus immediately.

One way that a principal could accomplish this was to discuss with teachers and other support staff how they could complement each other in striving for common goals (Glickman, et.al, 2001). Another way that principals could articulate the vision of raising third grade student achievement was to encourage teachers to plan collaboratively with common purposes and actions (Zapeda, 2003). An example of this would be for administrators to schedule third grade teachers; for collaborative planning time (Lick, et.al., 2005). During this time, data could be desegregated to determine, as a grade level, what students were at-risk and what areas they needed to strengthen. Individual teachers

could collaborate and map out strategies to help at-risk students in their classes. This collaboration allowed for shared decision making and greater student success (Hoy & Tarter, 2004).

Most principals relied heavily on their assistant principals, teachers, paraprofessionals, and custodians to work collaboratively to raise student achievement. The concepts of staff development and whole faculty study groups could be used as strategies to increase student achievement. In their book, Lick & Murphy, discussed the idea of whole faculty study groups, strengthening school improvement plans, building whole staff commitment and group collaboration and establishing a support network both district and state wide (Lick, et.al., 2005).

Asa Hillard stated that the quality of the teachers made a difference in working with at-risk students. Single-parent families and even threatening neighborhood environments presented no obstacle in the attainment of excellence for their students. They were willing to educate and provide for their students by any means necessary; these were types of dedicated successful and positive learning experiences for all students (Hillard, 2000). Principals were key in hiring teachers of the caliber needed to bring these goals to fruition.

Principals can utilize counselors to raise student achievement. Counselors, like teachers have a role in raising student achievement. A group of counselors honed in on a small urban school district to conduct a qualitative study of the relationship between grading, student achievement, test scores and at-risk factors for K-12 students. (Couillard, Garrett, Hutchins, Fawcett, & Mancock, 2006). The counselors' findings supported previously the similar characteristic of at-risk learners found by Pecker et.al. More than

50 percent of the students in this study were found to have at-risk factors such as lower achievement, lower grade point averages, more likely to be male and minority.

In this study done by counselors, these students were more likely to be receiving special education services and to had a high rate of absenteeism or tardiness and had multiple suspensions or discipline reports, they also had a higher incidence of being from single, deceased, or step-parent homes and to had free, or reduced lunch status. School counselors, teachers, and other staff could work together with principals to positively impact student achievement too.

#### Effective Leadership Behaviors that Can Be Used by Elementary Principals to Raise Achievement of At-Risk Students

Most educators knew that school leadership made a difference in students' achievement (Marazano, Water & McNalty, 2005; Whitaker, 2003; Cotton, 2003; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Waltstrom, 2004).

Many studies had been conducted on leadership behaviors and practices that could increase student achievement. Marazano was one such researcher. He had written exclusively on school improvement and student achievement. In his book, *School Leadership that Works From Researcher to Results*, listed are 21 responsibilities of school leaders that could result in change; he referred to these as “standard operating procedures for effective principals” (Marazano, 2005). The 21 leadership responsibilities were divided into first and second order change. The first order changes were built on past and existing models. The second order changes broke from past existing models and challenged the existing norms and values within the organization. Some of the 21

leadership responsibilities were: affirmation, change agent, contingent rewards, communication, and culture (Marazano, 2005).

Cotton (2003) focused on leadership behavior studies from the 1980s until present. Of the studies, 56 dealt with the influence of principal leadership on student achievement, 10 dealt with the effect of principal leadership on student attitudes, 8 with student behavior and the others with teacher attitudes and teacher behavior (Cotton, 2003). Similarities existed between Cotton's 25 categories and Marazano's 21 leadership responsibilities. Some of the similar leadership responsibilities were: safe and orderly school environment, vision and goals focused on high levels of student learning, high expectations for student learning, self-confidence, responsibility, and perseverance, visibility and accessibility, positive and supportive school climate, communication and interaction, (Cotton, 2003). Cotton's positive and supportive school climate relates to Marazano's Culture. Marazano and Cotton also agreed on instructional leadership, which was knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, as an important behavior for principals to have (Cotton, 2003; Marazano, 2005).

Cotton and Whitaker agreed on high expectations for student learning, support of teachers' autonomy, and protecting instructional time. Several principals, that were interviewed, also agreed with Cotton, Whitaker, and Marazano in the areas of setting high expectations for student learning and protecting instructional time (Dandridge, Edwards, & Pleasants, 2000).

Many other researchers had studied leadership behaviors and their effects on student achievement. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Walstrom (2004) concluded a study using a narrative design. They estimated that the correlation between student achievement and

leadership was between .17 and .22 (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Walstrom, 2004). These researchers concluded that leadership was second to classroom instruction. This opinion was also held by other researchers (Stricherz, 2001; Glanz, 2007).

They also founded three basic practices as the center of successful leadership. The first means setting direction which was aimed at helping the school community to establish and to understand the goals of the school and was the shared vision for the school. Secondly, was redesigning the organization. This involved strengthening the school culture and building collaboration among the teams in the school (Cotton, 2003; Marazano, 2005; Lick, et.al., 2005; & Leithwood, et.al., 2004). The third basic practice found by Leithwood was developing people (Leithwood, et.al., 2004). Developing means using the people in the school to build capacity, individualized support and offering intellectual stimulation (Leithwood, et.al., 2004).

The idea of developing people was mentioned by at least two other researchers (Collins, 2007; Marazano, 2005). In Whitaker's research, he mentioned that great principals realized that it was people that make schools effective, not the programs. This idea was further developed in the idea of individual teacher development (Whitaker, 2003). He stated that effective principals in his study did all they could to promote the effectiveness of individual staff members as a way to improve the school. "As school leaders, we must recognize that no matter what programs we introduce or seek to strengthen, our most important work is to improve the people in the schools" (Whitaker, 2003, p.12).

Collins, also valued developing and having the right people (Collins, 2001; Strichez, 2001). There were behaviors that level 5 leaders have that could be correlated to school

leadership behaviors. One behavior that they exhibited was that when things went wrong they tended to look inward for the reasons. Whitaker agreed with this behavior; in his book, *What Great Principals Do Differently* (Whitaker, 2003). Great principals viewed themselves as responsible for all aspects of the school. When things went wrong they looked inward (Whitaker, 2003; Collins, 2007). Whitaker went even further to say that ineffective principals complained and blamed others when things went wrong at schools (Whitaker, 2003).

Other characteristics of level 5 leaders included: surrounding themselves with the right people to do the job, creating a culture of discipline, also stated by Cotton (2003) and Marzano (2003), and riding on high standards was the primary vehicle for attaining goals as opposed to personal charisma (Collins, 2001). When Stodgill analyzed the characteristics of 124 leaders, popularity was mentioned along with sociability (Marzano, 2002). These two terms could be associated with charisma.

Michael Fullan has contributed to the theories on leadership but was focused on change. In his book, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, he discussed effective leadership and states that all leaders can become effective. He identified five characteristics of effective leadership for change. They were moral purpose, understanding the change process, building strong relationships, knowledge sharing, and connecting new knowledge with existing knowledge (Fullan, 2001). These characteristics could be used as effective leadership behaviors to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students. In order for a principal to become an instructional leader he or she must have attained new knowledge and have become a disseminator of that knowledge. Instruction and

assessment was agreed upon by Cotton, Marazano, and Fullan (Cotton, 2003; Marazano, 2003; & Fullan, 2001). These thoughts were also shared by Steven Covey.

Covey, though not an educator, had an influence on educational leadership. In his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989), he gave seven directives to people that wanted to become highly effective. They included: be proactive, begin with the end in mind, put first things first, think win-win, synergize, sharpen the saw, and seek first to understand and then to be understood (Covey, 1989). This idea related to establishing strong lines of communications, listening and understanding the needs of others in the organizations (Collins, 2001; Whitaker, 2006; Fullan, 2001). Communication, collaboration, and listening were key behaviors to effective leadership (Cotton, 2003; Marazano, 2003; Covey, 1989; & Brown, 2007).

The need for communication and collaboration has been already established as an effective behavior or practice. The degree to which a principal should share with the public his or her private self should have been left to individual principals, but the need for communication was established as a necessary leadership behavior to raise student achievement (Marazano, et.al., 2003; Cotton, 2003; Covey, 1989; Whitaker, 2003).

The National Association of Elementary School Principals, in a ninety-six page publication, reported that the role of principals was redefined. In the article “Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do,” the group recommended that principals’ top goals should have been to raise student achievement (Stricherz, 2001). The group concluded that effective principals led schools in a way that placed student learning at the center. The principals in the meeting made recommendations for districts to spend more money on additional assistant principals and

to spend more money on professional development for school leaders (Stricherz, 2001). The chief operating officer of the Council for Basic Education said that principals' roles have changed and that support is needed to assist them. This group concluded with six steps that principals should have tried to improve student achievement. Some of the steps were: foreseeing a culture of adult learning, using data to lead instruction and engaging parents and community and civic groups in schools. These thoughts on how to raise academic achievement were also shared by Cotton, Marazano, and Whitaker (Cotton, 2003; Marazano, 2003; Robinson, 2007; Whitaker, 2003).

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium was formed for the purpose of developing model standards and assessments for school leaders (umsl.edu, 2005). The organization, which was formed by the Council of Chief State School Officers, had six standards. Most of the standards including standard six that promotes collaborating with families; and with community staff members, could be correlated with many researchers (Dandridge, et.al., 2000; Stricherz, 2001; Met Life Foundation, 2006; Nagle, et.al., 2006).

Owings, Kaplan, and Nunnery (2005) were the authors of research that studied the relationship between principal qualities as measured by the ratings on an ISLLIC standards rubrics and student achievement scores over time (Owings, Kaplan, & Nunnery, 2005, p.102). The study concluded that principal quality was connected to student achievement. The findings concluded that, "it is reasonable to believe that principals who practice and build skills in leadership for teaching and learning can positively impact their school's learning and student performance" (Owings, et.al., 2005, pp.115-116). Researchers have proven that there were behaviors that effective leaders could model that would increase student achievement.

## Summary

Because of state and federal mandates, principals in today's schools were not only building facilitators, but also were instructional leaders. No Child Left Behind mandated that principals become armed with strategies and interventions for all but especially for Georgia's at-risk population. These challenges were new and must have been met head on.

Although many researchers had identified various leadership behaviors and leadership responsibilities that were proven to be successful, all students were still not achieving. While there are challenges that principals face that make student achievement for all third grade students difficult; it was not impossible. Several successful strategies were identified in this chapter that principals can utilize to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students. As a result of this research and the supporting literature, exploring the challenges that principals face in raising at-risk third grade student achievement was necessary and essential at that time for improving achievement of at-risk third grade students in schools today. The Research Questions are: (1) What challenges do elementary principals face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students in their schools? (2) What strategies do Georgia elementary principals use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges that principals encounter in raising the achievement of at-risk third grade students. No Child Left Behind (NCLB); (Public Law 107-110, Section 101 Part 1001(2) mandated that states assess students yearly in grade 3 in reading, math, social studies, and science (gadoe.k12.ga.us). That mandate was important because it was the first time in the elementary grades that students' passing the grade or being retained was contingent upon their test performance. Third graders in Georgia were required to pass a portion of the Georgia Criterion Referenced Curriculum Test (CRCT) in order to be promoted to the next grade (gadoe.k12.ga.us). In Georgia 13%, or approximately 7,007, third graders from 15 metropolitan districts in Georgia did not meet the standards in English, Reading, and Language Arts. Those students were at-risk of future failure (Guitierrez, 2007). This research study was essential to disseminate pertinent information in the field of education with regard to raising student achievement.

Hall and Kennedy (2006) indicated that there were gaps in the performance of white and minority students, in the subjects of math, science, and reading in 2002-2005.

To increase academic success, Georgia's teachers and principals were trained intensely to help improve student performance in the "meets expectations" category on the Georgia Criterion Referenced Test in reading and math. Even so, many at-risk third graders failed to perform at the passing level. The challenges of the principals while

attempting to raise student achievement at that critical third grade level were rarely addressed in the literature.

### Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to answer two research questions:

1. What challenges do elementary principals in Georgia face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students?
2. What strategies do elementary principals in Georgia use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students?

### Selection of School Sites

The researcher conducted an empirical research case study on two elementary schools, one lower performing and one higher performing. One school, the lower performing school, was located in a suburban area in the western portion of the state of Georgia. The other school, the higher performing school, was located in a rural area in the western portion of the state of Georgia. All of the participants' names, names of the schools, and addresses were pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants and the schools that were used for this research study. These two were selected because they had similar demographics (poverty rates) and number of students. However they differed in test performance in that one school was a higher performing school and the other was a lower performing school. These two schools were selected based on data reports from the Georgia Department of Education's Office of School Accountability, and from the state Report Card ([www.doe.ga.us](http://www.doe.ga.us)).

The first school, the lower performing school, earned scores on the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) over a three year period as follows:

*Table 2.1: CRCT 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading Scores for Lower Performing School*

<b>School</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Does Not Meet</b>	<b>Meets</b>	<b>Exceeds</b>
Lower performing school	2003-2004	14	57	29
Lower performing school	2004-2005	12	49	39
Lower performing school	2005-2006	21	71	9

Data Resource: Georgia State Department of Education 2005-2006 State Report Card

At the lower performing school, the standardized test scores have been consistently at a lower performing level.

The second school, the higher performing school, earned test scores on the Criterion Referenced Competency Test over a three year period as follows:

*Table 2.2: CRCT 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading Scores for Higher Performing School*

<b>School</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Does Not Meet</b>	<b>Meets</b>	<b>Exceeds</b>
Higher performing school	2003-2004	6	64	30
Higher performing school	2004-2005	9	59	32
Higher performing school	2005-2006	23	67	10

Data Resource: Georgia State Department of Education 2005-2006 State Report Card

At the higher performing school, the standardized test scores have been consistently at a higher performing level.

The CRCT 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading scores at the higher performing school were at a higher level in most categories. Although the percentage points may seem close, the actual gap in the number of students at that level was significant when using the following formula: (percentage of students in category \* total number of students)

Lower performing school: 2004-2005 meets 49% \*

500 students = 245 students

Higher performing school: 2004-2005 meets 59% \*

500 students = 295 students

The researcher selected these two schools for the study because they met the demographics needed in order to determine the differences between the roles of the principal of a high performing school and a lower performing school and because of the percentage of free/reduced lunch. Both schools are Title I and had similar demographics.

*Lower Performing School:* The lower performing school was located in a small suburban county in Georgia. It had an enrollment of less than 500 students ([www.doe.ga.us](http://www.doe.ga.us)). The percentage of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch was 79% ([www.doe.ga.us](http://www.doe.ga.us), 2005-2006 State of Georgia K-12 report card).

*Higher Performing School:* The higher performing school was located in a small rural county in northwestern Georgia. The enrollment was less than 500 students. The percentage of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch was 76% ([www.ga.doe.us](http://www.ga.doe.us), 2005-2006 State of Georgia K-12 report card).

## Research Design

In conducting this research study, a phenomenological qualitative research method was used to gather information on the challenges that Georgia elementary principals face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students. According to Glesne (2006), qualitative research was used to understand some social phenomena from the viewpoint of those involved. Qualitative methodologies allowed the researcher to construct multiple realities, which surround occurrences (Denzin & Lincoln). Qualitative researchers approach the interview session with the thoughts that nothing is trivial and that every detail is important (McMillan, 2004). Merriam suggests that qualitative research is descriptive of people, their thoughts and ideas, and is flexible and evolving (Merriam, 1998). Marshall and Rossman (1980) indicate that qualitative researchers rely on in-depth interviewing, and that qualitative in-depth interviews are more like conversations with predetermined response categories (Marshall & Rossman, 1980).

The specific qualitative research design will be phenomenological analysis. Patton describes phenomenological analysis as seeking to group and extract the structure, meaning, and essence of the lived experience (Patton, 2002). The method of gathering the data was in-depth interviewing. The researcher obtained a view into the participants' life and world to understand their individual and personal meanings constructed from their lived experiences, within their environments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Patton, 2002). Human behavior is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs; thus the researcher must study that behavior in situations. The physical setting, space, schedules, and the internalized notion of the norms, traditions, rules, and values are crucial contextual variables (Marshall & Rossman, 1980). The research must be conducted in the

school environment where all the contextual variables are operating. In qualitative studies, the investigator has a direct role in collecting information. The qualitative researcher needs to be close to the data to obtain a full understanding (McMillan, 2004). Thus the utilization of qualitative research allowed the researcher to explore the processes and seek to understand the challenges that Georgia elementary principals faced in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students.

During this study, the researcher examined the qualitative data using phenomenological research methods by interviewing principals, parents, and teachers, and reviewed school artifacts presented by the principals. Therefore, the researcher used the phenomenon design to seek to understand the essence of the challenges faced by Georgia elementary principals in raising at-risk third grade student achievement.

#### Sample and Population

The participants of the study were elementary principals, teachers, and parents. The method of selection was a purposive sampling from two elementary principals and their school populations because of their individual school characteristics based on location, demographics, student populations, and standardized scores.

This study had approximately eighteen participants: two principals, eight teachers, and eight parents. In addition to the individual principal interview, four parents were involved in a formal focus group discussion at the lower performing school. The third grade teachers were interviewed individually. Along with the principal, at the higher performing school, approximately four teachers were interviewed individually. Four parents were involved in a formal focus group discussion. The four parents were parents of at-risk third grade students.

### *Teacher and Parent Groups*

This sample size was selected because it represented both principals and all of the third grade teachers for the selected schools. The district records reflected enrollment numbers. This information came from the district's director of elementary education.

The study included parents of students. The parents were selected by purposive sampling and interviewed in a formal focus discuss group. All of the third grade teachers were interviewed individually at both schools.

### Participants

The principal participants were selected on the following criteria. Two schools with:

1. Similar demographics (percent of free and reduced lunch, student population)
2. Differences in third grade criterion referenced test scores (CRCT)

For this study, the researcher contacted the Georgia Department of Education to obtain information that was used to determine which schools to study and contact the director of elementary education.

The parent participants were parents of at-risk third grade students from each school. The parents were selected using information from the school counselor. The parents were interviewed using a formal focus discussion group, for 1-½ hours. The teacher participants were all four third grade teachers, from each school, from the same schools as the principals. The teacher interviews were individual and lasted 1 hour to 1-½ hours. The research maintained anonymity amongst the participants and their schools by using pseudonyms.

After school system and IRB approval, a pilot study was conducted by two experts in the field of educational leadership. The pilot study determined if the research protocol was workable.

The pilot study was conducted by an elementary assistant principal and an elementary counselor, both with advanced degrees in the field of Educational Leadership.

The pilot study was done by mailing a copy of the interview questions to each expert. After discussing the interview questions with the two experts, the researcher confirmed that the questions were appropriate for the research study.

### Sample

The sample size was determined by the total number of people that were interviewed. At the high performing school, the researcher interviewed the principal, all of the third grade teachers and approximately four third grade parents. At the lower performing school, the researcher interviewed the principal, all of the third grade teachers and approximately four third grade parents.

### Instrumentation

First, the researcher interviewed the principals, third grade teachers, and parents of third grade students. The researcher used the semi-structural interview questions, school observations, and document collection. The document collection included but was not limited to pertinent information about the two schools. Next the researcher interviewed the teachers and the parents. The interview questions were designed to explore the challenges that elementary school principals face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students.

The researcher used the interview guide approach (Patton, 1990) by covering the topics and issues exploring the challenges that elementary principals face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students in outline form. Through using the interview guide approach, the comprehensiveness of the data was strengthened.

After each principal interview segment, the researcher toured the school and viewed artifacts of learning obtained from the principal. The researcher carried a school observation reflection log during the tour that was used for note-taking. The collection of information from the school observation complimented the information from the interview. The interview, school observation and the observing of school artifacts took approximately 1 to 1-½ hours per principal. The researcher then interviewed the teachers individually and the parents in a focus group.

#### Data Collection

The collection of the data was conducted through semi-structural interview questions, the school observation tour notes, and school artifacts. The researcher established a school visitation appointment with each participant by e-mail and by telephone calls. After establishing an appointment for 1-½ to 2 hours, the researcher provided the selected principal, teacher, and parent participants a letter of informed consent explaining the need and importance of the research study along with steps to obtain data pertinent to the study (see Appendix B) prior to the school visitation appointment. Permission from the participants was obtained before any data was collected, and the information remained confidential throughout the study.

On the day of the school visitation appointment, interviews were conducted to collect data pertaining to the experiences of the principal participant, the teacher

participants, and the parent participants. A list of interview questions was used as a guide to gather the focus or the experiences of each participant. Through the use of qualitative interviews, the researcher reconstructed the events and sought to understand the participants' experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The researcher sought to extract from the participants "what else" and "tell me more" about the participants' experiences (Glesne, 2006). Most qualitative researchers depended on audiotapes, which were then transcribed with exact text and analyzed at a later date by the researcher (Easton, McComish, & Greenberg, 2000). After audio taping the interview data, the researcher toured the school with each participant to investigate for data shared during the interview or any information the participant deemed as appropriate for the purpose of the study. The school observation data were written on a memo notepad in a log format. By writing in a memo notepad in a log format, the researcher was able to develop thoughts and ideas as they occurred before they were quickly forgotten (Glesne, 2006). After each interview, the researcher kept a memo notepad close by at all times and captured new insights and perspectives as they arose in each interview. Using this approach, the researcher analyzed all of the interview data including both verbal and non-verbal cues (Weis & Fine, 2000). All of the data collected during the research process by the researcher were stored in a secure location. This included tapes and all of the transcription notes.

The written observation included the principals', teachers', and parents' dialogues, a description of the physical setting, and a detailed description of any school artifacts shared by each participant. The researcher avoided and minimized the potential errors that could occur such as equipment failure and transcription errors by following the procedures of the pilot study and by making the revisions as needed (Weis & Fine, 2006).

The researcher ensured trust-worthiness in reporting the findings and did not use biases or predetermined hypothesis when recording the data.

### Data Analysis

The process of data analysis was moving from raw interview material to interpretations that were evidence-based and that formed the foundation for published reports (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The researcher used the qualitative research design to capture the experiences of elementary principal participants, teacher participants, and parent participants in elementary schools with at-risk third grade students. The interviews and the school artifacts shared by each participant were analyzed by identifying common themes and patterns throughout (Glesne, 2006, p.164).

The common themes and patterns of the responses of the principal, teacher, and parent participants were examined individually then compared to each of the principal participants' responses. The data gathering instrument was the researcher, whose listening, observing, and understanding skills were critical (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The most important part in collecting data was the skill of listening, which was difficult to learn (Dilley, 2000). Data from the interview, school observations, and school artifacts were transcribed and coded according to the different themes that developed for each principal participant, teacher participant, and parent participant. Then, the collected, coded themes and patterns were analyzed, integrated, summarized, and then organized into a narrative text and into graphic tables. An interview matrix was developed by the researcher to generate a list of common challenges and strategies among the participants. The compilation of the data from the research study in the form of written text and graphics (tables) was evaluated for the usefulness and conclusiveness with answering the

research questions. Question: (1) What challenges do elementary principals in Georgia face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students? (2) What strategies do elementary principals in Georgia use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students?

### Reporting the Data

The researcher reported the data in Chapter 4. Conclusions were drawn by the researcher and recommendations were made using the information collected through the interviews, observations, and information from the principal, the teacher, and the parent participants in Chapter 5.

### Summary

The methodology that was used was a phenomenological, qualitative research study design for exploring the challenges that elementary principals face in raising the achievement of at-risk third grade students. The research design allowed the researcher to closely listen to and observe the principal participants, teacher participants, and the parent participants, and to observe the setting at the schools.

After receiving IRB approval, the two research questions were used to guide the study. The research followed a phenomenological qualitative research design because a qualitative study best suited the investigation challenges that elementary principals face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students and the strategies that elementary principals use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students.

A pilot study was reviewed by two experts in the field of Educational Leadership. The results of the pilot study determined if the study would be workable. The researcher examined the results of the pilot study, and adjusted the questions as necessary. After discussions with the experts in the field of Educational Leadership, it was determined that

the questions were appropriate for the study. There were principals, teachers, and parents who participated in the study. The principal focus group discussions, along with the teacher and parent interviews, school observations, and observation of school information took place at the school of each participant and served as three ways to obtain data and explore challenges that elementary principals face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students. The researcher also individually interviewed third grade teachers. Third grade parents were interviewed as a formal focus group discussion. All interviews were tape recorded and stored in a secure place.

After all of the interviews were completed, the data were coded, collected, transcribed, and analyzed looking for curriculum themes and patterns for each participants' responses.

CHAPTER 4  
REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the challenges that elementary principals in Georgia face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What challenges do elementary principals in Georgia face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students?
2. What strategies do elementary principals in Georgia use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students?

The researcher conducted an empirical study on two elementary schools, one lower performing and one higher performing. The researcher selected these two schools because they met the demographics needed in order to determine the difference between roles of the principal of a high performing school and a lower performing school and because of the percentage of free/reduced lunch. Both schools were Title I and had similar demographics. A phenomenological qualitative research method was used to gather information on the challenges that Georgia elementary principals face in raising achievement of at-risk students. This study had approximately eighteen participants: two principals, eight teachers, and eight parents. At both schools the researcher conducted individual principal interviews, third grade teacher individual interviews, and parents of third grade students in a formal focus group discussion.

This chapter is divided into three sub sections. The first section describes the participants in the study, the second section presents the common themes and patterns

obtained during the interviews, and the third section describes the school observations and school artifacts provided during the visitation.

### Section One: Participants

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 describe the personal demographics of the principals, teacher, and parents. The principal participant at the lower performing school (1-L) had an education specialist degree in Educational Leadership. She had over twenty years of experience in education. The principal (1-L) was African-American aged in her mid-forties.

The teachers at Site 1, the lower performing school, had a range in degrees from Bachelors to Master of Education degrees with experience ranging from 2 years to 19 years. The ethnicity was two African-Americans and two Caucasians aged from 32-50 years of age. The parents at Site 1 were all college educated. Two of the teachers were African-American and the other two were Caucasian.

The principal participant at the higher performing (2-H) had a specialist degree in Educational Leadership with over twenty years in education also. She was Caucasian aged in her late fifties.

The teachers at the higher performing school had a range in degrees from bachelors to education specialist with experience from 1 year to 25 years in education. They were all Caucasian aged from 23-48 years of age. The parent focus group participants at the higher performing school were high school graduates ranging from 31-35 in age. They were all Caucasian.

Table 3.1: *Demographic Profile of the Participants in the Study at the Lower Performing School*

Participant	Degree	Total Yrs. In Education	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Position
Principal 1-L	Ed.S	27	African-American	45	Female	Principal
Teacher 1-L	B.S.	11	African-American	32	Female	Teacher
Teacher 2-L	B.S.	14	African-American	58	Female	Teacher
Teacher 3-L	B.S.	2	Caucasian	25	Female	Teacher
Teacher 4-L	M.Ed.	19	Caucasian	50	Female	Teacher
Parent 1-L	M.Ed.	0	Caucasian	35	Female	Parent
Parent 2-L	M.Ed.	0	African-American	36	Female	Parent
Parent 3-L	B.S.	0	Caucasian	38	Female	Parent
Parent 4-L	B.S.	0	African-American	30	Female	Parent

L indicates lower performing school

Table 3.2: *Demographic Profile of the Participants in the Study at the Higher Performing School*

Participant	Degree	Total Yrs. In Education	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Position
Principal 2-H	Ed.S	30	Caucasian	57	Female	Principal
Teacher 1-H	B.A.	1	Caucasian	23	Female	Teacher
Teacher 2-H	M.Ed.	17	Caucasian	56	Female	Teacher
Teacher 3-H	B.A.	9	Caucasian	32	Female	Teacher
Teacher 4-H	Ed.S	25	Caucasian	48	Male	Teacher
Parent 1-H	0	0	Caucasian	38	Female	Parent
Parent 2-H	0	0	Caucasian	31	Female	Parent
Parent 3-H	0	0	Caucasian	34	Female	Parent
Parent 4-H	0	0	Caucasian	37	Female	Parent

H indicated higher performing school

#### *Lower Performing School Participant Descriptions*

##### *Principal 1-L*

Principal 1-L has served as principal for six years at the lower performing school. She worked as an assistant principal at another elementary school before acquiring the principal position. She received her Educational Leadership specialist degree in Georgia.

The lower performing school is located in a northwestern city that is a suburb of Atlanta. The building is nearly forty years old and has gone through several renovations and transformations. Over ten years ago, the lower performing school and the elementary school across the street, shared the same student population. The lower performing school served as the community's third through fifth grade elementary school, as the school across the street served the kindergarten through second grade school. Since that

time, the one school split into two schools and transformed each school to serve kindergarten through fifth grade.

Principal 1-L is the principal of the lower performing school which is a Title 1 school located in Georgia. This is her sixth year as the principal of the lower performing school and her twenty-seventh year in education. She has taught special education and early childhood education in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. She currently oversees a staff of approximately fifty persons. The lower performing school has approximately a 79% free/reduced lunch rate. She finds her job to be challenging but also fulfilling. When asked her philosophy of working with at-risk students she paused thoughtfully and said: “At-risk students can and will succeed with appropriate and relevant instruction coupled with high expectations for student learning and motivation.”

At the lower performing school there are sixty third grade students with approximately thirteen of those students involved in EIP (Early Intervention Program). She spoke about the third grade students as being in a grade of transition from second grade. Principal 1-L shared that if the reading and math foundation is not solid in second grade the students will struggle when they get to third grade.

#### *Teacher 1-L*

This is Teacher 1-L’s second year teaching at the lower performing school. She is a female third grade teacher in her early thirties. She has eleven years of teaching experience. During her career, she has taught second, third and fourth grades. Her philosophy for working with at-risk students is that all children regardless of their abilities can and will learn if taught in a loving environment. She has approximately sixteen students and five are in EIP in her class. When she came to work at the lower

performing school she was unaware of how far behind some of the students are. Some of her at-risk third grade students are two grade levels behind where they should be performing. She feels that it has a lot to do with their home environments.

*Teacher 2-L*

Teacher 2-L is a female third grade teacher in her late fifties. This is her fourth year at the lower performing school and her fourteenth year teaching. She has taught grades three through five. Her philosophy for working with at-risk students is to assess their levels of learning and to gather all materials needed to promote their learning. She wants to tap into all available resources to help those students including but not limited to having someone else in the classroom assigned to her class to work one on one with each student.

Her third grade class consists of sixteen students with at least two of those who are at-risk. She spoke about how concerned she is for her students. The researcher could feel the compassion in her voice and see the sincerity on her face.

*Teacher 3-L*

Teacher 3-L is a female third grade teacher in her early twenties. This is her first year at the lower performing school and she has been teaching for almost two years. In public school she has only taught third grade but she likes it.

She says that in her class there are 15 students who are well-behaved. Three of those fifteen are in EIP (Early Intervention Program). Teacher 3-L shared that in her class, there is a combination of average to lower performing students.

*Teacher 4-L*

Teacher 4-L is a female third grade teacher in her mid-fifties. She has been teaching for nineteen years, eighteen of which have been spent at the lower performing school. Her experience is in grades three through five. Teacher 4-L's philosophy of working with at-risk students is: to have consistency, offer praise and positive reinforcement, to be upbeat and to be loving. She said that she believes that the students should be given the opportunity to work on their level (below grade level if necessary) and then rise to their current grade level. She uses repetition as a key component in her teaching methods.

*Third Grade Parent Focus Group*

The parent group consisted of four females, three of whom were third grade volunteers. There were two African-Americans and two Caucasians. Their age range was from mid-thirties to late thirties. This interview was held away from the main office in an empty classroom. They all commented on each question and seemed very willing to answer the researcher.

*Higher Performing School Participant Descriptions**Principal 2-H*

Principal 2-H has been the principal at the higher performing school for five years. She was an elementary school assistant principal for four years with the county. Her teaching experience is in grades third through ninth. Her Education Specialist degree was obtained in Georgia as well as her initial teaching certificate. She also previously obtained certification in Alabama where she taught elementary school. In her current position she oversees a staff of approximately forty-four persons. The higher performing

school is a Title 1 elementary school with a 68% free/reduced lunch rate. Five years ago the higher performing school was on the needs improvement list.

The school is located on the main street of a small northwestern Georgia town. There are local businesses located across the street. The building is approximately twenty years old with additions currently underway for a new gymnasium. Because of the construction, there is unusually heavy traffic at dismissal.

The researcher was met in the front office by the school's secretary who pleasantly greeted her. As the researcher waited for the principal to become available, the Curriculum Specialist, gave the research a tour of the building.

The researcher noted that the students in the hallway were quiet and orderly and that the students in the classroom were listening attentively to their teachers' directions. As the Curriculum Specialist and the researcher entered the main office area, the principal introduced herself to the researcher and invited her to begin the interview.

Principal 2-H is a female in her late fifties with a pleasant voice and a relaxed demeanor. Principal 2-H was very open and forthcoming with her comments and seemed at ease while discussing the interview questions.

#### *Teacher 1-H*

Teacher 1-H is a female first year teacher in her early twenties. As we began the interview she explained to the researcher that although this was her first year teaching and she felt very supported. The support came mostly from the principal in the form of suggestions, useful websites and personal guidance. She had 15 students in her third grade class. During the interview, it was obvious to the researcher that she cares deeply

for her students and wanted very much for them to be successful. Teacher 2-H described her class as well-behaved. She has three at-risk students.

*Teacher 2-H*

Teacher 2-H is the team leader in third grade this year. This is her seventeenth year teaching. Over her career she has taught elementary, middle and high school. The researcher had the opportunity to observe her with her students of whom she spoke highly of.

In her class of 15 she has no EIP (Early Intervention Program) but there is one student who uses assistive technology, although he is not included in special education.

*Teacher 3-H*

Teacher 3-H has been teaching for nine years. Most of her teaching career has been spent in third grade although she has taught first and second grades. Teacher 4-H spoke candidly about her philosophy of working with at-risk third grade students. She expressed that while working with third grade at-risk students you need patience and the ability to make accommodations for individualized learning. She came to the higher performing school as a novice teacher and has been at the higher performing school all of her career.

*Teacher 4-H*

Teacher 4-H was a male third grade teacher with twenty-five years of experience in education with experience in grades second, third, fourth and fifth. He was the most experienced teacher that the researcher interviewed and by far the most reserved. This is his tenth year at the higher performing school. His answers, although brief, were thought through very well and came from his vast experience. He gave his philosophy for

working with at-risk students in four parts: 1) start where the students are, 2) when they do assignments give them immediate feedback as much as possible, 3) celebrate the small steps as huge accomplishments and 4) set high expectations for them. The researcher was disappointed that his answers were not more detailed since he had the most experience. He seemed reluctant to answer and was not very talkative, frowning as he spoke at times. The researcher thought that this was because he was unfamiliar with her.

### *Third Grade Parent Formal Focus Group*

The parent group consisted of four parents of third grade students. They were all female, Caucasian and ranged in age from mid-thirties to mid-forties. Two of the parents worked at the higher performing school. One of the parents was a substitute teacher, one of the parents was a paraprofessional and the other two were parent volunteers. Although they seemed hesitant at the beginning of the interview they soon warmed up and all began to comment on the questions that were being asked. They spoke very highly of the teachers and the principal at the higher performing school. Overall they felt that the school personnel gave over and beyond the amount of time and effort to make the higher performing school's students successful and that all of the students including the at-risk students will have the opportunity to be anything that wanted to be.

## Section Two: Common Patterns/Themes

### *Research Question 1: What Challenges Do Elementary Principals Face in Raising Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students?*

#### *Lack of Teacher Training to Know How to Work with Some At-Risk Students*

This is a challenge for principals because when teachers are hired, they may or may not have expertise in working with at-risk students. Third grade is a particularly

difficult challenge since third grade is a gateway year for standardized testing of students in reading on the CRCT (Criteria Referenced Test). The principal has the challenge of making sure that she is utilizing every available resource to strengthen the reading in third grade. The skills that are tested on the CRCT involve comprehension, decoding, word attack skills, punctuation, and vocabulary. A first year teacher stated that she is concerned about her students passing the CRCT reading. This is a challenge for the principal to train and identify third grade teachers' weaknesses the new teachers as needed. An additional challenge is to find out which veteran teachers need more training to teach at-risk third grade students and which veteran teachers may not be comfortable with their students being prepared for the CRCT test and passing the reading portion of the CRCT.

Principal 2-H: We try to make sure that the “bubble kids” or the at-risk kids are reached in various ways whether it be through tutorial and enrichment. During that time we look at weak areas of our third grade students. Differentiation is very important for student success. If the teachers do not know how to work with “bubble kids” (at-risk third grade students) I help them. Sometimes the teachers forget what to do in the classroom. She frowned as she said this. The researcher realized that this is a real challenge for this principal to handle. I have a Curriculum Specialist who was formerly a teacher here. She is very knowledgeable about disaggregating test scores and using test data to drive instruction. I rely on her to help with the teachers with training and using the GPS (Georgia Performance Standard). My assistant principal also helps teachers when they need questions answered or if they have concerns.

Teacher 1-H: I have 17 students in my class. I have 12 children which can be called bubble kids. These kids are ones that were very close in passing the CRCT in second grade. I have 3 EIP Reading and 4 EIP Math. The principal works closely with us with the “bubble kids” if we need help in teaching them.

Teacher 2-H: We have a wide range of students. We try to work with them to the best of our abilities and time frame that we have to prepare them for the CRCT. We do the best that we can do with what we have. Teacher throwing up her hands in exasperation.

Teacher 3-H: I am in an EIP reduced classroom. I have 13 students, and probably half of them are considered at-risk. These students need one on one help because they are on a low socio-economic level. I know they can't help the families that they come from, but I have some really low students that need a lot of extra help.

Teacher 4-H: I have 3 at-risk students in my class. One of them reading is so difficult for her, as well as comprehension and spelling, I give her extra help, but I think I need more training to get her ready for the CRCT. The principal supports me with her.

Parent 1-H: I think the parents are not helping the teachers. The parents don't help with their child's work to raise their child's levels. The principal does all she can to help the teachers.

Parent 2-H: They are not paying attention to what the kids are doing. Maybe helping with homework would help their child. I think the teachers and the principals are doing a great job. I have seen the principal working with a teacher who needs help.

Parent 3-H: She nodded in agreement. The teachers and principal are working; it's the parents who won't help.

Parent 4-H: If the parents would take advantage of it, there are lots of things that the principal is doing if the parents would notice. The principal helps the teachers; I have seen her.

Principal 1-L: Our third graders are at a developing stage. What happens a lot of times is if the foundation isn't built, they struggle in third grade. Some of the third graders may experience problems in decoding skills, vocabulary skills, word identification and word recognition skills. When I say word recognition skills I am talking about just recognizing a word. Most of the times they have seen the word before and they recognize it from a previous experience. Word identification skills is that it may be a new word that they have never really seen before, heard before or experienced before and having the necessary skills and word attack skills to attack the pronunciation and appropriate comprehension may come into play. A lot of times we see that with our third graders. It is very very important at that stage when that is noted that the appropriate instruction and intervention is given at that time. This is when individualized instruction is needed. I make sure that my teachers have the training and the help that they need to work with the at-risk third grade students. I have a teacher that, when she came, wasn't sure of what to do; I have her guidance. She has been here for three years and her test scores have risen each year since I helped her on how to best help the at-risk third grade students. During this portion of the interview the researcher notes that the principal is very self assured with her comment. The researcher can hear the confidence in her voice

Teacher 1-L: The third grade students that I have need repetition. I teach math through context. They need to hear it often to remember it. They need to relate it to something else that they know. Maybe they can sing a song and that helps them to remember. If I

let them make up rhymes or some sort of personal experience that they can relate to like for example multiplication being related to real life experiences. If they go to a store and buy items, this is a good example of using money to multiply for items that they buy so that they know how to pay for it and if they get money back, how do they know they are getting the right change back. It can involve counting money back. I try to relate to their personal experience, to songs, to rhymes and repetition. Every week we repeat what we have already learned in third grade. If they don't remember it, the repeating somehow can help them remember. They know that they are going to get it again. I try to give them a lot of praise and positive comments because they already know that they are not on grade level and they know they should be able to remember things that they already had in first and second grade. I think that making them accountable, telling them that they have to know these things; we have to bring them up to that level. The principal understands this and gives us the help that we need, whether it's training of just to be listened to, her door is open and she is willing.

Teacher 2-L: I have 16 students, most of them are at-risk. To get them ready for the CRCT test, I try to tap into their strengths. Reading comprehension is hard for them to understand because of the vocabulary. At first I wasn't sure why reading was hard, but now I know it's the vocabulary. Some words they don't know or understand the meaning. They can get extra help in the extended day program; it is supported by our principal.

Teacher 3-L: I have a very different group. I have some that are very highly academic levels and some that are lower academic. What I do is that we do a lot of one-on-one. We do lots of hands-on activities where they get to use manipulatives and do things for themselves. I work in groups where I put highs with lows or mediums with lows or we

mix them together. We do pair-share reading, individual one-one-time, and just different things like that. I want to make sure that they are prepared for the CRCT. Our principal expects us to teach one-to one and individually.

Teacher 4-L: I have a very different group. That fact that I have a different group was hard for me at first, but now I think I understand what to do to help them. We talk in team meetings and with the principal about helping our students. I do a lot of one-on-one teaching. I have 15 third grade students, 3 are EIP. Sometimes I mix the highs and lows together. This helps me differentiate instruction, which we are expected to do.

Parent 1-L: I think the standards changed drastically from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Before we had standards you stuck to the objectives and didn't really challenge the kids much. When they got to the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade you expected them to have all of this knowledge that they didn't have or the experience that they didn't get. Some teachers may not have taught third grade before and need extra help from the principal as to what to do to help the students more. So 3<sup>rd</sup> grade becomes like "Wow, all this work all of a sudden." It's like they grew up between 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. We didn't train them between there and they missed something.

Parent 2-L: Right there is a big transition. I think the principal realizes this transition is helping the teachers with the students transitioning from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

Parent 3-L: If they didn't learn to read and get that skill down pat, now they are just in trouble. Reading is the part they have to pass on the CRCT isn't it? The principal is there to help the teachers get the students prepared for the CRCT test.

Parent 4-L: Parent four nodding in agreement. The researcher noticed that she did not speak but gave a lot of agreement.

*Inadequate Funding for Teaching At-Risk Third Grade Students*

Inadequate funding proved to be a challenge for principals. Students who are enrolled in Title I schools are from low income homes and sometimes need more money for instruction, supplies, support personnel, and field trips. The challenge is intensified when funds are cut and principals have to decide how to best spend the money that is provided. The researcher heard personal testimony of funding issues from principals and teachers. Inadequate funding is a major challenge for principals.

Principal 2-H: If there were more funding I would like to have more assistance available, like more teachers in each room. This I feel would help raise student achievement.

Teacher 1-H: If we could have more money, I think more technology would be good. If each child could have a computer it would be great!

Teacher 2-H: The biggest problem is the money. At the beginning of the year, I remember the principal letting us know that the budget had been cut drastically and that there were few funds available.

Teacher 3-H: The money (funds) is a big challenge. It would be really nice to have one computer for each student.

Teacher 4-H: I would like to see extra teachers hired if we had the money. It would really be beneficial.

Parent 1-H: If we could have more money to improve extended day, I think it would help.

Parent 2-H: Parent nodded.

Parent 3-H: Parent frowned in disagreement.

Parent 4-H: No comment made.

Principal 1-L: This year our budget was cut. I would like to have more exposure for my students if the money was available. Third grade students could benefit from more field trip exposure. It would increase their vocabulary. This would help in raising student achievement.

Teacher 1-L:

Teacher 2-L: I think we need more money for more educational field trips. I believe that offering a paraprofessional for all the at-risk students would help also. They could almost have a private tutor for all day long. Someone that could help them with each skill in social studies, science, reading and math would be great. We need to meet their parents' needs. Some parents may not have a car. They can't get to school. Maybe they work two jobs. If the sky was the limit somehow meeting the parents with their needs would help. We do have parent meeting that are held monthly by the principal and the coordinator of the parent resource center.

Teacher 3-L: We need funding for more help in the classrooms like a paraprofessional and more computers. My students are very visual learners and they would benefit from more technology, if we had more money for that.

Teacher 4-L: I believe that if we could pay for it, offering a paraprofessional to help with my third grade students would be good. Funds are not available I know but it would help my at-risk students who need extra help and one-on-one teaching. I feel that the principal would be in favor of it, if it was affordable.

Parent 1-L: If we had more hands in the classrooms, maybe more paraprofessionals, I think it would help. Maybe we could hire more teachers.

Parent 2-L: When I volunteer in my child's class I see that they need more help.

Parent 3-L: No comment.

Parent 4-L: Nodding in agreement with parent 2.

*Maintaining Smaller Class Size*

It has been proven by several researchers that smaller class size improves the quality of instruction. When class size is reduced to a smaller teacher to student ratio, the students get more individual attention that they need to be more successful. More individualized attention can raise test scores. The challenge for the principals is to work with the state guidelines for class size that are set by the state of Georgia.

Principal 2-H: The teachers would say smaller class size would help in third grade and having an additional teacher. Sadly enough this is not going to happen unless the state changes its mind. We average about 15-16 in regular third grade, EIP classes are smaller. I try to make do within the guidelines that we have.

Teacher 1-H: I have been teaching for nine years now and if we had smaller classes I could have more one-on-one instruction for my students, some of them really struggle.

Teacher 2-H: I have 17 students in my third grade class, some of those are EIP, and so if I had less I could do more CRCT preparation with reading with us on the CRCT.

Teacher 3-H: Frowning. Even though I have 13 students, about half of them are EIP, I could provide more differentiation of instruction if I had less students. The principal wants us to differentiate instruction, but it is hard to do. I have help from the principal, but I am still worried.

Teacher 4-H: This is my first year, so I am worried about my students passing the CRCT. I am diagnosing their reading daily so if I had fewer kids it would be easier. The principal does show her support for us though.

Parent 1-H: We have about 17 students on average in the classes in third grade. That's good.

Parent 2-H: We already have low student ratios, so teachers can work with them. But I guess less students would be better.

Parent 3-H: I think the EIP class is smaller.

Parent 4-H: Parent nodding in agreement.

Principal 1-L: I wish we could have smaller class sizes. Out of 60 third graders, 13 are EIP and at-risk. It is challenging because of the reading skills that they need to pass the CRCT in third grade. The researcher can feel that this is a struggle for the principal by her facial expression.

Teacher 1-L: I have 15 students, 3 are EIP. Having more volunteers to lessen the class size and offer one-to-one help would be good for my at-risk third graders. I think our principal would like to have more volunteers, and smaller class sizes.

Teacher 2-L: A lot of my students are at-risk. I would like to have a smaller group with more volunteers in my classroom.

Teacher 3-L: With 15 students, 3 EIP, I am trying to make sure than they are prepared for the CRCT. I wish I had more volunteers and a smaller group to help them more.

Teacher 4-L: I have 15 students, 3 are EIP. Smaller class sizes would help my EIP students. One of them goes out to resource where the ratio is 5 students to one teacher.

This is great. (She raises her hands and smiles).

Parent 1-L: Since some of the kids are lower coming from second grade, with less students in third grade the teachers could push the students harder.

Parent 2-L: No Comment

Parent 3-L: I am not sure all third graders are equipped to handle that learn to read mentality, maybe less kids in the third grade classes would help transition the from second grade to third grade.

Parent 4-L: Nodding in agreement with parent 3-L

*Lack of Time and Knowledge to Gather and Analyze At-Risk Third Grade Student Achievement Data*

Disaggregation of test scores and analyzing student data is a highly debated topic among principals today because of the requirements of NCLB (No Child Left Behind). The challenge for principals here is the time that it takes to train the teachers to analyze the data. The data is volumous and not easily discernable. Some of the teachers interviewed did not know how to analyze data. This is an additional challenge because the teachers were not always trained to effectively discern the data and use the data so that they can help the students to achieve in their specific areas of weakness. This challenge became evident in their following dialogue.

Principal 2-H: Gathering and analyzing data is a challenge because of the time it takes and because we have new students coming in all the time. I do have a Curriculum Instruction Specialist who does this. We meet weekly to discuss her findings and her test data. I utilize her to help me to gain information that I need to improve test scores and to improve instruction.

Teacher 1-H: I have 7 EIP students, so I am constantly looking for ways to help them improve. We meet as a group at team planning an analyze data, but it takes time.

Teacher 2-H: I only have one student who is slightly at-risk, I am very fortunate. I am able to use the curriculum specialist to help me analyze data when I need help. The principal asks her to help us.

Teacher 3-H: I individually test my students and help them one-on-one. I use the data to teach them. I don't like my students leaving to go to other classes it hurts their scores (frowning as he spoke).

Teacher 4-H: We have to analyze data with our SST (now called RTI) program. We have to make notes often, so I pretty much know where my kids are. The principal can help if we need her to help us.

Parent 1-H: I don't know about analyzing data but we do use the CRCT on-line practice to raise the kids scores.

Parent 2-H: I do not know how to analyze data. I usually ask her teacher when the scores come back.

Parent 3-H: This principal includes children when meeting with the parents to talk about test scores. I think it helps the child to understand better how they need to improve. It gives the child some ownership. The researcher hears in her voice tones that she thinks including students on conversations about their test scores is a good idea from the principal.

Parent 4-H: Yeah, I think it's good. They are really pushed to practice for the test in third grade.

Principal 1-L: We have a transient, low income population with very little parent support. Finding the time to analyze data is important but time consuming. I have to spend extra time to do this because it is important.

Teacher 1-L: I put my students in mixed groups like high-low. When I test them I look to see how I can help them.

Teacher 2-L: I do a lot of hands-on in my classroom and use reading tests to look at how they are doing. I have a student teacher to help me. This was planned by our principal to help my students to do better.

Teacher 3-L: As a first year teacher, I am learning a lot about test scores and everything. I can ask for help to analyze data if I need to from the principal. She is very supportive.

Teacher 4-L: The principal sends us to workshops to help us learn more about how to analyze data. I think Title 1 money is used for that. She talks to us about our needs and helps us with our weak areas.

Parent 1-L: When the test scores come back we can ask the teacher if we have questions.

Parent 2-L: I don't really know anything about that.

Parent 3-L: Nodding in agreement with both responses.

Parent 4-L: No comment.

*Research Question 2: What Strategies Do Georgia Elementary Principals Use to Raise Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students?*

*Teacher Training for Working with At-Risk Third Grade Students*

Principals believe that they must hire highly trained teachers who have experience in working with at-risk students and teachers who have experience in teaching third grade students who are taking the CRCT. The third grade students are required to pass the reading portion of the test. These schools are Title I schools which implies that the students are more at-risk than other third grade non-Title I school students. The principal has to prepare the teachers to teach at-risk students and third graders who need to qualify

in the meets expectations on the reading portion of the CRCT to pass third grade. The challenge is enormous, but principals can use Title I funds if that available for additional training and workshops for teachers. The principal can also rely on their assistant principals to help train teachers for working with at-risk third grade students and to identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses.

Principal 2-H: Because we are close in proximity to University of West Georgia, we get a lot of support from them. We've worked a lot in this county on disaggregating the data. We have been doing it probably for several years now. Before that we, as a school, had gotten a grant, the CSRD Grant, through the federal government. We had gone through the League of Professional Schools through the University of Georgia for that. They are the first group of people who started talking to us about disaggregating the data. We've been doing this since 2000. Our teachers are very good at that. We even have a person employed by University of West Georgia that is here in the building that runs our Fellows Program. This program places student teachers who are training at the university in our building each semester. The Fellows Coordinator is here to support them and the teachers that they are working with. She is an additional support person to help with training if needed.

Teacher 1-H: My principal has been very helpful to me. As a first year teacher, I needed training and she has helped me. She asked the Assistant Principal and the Curriculum Coordinator to give me the help that I need.

Teacher 2-H: The principal here offers classes if you need help with a particular problem/concern with a student. I had a concern and she sent the speech therapist to help me.

Teacher 3-H: We have daily meetings, because we have collaborative planning. The principal sends the curriculum specialist to train us with GPS (Georgia Performance Standards) concerns. The principal also comes to the meetings weekly and offers advice to us.

Teacher 4-H: We have lots of workshops, we just had one on math from RESA. We are all concerned about the CRCT Math and Reading. She hears our concerns and is there for us. This helps me feel supported because she cares and she listens.

Parent 1-H: The principal meets with the teachers during team meetings.

Parent 2-H: They share leadership and collaborate among third grade.

Parent 3-H: The principal trains them on how to help students prepare for the CRCT. In third grade it is hard for our kids (frown).

Parent 4-H: Parent nodding in agreement.

Principal 1-L: As you know third grade is a transition grade in elementary school. Our third graders are at the developing stage. What happens a lot of times if the foundation isn't built in the primary grades, by the time the students get to third grade the foundation isn't solid. Then the problems exist and the problems are noted by me. Some of the third graders may experience problems in decoding skills, vocabulary skills, word identification and word recognition skills. When I say word recognition skills I am talking about just recognizing a word. Most of the times they have seen the word before and they recognize it from a previous experience. Word identification skills is that it may be a new word that they have never really seen before, heard before or experienced before not having the necessary skills and word attack skills to attack the pronunciation and appropriate comprehension may come into play. A lot of times we see that with our

third graders. It is very, very important at that stage when that is noted that the appropriate instruction and intervention is given at that time. The teachers are trained by going to workshops, speakers come in, we do book studies and we use collaboration intensely. The teachers have a schedule to use during their planning. For example on Mondays they meet to analyze data, on Tuesdays to discuss SST results, on Wednesdays they visit another teacher to observe, on Thursdays book studies, and on Fridays they do individual lesson plans lessons.

Teacher 1-L: We meet with the principal often. She is available and talks to us about our students. We go to trainings and meetings that she sends us to often.

Teacher 2-L: The principal gets us materials that are needed to teach our classes. We can go to her for help especially if there is a problem with teaching, or if we have questions about what we are to teach.

Teacher 3-L: We meet with the principal to discuss how to bring up test scores. We attend training and meetings. Sometimes she attends with us.

Teacher 4-L: I attend training whether it is in the subject of reading or math. The Ruby Payne workshop was especially helpful for me and the workshop on multiple intelligences was also. The researcher notes that she was excited that the principal sent her to The Ruby Payne training. The researcher can tell by her facial expressions and by her voice intonation.

Parent 1-L: The teachers go to training to help them be better teachers. The principal sends them.

Parent 2-L: The principal talks to parents at PTA about how she trains the teachers.

Parent 3-L: The principal seems to try a lot of different training for teachers.

Parent 4-L: Nodded in agreement (smiling).

*Programs Used to Raise Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students*

Researchers documented many programs that can be used as strategies to increase at-risk student achievement. Principals have a key role in finding out which programs yield the greatest result. Some programs are mandated by the state (EIP, SST) decisions made the principal to implement new programs play a vital part in increasing student achievement of at-risk third grade students. The researcher obtained information from the principals about programs that they are implementing to raise student achievement. Both the teachers and the parents agreed that the principals at both schools support programs as strategies for raising student achievement. Both schools have an extended day program that allows some at-risk students to receive additional instruction in the subject areas of their weakness. Some of the teachers spoke about these programs and how the principal supports their usefulness. The principals' support of extra-curricular activities is important to the success of the activities.

Principal 2-H: I am hoping that the tutorial/enrichment part that we do in the mornings is successful. What we do in the morning is when the students come in each morning, the first thing they do after announcements is tutorial. It is a 30 minute period. At that time, teachers are supposed to be working not only with the students who are struggling but challenging those who are not struggling. This is our 2<sup>nd</sup> year for this program. This year I think it is actually working better than it did last year because it was something that the teachers had to get used to. I had to promote more the researcher can tell that this is a program that the principal is very interested in and has hopes for its success.

The other thing that has nothing to do with academics is that we are doing a grab and go breakfast this year. We chose to do that because #1, we have no gym. Because of that our car rider line is a nightmare. The car rider line used to be at the gym area which is being constructed. We have totally had to change our car riders. In so doing we need more hands on people, more adults outside. These are the teachers that we used at one time in the cafeteria in the morning. It is my support personnel who do duties in the morning; my regular education teachers do duties in the afternoon. Now I don't have to put anyone in the lunchroom. I can use them outside. For the grab and go breakfast, my lunchroom manager has worked well with us. We have been very challenged by the food services director from the county to do this because other schools doing it have been successful. What they do is they set up a cart in the building so when students come in from car riders they grab their breakfast and go to the classrooms. They eat in the classrooms. We have improved our breakfast participation to 68% which is the highest in the county. They have never heard of anyone having that high of a participation rate. So students are eating who probably didn't eat before because they were afraid to go to the cafeteria so it makes it better for their learning. It also gives the teachers an opportunity, this was a sell I had to do also, but it gives the teachers a chance to get to know their students better in a family atmosphere. I expect the teachers to use this time to get to know the students better. We also cut down discipline problems in 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grades because a lot of times when the students were coming to the cafeteria and they were getting into trouble going or coming because of lack of supervision. That has been a huge plus this year. The researcher can tell the principal 2-H is excited about the success of the program.

Teacher 1-H: We do our tutorial program. Our tutorial we do in the morning and we switch by classes. Our kids get to go to each teacher throughout the week. We do different concepts. For example if I was working on a certain multiplication skill, somebody else was teaching a division skill. They were getting it in a different manner from a different teacher. My students may not have gotten it the way I taught it but when they went to tutorial some of them would get it from a different approach from a different teacher. That maybe would make it click on all cylinders. Also it is a way to go over concepts that are difficult. It is about 30 minutes of just review. Then those students who aren't at-risk were sent to the Quest teacher (gifted teacher) and she did acceleration. Those students were not all in Quest but she took our students that needed to be accelerated. The researcher noted that this is a strategy to raise student achievement.

Teacher 2-H: I would say differentiation of instruction. The principal is big on that. It gives our students more individual help at their level.

Teacher 3-H: Learning focused. That is pretty much county-wide as well. It is pretty much state wide. It kind of goes hand-in-hand with the way the GPS works. You start at the end of your lesson and work your way back to the front and then proceed through there. I think it works pretty well with the at-risk students. That way at the beginning they know what it is they are suppose to know by the end. We use lots of graphic organizers and essential questions. The principal wants us to do that. We design the assessment at the beginning of the lesson so we know which way to guide the students and at the end we reassess or make changes if we need to go back and try to teach it a different way. It is a good program. It focuses in on those students that are at-risk.

Teacher 4-H: I would say EIP (Early Intervention Program). With EIP I have one little girl that I feel like she wouldn't have been succeeding as well if she hadn't had the one-on-one attention especially in reading and math. EIP is a program that our principal likes and she supports.

Parent 1-H: We have Compass Learning (individualized student computer program) on the computers in the classrooms. They use it and it helps.

Parent 2-H: We have a Georgia CRCT website.

Parent 3-H: They have extended day for the kids to get extra help.

Parent 4-H: The classes pair up for reading buddies. They like to read together.

Principal 1-L: When I think about programs, I think about the at-risk writing program. I have a resource person teaching that. I have frequently been in there. We have tracked our kids from day one when they entered the program. We have monitored the progress by having informal assessments to actually see if progress has been made by our students. Not only that but the strengths of our students as well as their weaknesses are monitored so that we will know where we need to change, modify or reinforcement instruction. So I think our writing program has been very, very instrumental this year. This will be especially helpful in third grade as our students prepare for the CRCT. The researcher noted that the principal is very proud of this program by the smile on her face.

Teacher 1-L: I believe that the special resource teachers that we have is a good program. Like we have a math teacher for the kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and we have another teacher who teaches 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade. They take these students out for at least an hour every day and they are in a small group. They teach all day just the lower level students.

There are two teachers that teach reading and vocabulary. I believe that this is the biggest help.

Teacher 2-L: The Tiger Cub Program is an after-school program. The students have a certain amount of time where they are to do their homework. They get assistance with whatever they didn't understand in their instruction. They get assistance with whatever skill or concept they need to finish their homework. They also get to do physical things to help their body in shape. That's implemented into it. They get extra reading and math instruction that helps them toward fluency and the different math and reading skills that they need. I have seen a lot of improvement in that area. They get to do things and learn skills like cooking, sewing, poetry and things of the arts. They get to be exposed to different visitors and experts coming in and giving talks. They get to make puppets. They get exposed to things that they normally wouldn't get exposed to. The principal really supports field trips for this program. We were doing a unit on sea animals and we went to the aquarium. We took pictures of the children. We did an educational thing with them. We talked about the sea animals that were there. The principal thought this was great. If you asked them today, they can tell you what sea animal does what, about their habitats, what category they are in, and they vertebrates or invertebrates. This impacted them because this is getting outside the normal reading and doing a lot of hands-on things. The principal really likes for the students to go on field trips this is more productive with those students who are at-risk. Every student is a different learner. The researcher notes here that the principal expects the teachers to teach to all levels in the classroom.

Teacher 3-L: The Tiger Club is helping my at-risk third grade students a lot. They get to work on areas that they are weak in. We use special reading programs that increase their skills. These programs work on fluency phases (Fry's phases), leveled books, sight word recognition, paired reading and listening centers. This is supported by the principal.

Teacher 4-L: In the afternoon we have a program called Tiger Cubs. The program takes at-risk children and you work with them in small groups. You might have 7-8 children and you might help them with their homework or things that they are low on. I think that is a really good program. I have 3 children in here who are in that program and I can their scores have come up from it. We also do DIBELS testing and reading progress monitoring, reading fluency, phonemic awareness and vocabulary which are all tested on the third grade CRCT. The principal expects us to do DIBELS.

Parent 1-L: The principal has tried lots of different programs. When teachers do DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) I think they test several times a year.

Parent 2-L: We have Text Talk which is a really good phonics program, especially for third grade. It is a reading program thing that builds vocabulary. You read the books and it has very rich vocabulary. It is supposed to be very easy and you talk to the kids about the vocabulary and it is very interesting. We have these teacher/student kits. One of the pull out teacher resource groups is suppose to be using them.

Parent 3-L: I think Read Naturally is another reading program.

Parent 4-L: The teachers work in the extended day Tiger Club program; It has helped the students and the principal monitors the program.

*Use of Effective Leadership Practices by Principals to Raise Third Grade At-Risk Students' Achievement*

The principals set the tone for leadership in their buildings. When principals use effective leadership practices the results are positive. The teachers and the parents agreed with the research that has been found on effective leadership practices. This is a strategy that when used properly works. Several teachers shared how the principal listened to them and was available to them to help with their concerns. Most teachers felt that they were supported and that the principal understood what help they needed and how to best help them. The researcher learned that when teachers feel supported by the principal they work harder to help students raise their achievement. When the teachers feel good and supported, they can help the students to feel supported and good, when the students feel good and supported and good they are more successful which raises student achievement. Some teachers stated that the principal 1-L came into the classroom and monitored the learning by observing and by asking questions to the students. Listening, showing support, modeling positive behavior, monitoring, and evaluating are all effective leadership behaviors according to researchers and are strategies that elementary principals can use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students. This is the attitude that I expect of all my staff to have, so that our students can be successful regardless of their socio-economic status. If I show the teachers that my philosophy of working with at-risk students is positive, they will regard positively toward the students as well.

Principal 2-H: I have a can do attitude and I try to model this philosophy throughout the building that all children can be successful regardless of their socio-economic status.

Teacher 1-H: As a first year teacher, I feel very good. I can get the help that I need. The principal is great, she talks to me and the students often. This teacher had a very positive tone when speaking about her principal. The researcher could hear the sincerity in her voice.

Teacher 2-H: The principal offers moral support. We have a great relationship. She knows my strengths and my weaknesses.

Teacher 3-H: She attends our daily meetings and she listens to us. She offers suggestions. She is good about that. She also will talk to our Curriculum Specialist to get her to help us.

Teacher 4-H: She is very concerned about the students. She wants us to provide differentiated instruction. I do think this will help when students have to pass the reading on the CRCT.

Parent 1-H: She is here at 7:15 am to help them get their breakfast.

Parent 2-H: She goes to the team meetings and talks to the teachers. I've seen her do that.

Parent 3-H: She encourages the students in classes.

Parent 4-H: I feel that she really cares about the staff and the students. This parent convinced the researcher that the principal really does show care and concern for her staff.

Principal 1-L: I like to be on the edge of motivation and the whole bit. I like to implement new things in order to see if they will work and help instruction with my students. This was one of the areas that I wanted to try to have additional resources in subject areas. In addition to having extra resource personnel in subject areas, I also have personnel that only work with students in the areas of science. She integrates science

across the curriculum with grades kindergarten through fifth grade. As I said before I have a teacher who works exclusively with writing with at-risk third through fifth grade students. They work on the different types of writing, the different genres, and the different stages of writing exclusively. This is in addition to getting instruction in the regular classroom. I feel that this offers extra support because writing helps reading instruction.

Teacher 1-L: I think she gives us support. She does show support for us in knowing that we have students who are struggling and need extra help.

Teacher 2-L: As a team, we have daily meetings. She attends those meetings. She listens to our concerns. She is easy to talk to and usually available.

Teacher 3-L: She has an open door to her office, so we can talk. She also comes into our classes and talks to our students asking them questions. The researcher notes here that this is an example of the principal monitoring and evaluating instruction.

Teacher 4-L: I think the support that she gives is great (smiling). The researcher could hear the happiness in her voice and see the smile on her face.

Parent 1-L: When we are volunteering in the classrooms, we see the principal out doing observations and watching what's going on in the classroom so she can meet with teachers and talk to them about the strategies they are using in their classroom and how to help the students do more.

Parent 2-L: The principal 2-L also sends the teachers out for trainings. She is trying to make sure the teachers are up to par with the standards and understand what is expected. She has also implemented these new resource writing/reading/math programs to try to help build achievement in small group pullouts. An example is small group tutoring

programs. The principal is even having the specials (art, music, PE) teachers when they have time, tutor in small groups.

Parent 3-L: The principal comes into the classroom and asks the children “What are you learning? What are you studying?” The researcher thinks that this is a great strategy because the students do not know which day the principal is coming in to visit their classroom, so the students have to be prepared to answer her at any time.

Parent 4-L: The principal celebrates small gains by rewarding the students’ achievements, even if they are small. We have rewards ceremonies every 9 weeks. She wants to reward the students. This is motivating to the teachers and the students. Parent 4-L nodding in agreement with what has been said by parent 2-L and by parent 3-L.

*Parent and Community Involvement in the Schools to Raise Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students*

Overwhelmingly the participants believed that parents should be involved in the school. The more the parents are involved in the school, the more successful their child became. The same is true for the community. If the community becomes involved in the school, greater success usually follows. The principals use the parent resource center as one strategy to involve the parents and the community in the schools. The researcher visited both parent resource centers at both schools. One principal, 1-L, posts job and health information in the parent resource center. Surveys are also mailed to determine what the parents’ needs are at the lower performing school. Both principals supported the center as a vehicle to get parents in the building and to bring the community together. Parent meetings, in addition to PTA meetings, are held by the principals at the schools at different times to accommodate parents’ busy schedules at the lower performing school.

Food and babysitting accommodations are provided at some of the meetings. One parent in one group spoke about what the principal 1-L does to reach out to the parents and the community.

Principal 2-H: We have parents who volunteer all over the building. We even have parents who help with the traffic because of the construction. We have a person who works in the parent resource center. She does a great job coordinating this end of the school, helping to keep our parents involved.

Teacher 1-H: One of the most important things about these at-risk students is that they don't have the greatest home life. We as a school try to make sure they know we care about them and their families. I have children's phone numbers in my cell phone so I can call their parents if I need to. The principal knows about this and supports me. She knows the parental involvement is important for students' success.

Teacher 2-H: I have a parent volunteer who comes several times a week to work with small groups. It's great to have her (enthusiasm)!

Teacher 3-H: I don't have any parents to come help me. The researcher saw this teacher frown during this statement and could hear the disappointment in her voice.

Teacher 4-H: I like the class when there are no pull-outs. I want to do all the instruction myself. I do not have much parental involvement.

Parent 1-H: Some of the parents are not very involved.

Parent 2-H: I think that there is not enough parent involvement. With the way the economy is, both parents work and some work two jobs. When I am in some of the rooms and looking in the agenda some of the stuff from the week before is still in there.

The students take a bath and go to the bed. The parents aren't even looking to see if they are doing anything with school, or what they are learning or anything.

Parent 3-H: The parents are not working with their kids at home.

Parent 4-H: Yeah that's what I'm saying there is not enough parent involvement. They are not paying attention to what they are doing or helping them doing anything – being involved in what they are learning.

Principal 1-L: We have a parent resource center that is not just for parents, it is for the community. It has a wealth of books, video tapes and information for parents and community to use. We have a monthly VIP (Very Important Parent) meeting. We have them at different times day/night to accommodate the parents' schedule. In the parent resource center we also offer health information and job postings. We also survey the parents to see what their needs are. We want them involved. The parents are very important to raising our student's achievement.

Teacher 1-L: I have a volunteer who comes in to help me. This is very good for the class.

Teacher 2-L: I don't have a parent volunteer to help me on a regular basis. I do have a student teacher and close contact with my parents. The principal arranged for me to have a student teacher.

Teacher 3-L: I would like more help from parents who volunteer.

Teacher 4-L: I try to keep close contact with my parents, but they don't do much volunteering.

Parent 1-L: At PTA meetings there are hardly any parents at all.

Parent 2-L: If you have a dinner, food for the parents, you can get more parents to come. Otherwise the parents don't come, not even to PTA.

Parent 3-L: Parent nodding (smiling in agreement).

Parent 4-L: We volunteer in the classroom, the four of us, but not many parents do.

The principal at the lower performing school shared about the use of DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy) and the use of Progress Monitoring for reading instruction.

These are two frequently used test data devices. Teacher 1-L shared about the testing that she uses with her students especially in reading comprehension as did teacher 2-L.

Reading seemed to be a focus for the third grade teachers. The teachers are constantly determining what level the students are on.

Higher Performing School

Principal 2-H has a definite advantage over principal 1-L because she has an additional administrative person, a Curriculum Specialist. This person's job is to disaggregate data and to meet with teachers sharing the results. She also has the Fellows Program Coordinator who is in the building full time for support of her student teachers who, in return, are able to raise third grade achievement and lower the student teacher ratio.

Research Question 2: What strategies do elementary principals in Georgia use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students?

*Teacher Training for Working with At-Risk Third Grade Students*

*Lower Performing School*

At the higher performing school, all of the teachers interviewed discussed trainings and workshops that they are required to attend during the school year. The principal stated that if she requires teachers to attend training on Saturdays or in the summer; she tries to obtain funding for them. One teacher, 4-L, spoke about how she enjoyed the Ruby Payne training and the multiple intelligences training workshops.

*Higher Performing School*

The principal did not talk with the researcher about specific trainings, but she did talk about how that math was a concern as well as the reading in third grade. She also spoke about how she utilizes her Curriculum Specialist to help train the teachers with GPS. One teacher, 4-H, spoke about recent RESA training that the third grade teachers had recently attended and how beneficial it was to them.

*Programs Used to Raise Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students**Lower Performing School*

One of the programs used at the lower performing school is a Resource Teacher program. The students go out to a specialized teacher for reading, math, and writing. This is a smaller ratio than in the regular classroom and allows for increased individualized instruction. The Tiger Cubs Program is also a beneficial program because it is an extended day that allows for at-risk students to get extra help in weak areas. EIP is another program that identifies at-risk third grade students and allows for them to get additional help.

*Higher Performing School*

The Grab and Go Breakfast program is one that helped cut down on student discipline in the cafeteria in the mornings. It also allows for the teacher and the students to socialize before the school day begins. Principal 2-H also spoke about the morning tutorial program from 8:00 to 8:30 am daily that gives the students enrichment and tutoring as needed. Teacher 3-H spoke about how this program allowed a student who maybe did not learn a concept the first time to learn it in a different way from a different teacher.

### Section Three: Observations/Artifacts

#### *Research Question 1: What Challenges Do Elementary Principals Face in Raising Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students?*

The following is an analysis of observations and artifacts supported by the themes and patterns relating to research question one: What challenges do elementary principals face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students? Four of the common themes emerged from the topic of challenges were: (1) lack of teacher training to know how to work with some at-risk students, (2) state funding not adequate for raising achievement of at-risk third grade students, (3) maintaining smaller class size, and (4) gathering and analyzing student data.

#### *Lack of Teacher Training to Know How to Work with Some At-Risk Third Grade Students*

The researcher observed the principal 1-L in her role during the day. She met with teachers, visited classes including the third grade class that the researcher was observing and had several parent conferences including a telephone conference with an unhappy parent.

The researcher visited some classroom at the lower performing school to observe third grade teachers in their classrooms during instruction. The researcher visited Teacher 1-L's classroom.

Teacher 1-L clearly has high expectations for her students as she listened to them reading creative writing stories. As the students read, she stopped and corrected them giving constructive criticism. The researcher viewed artifacts of learning in the form of writing folders. The students' work was made readily available by the teacher. It was

clear from the observation that the teacher needed more training in working with at-risk students. At the higher performing school the researcher observed a third grade teacher 2-H giving a CRCT practice test to the students. The students were well behaved but it seemed like the teacher needed help with the students. The researcher looked at the students' responses in the practice workbooks. Some of the responses were correct and some were incorrect. The principal at the higher performing school was observed speaking with teachers about the instruction.

#### *Inadequate Funding for Raising At-Risk Student Achievement*

The researcher observed at the lower performing school, the lower performing school, classrooms that were full of old dirty furniture and tables that were not level. In one classroom in particular the researcher had to clean the chair before sitting down. Some classrooms had no curtains or colorful posters that make a classroom look more attractive. The researcher related an earlier comment by principal 1-L about hiring good custodial help. Maybe because of lack of funding problems arose. At the higher performing school, the higher performing school, the learning environment was not filled with new furniture but the furniture in the classroom was in better condition and the classrooms were more attractive than at the lower performing school. The higher performing school also seemed to have more availability of student materials.

#### *Maintaining Smaller Class Size*

The researcher visited teacher 2-H's classroom. Although the students were taking a practice CRCT, there was a parent volunteer in the back of the classroom helping a small group of students. The teacher introduced the researcher to the volunteer and she smiled proudly. The researcher observed the students' practice booklet and some of

answers that were wrote. The students were working quietly and diligently considering it was almost winter break.

At the lower performing school, the researcher observed teacher 4-L working with the whole class as they were spread out on the floor doing math with manipulatives. While the researcher was observing the class as a few students went out of the classroom to work on resource skills with another teacher. The researcher did not view the students' graded math work but rather listened to their responses as the teacher and students interacted. This was a first year teacher and her attitude towards her students was happy and upbeat even though she was very busy trying to give individual student help.

*Lack of Time and Knowledge of Gathering and Analyzing Student Data*

The researcher listened as principal 2-H spoke with her Curriculum Specialist about what she was doing. The Curriculum Specialist was entering newly obtained data from students in the computer. The researcher asked her about third grade in particular. She shared how the teachers met weekly with her as a team to discuss any concerns including the upcoming CRCT. The principal 1-L at the lower performing school met with the assistant principal to discuss placement of a third grade student and the results of his psychological evaluation. The researcher was asked to leave the room during this private meeting.

The third grade teachers at the lower performing school do Progress Monitoring and DIBELS testing on a regular basis to keep abreast of progress with their students' reading abilities and skills. Those scores are shared during team meetings with the principal.

*Research Question 2: What Strategies Do Elementary Principals in Georgia Use to Raise Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students?*

The following is an analysis of observations and artifacts supported by the themes and patterns relating to research question two: What strategies do principals use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students? Four of the common themes and patterns that emerged from the topic of strategies were: (1) teaching training for working with at-risk third grade students, (2) programs used to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students, (3) use of effective leadership practices by the principal to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students, and (4) parent and community involvement in the schools to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students.

*Teacher Training for Working with At-Risk Third Grade Students*

The researcher toured Site 1. In the parent resource center were copies of books and handbooks used for teacher training. The principal, 1-L, shared that the books used in book studies are chosen by teachers and by the administrators. Teachers also attend trainings and workshops. There was a schedule near her desk of upcoming classroom visitations. They are called walkthroughs. At the higher performing school the researcher spoke with the principal about her use of the Curriculum Specialist and her use of University of West Georgia to help her with teacher training. The researcher observed the Curriculum Specialist disaggregating test scores and test data of the students. The principal utilizes her to help train teacher with the curriculum and the use of test scores. The researcher also observed the Fellows Coordinator from University of West Georgia that is there to help train its student teachers in the building. This is a valuable resource

for the principal as extra help. The researcher met a student teacher from the university. She seemed knowledgeable about teaching and interested in the students.

*Programs Used to Raise Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students*

The researcher observed several teachers using different programs intended to raise student achievement. At the lower performing school, in one classroom, teacher 4-L had the students using a computer program that teaches map and globe skills. The researcher moved closer but not too close to distract the learning. The students were engaged in reading the prompts from the computer screen. The principal at the lower performing school supported the extended day program in addition to the regular after-school program. She also had resource teachers that teach in small groups in the areas of reading, math and social studies/science. These subjects are divided into k-2 and 3-5 grade levels.

In a classroom at the higher performing school the teacher, 3-H, had assigned independent practice in workbooks. The researcher was amazed at how well behaved the students were. One student was using compass on the computer. Technology used in the classrooms was evident at both sites as well as learning centers. The researcher observed technology use at both schools by the students.

*Use of Effective Leadership Practices by the Principal to Raise Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students*

At the lower performing school, the researcher spent time talking with the principal about how she evaluates teachers. The researcher also observed the principal and how she responded to her staff. There seemed to be a mutual respect from the principal and the staff that the researcher observed.

At the higher performing school, the researcher spent time in the principal's office observing. Principal 2-H was laughing, smiling, and in a joyous mood to all who entered her office during that time. Even as she disciplined two students she was very pleasant and positive with both of them. While the researcher was there, an unhappy parent requested to speak to her. She asked the researcher to leave and she cheerfully invited him into her office to have a seat. After a short time, the door opened and the parent came out. The look on his face was neither happiness nor anger. She immediately called her assistant principal in and they began to discuss the concerns of the parent and worked to solve the problem.

At the lower performing school, by comparison, the principal, 1-L, began to complain to the researcher at the beginning of the interview about the difficulty of personnel and parental matters. She also began to complain and to frown about the custodial staff and how hiring good custodial help was hard to find. The researcher wondered if this negative attitude was displayed to the staff.

*Parent and Community Involvement in the Schools to Raise Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students*

There was a huge difference in this theme between the two sites. At the lower performing school the teachers and parents said there are very few parent volunteers. The researcher did not observe many parent volunteers in the classroom on the day that she visited. Parental participation is low, even when they have VIP (Very Important Parent) meetings according to the principal. One parent stated that if you feed them, you have more parents to come into the building. The researcher happened to be in the building the day there was a parent meeting planned. As the researcher entered the media center, there

was a handful of parents, maybe 7-10, talking and eating food. The researcher did not want to disturb the meeting so she left and continued observing throughout the building. By contrast, at the higher performing school, there were parents in the building in the media center and in several classrooms. There were even parents in the teachers' lounge preparing holiday food for the staff. When the researcher talked to the parent group at the higher performing school, the tone was much more positive and complimentary towards the principal. These parents seemed to represent the sentiments of the community surrounding the higher performing school of how well liked and respected Principal 2-H is in the school.

### Summary

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgia Southern University (see Appendix C) gave clearance for the research then the researcher began scheduling interviews with two Georgia elementary principals, eight third grade teachers, and two third grade parent formal focus groups. The researcher gathered their lived experiences with their leadership behaviors in a Title 1 school and explored which leadership behaviors the participants have in common. The demographic profile for the study represented a large range of diversity, experience, and educational background. The interviews were scheduled with the participants at their respective schools and at a time that best suited them. The in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted and the participants were asked six to nine interview questions related to the study. The interviews, school observations, and observation of some school artifacts if applicable took approximately an hour to an hour and a half to complete. The research design for the study was qualitative in nature.

The researcher's findings in the described study included the following common themes and patterns for research question 1 were: (1) lack of teacher training to know how to work with at-risk third grade students, (2) inadequate funding for teaching at-risk third grade students, (3) maintaining smaller class size, and (4) lack of time and knowledge of gathering and analyzing at-risk third grade student achievement data.

The researcher's findings in the described study included the following common themes and patterns for research question 2 were: (1) teacher training for working with at-risk third grade students, (2) programs used to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students, (3) using effective leadership behaviors by principals to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students, and (4) parent and community involvement in the schools to raise the community involvement in the schools to raise the achievement of at-risk third grade students.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### Introduction

This chapter is a summary of the research study. It includes the analysis and discussion of the research findings, conclusions and the implications based on the findings, and the recommendations based on the analysis of the data gathered during the study.

#### Summary

The researcher's purpose of this study was to explore the challenges that two Georgia elementary principals face in raising achievement of at-risk students and to determine strategies that Georgia elementary principals can use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students. The research questions were:

- (1) What challenges do elementary principals face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students?
- (2) What strategies do Georgia elementary principals use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students?

The qualitative study was completed through in-depth interview questions that were conducted with two elementary principals, eight third grade teachers and eight parents of third grade students. The teacher and principal interviews were individual. The parent interviews were a focus group. The schools where the interviews were conducted were two Title 1 elementary schools with similar demographics both located in northwestern Georgia.

Along with each principal interview, the researcher was given a tour of the school. The researcher made observations. The principal participants shared the school artifacts that they thought would fit the study. Each interview consisted of six to nine questions. The researcher scheduled the interviews with the principals, teachers and the parents at their respective schools.

The interviews were audio taped and transcribed by the researcher. In order to protect the identity of the participants pseudonyms were used in place of the participants real names.

### Analysis and Discussion of Research Findings

Based on the data analysis completed by the researcher, four common theses emerged from the interview data stated by the principals, teachers and parent participants. Four of the common themes that were obtained from the data analysis reflected on the topics of challenges were the following: (1) lack of teacher training to know how to work with at-risk third grade students, (2) inadequate funding allocated for teaching some at-risk third grade students, (3) maintaining smaller class size and (4) lack of time and knowledge of gathering and analyzing third grade at-risk student achievement data.

Upon further data analysis, the researcher discovered four common themes on the topic of strategies use by elementary principals to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students. The four common themes used as strategies were: (1) programs used to raise at-risk third grade student achievement, (2) teacher training for working with at-risk third grade students, (3) use of effective leadership practices by principals and (4) parent and community involvement in the schools.

The research findings were consistent with the findings of several researchers with their studies on raising student achievement. Although, the topic of inadequate

funding for teaching some at-risk third grade students was rarely raised in the literature. The first sub-section addresses the first research question: What challenges do elementary principals face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students? The second sub-section addresses the second research question: What strategies do Georgia elementary principals use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students? The third section compares the lower performing school with the higher performing school by common themes and patterns. The comparisons are also divided by research question.

### Research Question 1

#### *What Challenges Do Elementary Principals in Georgia Face in Raising Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students?*

This sub section addresses the first research question on the topic of challenges that Georgia elementary principals face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students. The researcher found four common themes based on the data collection and data analysis of this study: (1) lack of teacher training on how to work with at-risk third grade students, (2) inadequate funding for teaching at-risk third grade students, (3) maintaining smaller class sizes and (4) lack of knowledge and time of gathering and analyzing third grade at-risk student achievement data.

#### *Lack of Teacher Training To Work with At-Risk Third Grade Students*

The teaching of at-risk elementary students is a challenge for elementary principals whose goal is to raise student achievement. Knivsburg, Iverson, Noland & Reichett (2007). conducted a study that involved elementary students who were enrolled in a high risk program for children. These students were found to have social problems,

attention problems and problems with anxiety. The researchers found that the attention problems were most frequently correlated to cognitive, linguistic and motor functioning.

Students who are at-risk require additional time on academic tasks, additional training for effective use of teaching strategies to best help them and a principal that is abreast of current trends and research that will improve their academic achievement.

Students in lower income communities are at-risk. The schools located in these neighborhoods are not always equal to schools in higher-income communities. Kozol (2000) found that some schools that are located in low-income areas have unequal neighborhood facilities such as public libraries.

All of the third grade teachers in the study and the two principals described their student populations as at-risk. One teacher, 2-H, used the term “bubble kids” when describing the third grade students at her school who are at-risk. The “bubble kids” are students whose test scores fall within five points of passing the state’s standardized tests. All of the teachers spoke about the challenges of teaching the students who are below grade level as a difficult task to accomplish because of the number of students who are in each class and in the school that are at-risk and because of the amount of time it takes to effectively reach each student. The teachers and the principals found it difficult to work with some of the at-risk third grade students because of a lack of training. This was a challenge for the principals. Teacher 1-L expressed that several of her students were performing two grade levels below third grade. The principal and the teachers felt that they did not have the training and this became a challenge for the principal at the schools.

*Inadequate Funding for Raising Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students*

Based on local, state and federal funding, having adequate monies allocated in the budget is a challenge to raising at-risk third grade student achievement for Georgia elementary principals. Inadequate funding is a challenge for principals for several reasons, such as desrepair of building facilities which can result in lower student achievement (Chancey & Lewis, 2007). Inadequate funding also affects the number of staff principals can hire and the amount of money spent on materials for students, which can also result in lower student achievement. Because of No Child Left Behind, President Bush's education reform, all principals are required to be more accountable with raising student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The federal law requires that states set higher academic standards and implement in-depth testing programs.

The two Georgia elementary schools visited in the study are both Title 1 schools and receive additional monies because of the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The funding is not enough. Teacher 2-L spoke about how much more could be done with more funds for raising student achievement. Principals 1-L and 1-H, as principals of Title 1 Georgia elementary schools, both spoke about the funding allocation being more than non-Title 1 schools, but they could use more funding to "fix the problem". Both principals 1-L and 2-H spoke about budget cuts from the state that have somewhat hindered the growth of at-risk students academically. The researcher believes that the budge cuts are not without reason but understands from the principal interview participants' point of view that it is a challenge to raise third grade student achievement and continue to make AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) while yearly funds are cut. Most third grade teachers and both principals when asked about making needed

changed described how budgeting for more paraprofessionals in the elementary grades and how providing more manipulatives in each classroom would raise achievement.

#### *Maintaining Smaller Class Sizes*

Based on the researcher's findings most identify maintaining smaller class size as a challenge to raising student achievement. Researchers Gilman and Kiger (2003) studied a program titled Project Prime Time. At the time in 2003, Indiana was the only state that had such a program. Three hundred schools participated in grades kindergarten through grade three. The results were varied. After the first year the students made gains in the area of attitude towards school, self-esteem and academic achievement (Gilman, et.al. 2003). However, the second year, the gains that were reported earlier disappeared.

In Tennessee, another study, Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio) received national attention (Gilman, et.al. 2003). This project was for a shorter period of time and with fewer schools. The results yielded four findings: (1) students in smaller classrooms performed significantly better on all sets of achievement tests, (2) students benefited regardless of school location or student gender, (3) some of the differences were greater for at-risk students and (4) there were no differences between smaller and larger classes in students' motivation. (Gilman, et.al 2003).

One teacher, 4-H, explained that smaller class size allows him to give "one on one" attention to his students. Teachers 3-H, 2-H and 3-L all expressed this idea in their interviews. Principal 2-H stated that she knew that all of the teachers were in favor of reducing class size. Principal 1-L's number one change that she would make would be reducing class size.

*Lack of Time and Knowledge of Gathering and Analyzing At-Risk Student**Achievement Data*

In this age of stringent accountability for raising student achievement, gathering and analyzing achievement data is essential. Based on the interviews, both of the principals interviewed gather and analyze student data to drive instruction and to guide instruction. In her interview Principal 2-H stated that she meets weekly with each grade level to discuss what teachers are doing in the classrooms to disaggregate data. She further stated that it is difficult to manage data and analyze it because of the number of “bubble kids. According to Marazano, Waters and McNulty (2005), knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment and monitoring/evaluation rank high on their list of responsibilities of the school leader. Principals must be students of what best practices work in their schools in order to provide guidance to teachers on day-to-day tasks of gathering and analyzing data. Further, Fullan (2001) relates the importance of this responsibility of the principal in making sure that third grade teachers are using best practices.

Principal 1-L said in her interview that she is abreast of what teachers are doing by making frequent informal walk through observations of her teachers. During these visits she asks the students about what they are learning. After she visits the classrooms, she gives feedback to her teachers. Marazano, et.al (2005) explained that monitoring/evaluating refers to the extent to which the principal monitors the effectiveness of current school practices and programs in terms of their impact on raising student achievement. Jane admitted that gathering data is a challenge. But by being

continuously aware of the impact of the school's test score on student achievement, she can raise student achievement.

## Research Question 2

### *What Strategies Do Elementary Principals in Georgia Use to Raise Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students?*

This sub-section addresses the second research question on the topic of strategies that Georgia elementary principals use to raise at-risk third grade student achievement. The researcher discovered four common themes based on the data analysis of this study: (1) programs used to raise at-risk third grade student achievement, (2) effective teacher training with at-risk third grade students, (3) using effective leadership behaviors and (4) parent/community involvement to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students.

#### *Programs Used To Raise At-Risk Third Grade Student Achievement*

All of the interview respondents discussed programs that are used at their schools to raise at-risk third grade student achievements. Both schools used EIP, Learning Focused and RTI (formerly the Student Support Team). The principals took the lead in making sure that the teachers were using these programs. Teacher 3-L spoke about success of the EIP program and how she can see gains with her students' achievement. Researchers found a variety of programs that were successful at raising elementary student achievement. One research study revealed a plan that provided supplemental reading instruction for primary students. Thompson and Davis (2002) gave the Woodcock Learning Survey in addition to the required reading program (Thompson, et.al, 2002). The students made significant gains while using this program. In Lane and

Menzies' study (2002) teachers were trained through a District Literacy Plan to structure reading literacy in a manner. This program had a high success rate.

Principal 2-H spoke about differentiating instruction. She makes sure that students are taught on their individual learning levels. She said that the teachers are expected to differentiate instruction for their students. Teacher 4-H spoke more specifically about how important on-to-one instruction is in raising student achievement. He further stated that the principal expected the teachers to individualize instruction as much as possible. Teacher 2-L also talked about being able to customize the instruction for her students in their individual levels. She also implied that the principal expected her to individualize the instruction. Another program discovered by Munoz (2001) in a mid-western school system targeted at-risk males. These students were economically disadvantaged and referred to be involved in the program by their principals. Each student was provided with an Individual Success Plan (Munoz, 2001). This program was beneficial to the students as well.

Principals 1-L and 2-H both spoke about their after school programs that are called extended day. The programs are funded through Title 2 funds and allow them to focus on ways to help raise achievement of their school's at-risk population. They both felt that the programs were excellent strategies to raise at-risk third grade student achievement. Principal 2-H stated that she would like to include more students in the extended day program, but at this time because of transportation problems that it was not possible.

Teachers 1-H and 3-H talked about the morning tutorial program that is in the second year at Site 2. During this time, students are given additional instruction for thirty

minutes each morning. The students are benefiting from this program. Principal 2-H also excitedly told the researcher about the “Grab and Go” breakfast program. Instead of the students sitting down in the cafeteria at breakfast, they get their breakfast to go and they eat in their classrooms. She said that this program is in the first year. The benefits are that there are less behavior problems during breakfast and that the students and teachers have time before school to talk and get to know each other in a less formal setting. The researcher thought that this program sounded promising as strategy for raising student achievement. The program is so successful because of the support from the principal.

#### *Effective Teacher Training*

Researchers Lick & Murphy (2005) wrote a book outlining how to raise student achievement by aligning the whole faculty into study groups that were correlated with state standards. Through this practice they established collaboration and commitment as a whole staff. They also established a network of support with The National Whole Faculty Study Group Center. Positive change occurred using this principal driven school-wide process. This ideal of school-wide plan is used by principal 2-H with the morning tutorial program at Site 2.

The idea of training teachers how to more effectively work with at-risk third grade teachers was also shared by principal 1-L. She used her Title I funds to send teachers to instructional workshops on reading and math to strengthen their skills. She also develops her teachers by conducting book studies. The teachers are required by the principal to read a book (selected by the teacher teams and by the administration) that outlines improving student achievement. At Site 1 they studied the book *Best Practices*.

Teacher1-L shared that she found the book studies interesting and admittedly, she may not have read the book if it was not required by the administration.

The idea of developing people is mentioned by at least three researchers, Collins (2007), Marazano (2005) and Whitaker (2003). In Whitaker's research he states that great principals realize that it is people (staff) that make the school effective, not the programs (Whitaker, 2003). Individual teacher training and development is essential to teacher development (Whitaker, 2003). Principal 2-H mentioned in her interview that a strategy to raising student achievement is getting the right people in the right grades. This concept meshes with Collins' (2007) ideas of developing and hiring the right people. Collins insists that having the right people (teachers) to do the job and developing them is as important as the programs at the school (Collins, 2007). Marazano, et.al, (2005) believes that teachers must be trained in instructional strategies, classroom management and classroom curriculum design if a school is to work successfully to raise student achievement. He further states that principals need to be involved directly in the design and the implementation of curriculum, instruction and assessment activities at the classroom level (Marazano, et.a., 2005). Principal 1-L realizes this and shared that effective teacher training is a piece of the puzzle to raise student achievement. At both schools, teachers are sent to workshops and involved in on-site training to prepare them for working with at-risk third grade students. These workshops and teacher training sessions are required by both principals.

*Using Effective Leadership Behaviors*

Numerous studies have been conducted on using effective leadership behaviors. Some researchers that written on the topic are Marazano (2005), Cotton (2003), Whitaker (2003), Fullan (2001) and Covey (1989).

Three teachers interviewed at Site 1 and the formal parent focus groups all shared their thoughts on the principal. They said that principal 1-L is a caring, communicative, supportive leader. Of the twenty-one responsibilities that Marazano (2005) established, principal 1-L models building relationships with her staff by demonstrating an awareness of personal aspects of teachers' lives. The teachers and the third grade parent group stated that she offers support to them and is available and visible as a principal. Teachers 2-L and 1-L were especially complimentary of principal 1-L as leader. They feel that she supports them and that she listens to them. Cotton's studies on twenty-five leadership behaviors correlate with Marazano's twenty-one leadership behaviors. Both researchers listed communication as a component to effective leadership behaviors. The researcher was impressed with the responses from the teachers and the parents at Site 2 about their leader, principal 2-H. Both groups of teachers and parents told how principal 2-H established strong lines of communication among students, parents and the teachers. Teacher 1-H especially described how supported and comfortable she felt as a first year teacher because of principal 2-H's attitude towards her as a new teacher. Both Cotton (2003) and Whitaker (2003) agreed that principals should set high expectations for student achievement. The teachers at Site 2 implied that the standards of expectations by the principal were high. The researcher noted that the collaborative teams meetings at Site 1 had specific weekly agendas for expected tasks to be completed daily. The only

day for teachers to individually plan is on Fridays. This information was told to the researcher by principal 1-L. She sets high expectation for her staff. Michael Fullan (2001) identified five characteristics of an effective leader. One of these characteristics, connecting new knowledge with existing knowledge, is exemplified by both of the principals interviewed. Even though the two schools were different in many ways, principals 1-L and 2-H had detailed knowledge of what direction their respective schools were headed in and specific strategies for raising at-risk third grade student achievement.

Covey (1989) wrote about highly effective people and his ideas about seven attributes that highly effective people share. The researcher relates one of the seven directives to the two principals in the study. Covey states “seek first to understand then to be understood”. This idea of modeling listening first, to teacher’s concerns and problems was a focus for both principals and was reflected through the same teacher and some of the parent interviews by their comments about their principals. Most of the teachers felt that the principals listened to their concerns as they had problems.

#### *Parent/Community Involvement in the Schools*

Involving parents and the community in the school’s improvement plan for increased academic achievement is essential. As stated by the formal parent focus group at Site 2, many parents are working and not involved in the day to day activities of the school. At-risk students populated schools need more parental and community support than other schools to help them to become more successful.

In a study released by Met Life & Foundation (2006), principals shared strategies on how to include parents and the community in their schools. Inviting parents and

business and community leaders into the schools to share their experiences and their time was helpful to increasing student achievement.

Title 1 schools have a parent involvement component that is mandatory because of the federal funding received by the schools. Both schools have a parent resource center and staff members whose job specifically is to coordinate activities for parents.

Principal 1-L said that their parent resource center is full of resources for the parents and for the community. Parent meetings are held at various times of the day on a monthly basis to accommodate parents' busy schedules. The parent group at her school is called V.I.P. – Very Important Parents.

Researchers Dandridge, Edwards & Pleasants (200) conducted a qualitative case study of two principals' experiences at the same school. The first principal was unsuccessfully in raising student achievement. He did work with the teachers, parents and the community. But he eventually gave up and transferred from the inner-city school. The second principal had a different approach. He viewed the school as a small part of the larger neighborhood community. He involved parents by inviting them into the school to tell "parent stories". He also charged the community to make a personal investment into the community via the school. The second principal was highly successful because of his approach and because of his attitude for success. The researcher felt that the higher performing school had more of a sense of community as a whole than the lower performing school. This was evident by the responses from the parents in the school.

In another study, Nagle, Hernandez, Embler, McLaughlin & Dah (2006) a rural school was studied for its high rate of success. After an analysis was completed the

reasons for the school's success were: (1) stability in the community, (2) a willingness for the school and community to work collaboratively, (3) close ties between the school and the community and (4) community support for at-risk students using creative resources.

The higher performing school was in a more established neighborhood community that had a solid link to the school. In comparison, the lower performing school's neighborhood was more transient as was the student population. The teaching staff was also less established at the lower performing school. The higher performing school had more teachers that had spent their teaching career at the school than did Site 1.

#### School Site Comparisons in Relation to the Common Themes and Patterns

*Research Question 1: What Challenges Do Elementary Principals Face in Raising Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students?*

##### *Lack of Teacher Training To Work with At-Risk Third Grade Students*

###### *Lower Performing School*

The Principal 1-L use the lack of learning that happened in second grade as a downfall to student achievement in third grade. She said that if there is not a firm foundation in second grade, then in the third grade students are still struggling and may fail. She is not looking at what progress can be made once they get to third grade, but rather explaining why they are failing. Teacher 1-L, as a first year teacher, is very concerned about her students not passing on the CRCT.

###### *Higher Performing School*

By contrast, principal 1-H had a different approach. She was very concerned about having teachers to understand how to teach at-risk third grade students. She analyzes the weaknesses and the strengths of the students to know how to best help "bubble" each

student. These are the students that are within five points of passing or failing on the CRCT in third grade. The teachers have been trained to look for bubble kids and given training on how to best help them. This principal also has a Curriculum Specialist in addition to an assistant principal to help her to train teachers and to identify problem areas with students. This is especially helpful in third grade.

#### *Maintaining Smaller Class Sizes*

##### *Lower Performing School*

The Principal at the lower performing school would like to reduce class size because she knows from experience that it works, but that is not her focus. Getting the students out of their regular classroom to the special resource teacher for writing, reading, and math is her focus. This solution lowers class size temporarily.

##### *Higher Performing School*

Principal 2-H stated that she knows that teachers want smaller class sizes and a paraprofessional in the third grade classes. The principal realizes that is not an option as long as the state has its current budget. Teacher 4-H mentioned that smaller class sizes gives him more time to work with his students one to one.

#### *Inadequate Funding for Teaching At-Risk Third Grade Students*

##### *Lower Performing School*

Principal 1-L said in her interview that funds had been cut in the county and in the state and that teachers would have to adjust. Although this is true, the teachers seem to have most of what they need. They had supplies, and money to attend training workshops.

*Higher Performing School*

Principal 2-H told her staff in August that the budget had been cut and that funds were limited. But because of the school's close proximity to and relationship with University of West Georgia, they may have an advantage of getting additional help for whatever is needed.

*Lack of Time and Knowledge of Gathering and Analyzing Student Achievement**Data**Lower Performing School*

The principal at the lower performing school shared about the use of DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills) and the use of Progress Monitoring for reading instruction. These are two frequently used test data devices. Teacher 1-L shared about the testing that she uses with her students especially in reading comprehension as did teacher 2-L. reading seemed to be a focus for third grade teachers. The teachers are constantly determining what level the students are on.

*Higher Performing School*

Principal 2-H has a definite advantage over principal 1-L because she has an additional administrative person, a Curriculum Specialist. This person's job is to disaggregate data and to meet with teachers sharing the results. She also has the Fellows Program Coordinator who is in the building full time for support of her student teachers who, in return, are able to raise third grade achievement and lower the student teacher ratio.

Research Question 2: What strategies do elementary principals in Georgia use to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students?

*Teacher Training for Working with At-Risk Third Grade Students**Lower Performing School*

At the lower performing school, all of the teachers interviewed discussed trainings and workshops that they are required to attend during the school year. The principal stated that she requires teachers to attend trainings on Saturdays or in their summer; she tries to obtain funding for them. One teacher, 4-L, spoke about how she enjoyed the Ruby Payne training and the multiple intelligences training workshops.

*Higher Performing School*

The principal did not talk with the researcher about specific trainings, but she did talk about how the math was a concern as well as reading in third grade. She also spoke about how she utilizes her Curriculum Specialist to help train the teachers with GPS. One teacher, 4-H, spoke about recent RESA training that the third grade teachers had recently attended and how beneficial it was to them.

*Programs Used to Raise Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students**Lower Performing School*

One of the programs used at the lower performing school is a Resource Teacher program. The students go out to a specialized teacher for reading, math, and writing. This is a smaller ratio than in the regular classroom and allows for increased individualized instruction. The Tiger Cubs Program is also a beneficial program because it is an extended day that allows for at-risk students to get extra help in weak areas. EIP is another program that identifies at-risk third grade students and allows for them to get additional help.

*Higher Performing School*

The Grab and Go Breakfast Program is one that helped cut down on student discipline in the cafeteria in the mornings. It also allows for the teacher and the student to socialize before the school begins. Principal 2-H also spoke about the morning tutorial program from 8:00 to 8:30 am daily that gives the student enrichment and tutorial as needed. Teacher 3-H spoke about how this program allowed a student who maybe did not learn a concept the first time to learn it in a different way from a different teacher.

*Use of Effective Leadership Practices by Principals to Raise Achievement of At-Risk Third Grade Students*

*Lower Performing School*

Principal 1-L spoke about how she monitors closely what goes on in the classrooms. She does this by visiting classrooms on a regular basis and by asking the students questions. All of her teachers spoke about how her door is always open and that they can talk to her. She seems to have a supportive attitude towards the teachers.

*Higher Performing School*

Principal 2-H spoke about getting the right teacher for the job and about making sure they are abreast of the most current trends and practices to raise at-risk achievement of third graders. She models the positive “can do” attitude that she wants exhibited by the teachers in the school. This is evident by the comments made by the teachers, but more so by the parents. One of the major differences in the lower and higher performing schools was the enthusiasm and positive climate at the higher performing school.

*Parent and community involvement to raise achievement of at-risk third grade students*

*Lower Performing School*

This school has a well-stocked parent resource center. There were books, tapes, a VCR, a computer, and many brochures on topics that would be of interest to parents. The researcher noted that the location of the parent resource center was not as accessible as at the higher performing school. It was tucked away behind a hallway near the principal's office at the lower performing school. Parents were not as involved at the lower performing school. The neighborhood seemed more transient and not as well established as the higher performing school.

*Higher Performing School*

The parent resource center was on the main hallway and beautifully decorated. The person who ran the center was friendly and upbeat. It looked like place that was welcoming to visit as a parent. The difference in parent participation was obvious in the volunteer programs at the two schools. The lower performing school had little participation. The higher performing school had more participation and Fellows Program supported by the community and sponsored by The University of West Georgia.

*Implications*

The implications for this research study are multi-faceted. They are educational research, educational policy and educational practice. With the implication for educational research, the researcher's finding of the eight common themes and patterns will be included in with the research studies on the challenges that Georgia elementary principals face in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students. The inclusion of

this study to educational research will help to raise achievement in elementary schools of at-risk students.

With the onset of No Child Left Behind, all schools must meet its mandates by 2014. The mandate requires that all students be on grade level by 2014. The implications for educational policy includes allocating funding for leadership preparation, for further professional development and the use of research for all administrators – those who are veteran principals and those who are perspective principals. It is the researcher's hope that through the use of this study aspiring and veteran principals will broaden their knowledge so that they are better prepared to face the on-going challenges of raising at-risk third grade student achievement.

The implication for practice is that Georgia elementary principals need to realize that they do indeed make a difference in raising student achievement. Various researchers have found in their studies that principals do have an impact on student learning and student achievement, especially with at-risk students. Third grade is a gateway year to students taking the CRCT test. Their test results in reading are contingent upon their passing third grade. Armed with the knowledge of the challenges that two elementary principals faced in raising achievement of at-risk third grade students, other elementary principals can use this researcher to better prepare their third grade students for greater success. The research acknowledges that students in first grade through fifth grade may also be at-risk of failure in the “meets” category on the CRCT. The researcher suggests that the strategies used by these two elementary principals in Georgia be used by other elementary schools' principals in first through fifth grade to help raise at elementary students' achievement. If principals want a high performing elementary

school, they should implement the strategies found to be effective in this study. The researcher's finding in this study will make a positive contribution to the current literature on the relationship between principals and student achievement.

### Recommendations

The results of this study suggest the following: (1) the researcher's visiting and observation was an excellent opportunity to learn more about the challenges of educational leadership and about two elementary Title 1 principals in their school settings. The researcher was able to interview, to observe the school settings and to review any artifacts shared by the principals of two Title 1 elementary schools. The researcher recommends that all principals both aspiring and veteran collaborate with other principals to establish a mentor relationship and visit other schools. It is the researcher's hope that all principals who visit other high performing elementary schools and can learn how to operate a more effective school by observing the principals' actions and by shadowing other successful elementary principals. (2) More research needs to be studied on the topic of inadequate funding for teaching some at-risk third grade students.

(3) Elementary principals from Title 1 schools should closely examine their leadership behaviors, monitoring/evaluating of teachers, identification of at-risk students, and use of programs within their schools. The researcher recommends that even though challenges exist, the principals should spend time reflecting and evaluating during each grading period to determine the next direction that the school should be headed in for great success in raising student achievement, and to focus on what strategies are successful to yield greater student success.

(4) The researcher's findings in this study may provide to various institutions of higher learning, regional, state, national educational leadership preparation programs; and other professional organizations important information specific to raising at-risk student achievement. It is also the researcher's hope that the information obtained during this study will be presented at elementary schools, presented at district principals' meetings, groups, leadership workshops, leadership conferences and published in professional leadership journals and magazines.

(5) The researcher recommends additional research on the eight common themes and patterns. Additional research may include additional interview sessions, additional grade levels included such as grades 2-4, more than two principal interviews and possibly central office staff interviews included in the research. Additional research should be done to follow up the Grab and Go Breakfast Program at the higher performing school and the New Resource Specialized Subject Area Program at the lower performing school.

#### Dissemination

The research plans to disseminate the findings to her cohort members. The researcher further plans to disseminate the findings of this study by serving as a guest speaker to individual elementary schools and school districts. Also, the research plans to meet with the Director of Elementary Education in the lower performing school district to discuss the findings of the study. It is also the researcher's hope that the findings of this can be disseminated in a professional journal in an article on educational leadership. The researcher plans to submit the research information to several educational leadership journals.

### Concluding Thoughts

During this important era of school accountability, the goal is to produce higher achieving, more successful students even at the elementary level and especially among at-risk students. The researcher's participation in this study was very beneficial.

Through this project, the researcher was able to extract from the participants' responses eight common patterns and themes and to conduct a study that was helpful to the researcher. The researcher will be able to take the findings of this study and use the information that she gained and help raise at-risk third grade students achievement both as an aspiring principal, lead teacher, and as a mentor to at-risk third grade students.

As a former elementary teacher of at-risk third grade students and presently a teacher of kindergarten at-risk students, the researcher clearly understands the task that is at hand to identify at-risk students and raise student achievement beginning as early as in kindergarten.

The similarities and the differences in the responses at the two schools were enlightening. The principal at the higher performing school had a "can do" attitude. This "can do" attitude was consistent throughout the building but was modeled by the principal. This positive "can do" attitude was persuasive and consistent throughout the building amidst the difficult challenges that the higher performing principal faced. The principal of the higher performing school proved that with hard work, collective positive "can do" attitudes, utilizing all of the staff materials and funds that allocated, success of at-risk third grade students not the exception but the norm. because of her high expectations for herself, the students and the staff success did occur. The researcher's concluding thought is that highly successful Title 1 elementary schools are run by highly

successful, very determined principals who consciously make the decisions that all students can and will succeed regardless of their socio-economic status, their ethnicity or their ability level. Certainly this correlates with the original ideas and philosophy of No Child Left Behind.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Interview Questions for Parents

1. As a principal, I am sure that you encounter students who are considered at-risk of academic failure every day. Tell me a little in particular about the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students that you have here at \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary School?
2. What do you as a principal find to be the most challenging part of working with 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students who are struggling academically?
3. How do you overcome the challenges that you have described in working with these at-risk students?
4. Tell me about changes that you would or could make in your school's classrooms that you think would make the biggest difference academically with your 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at-risk students.
5. What resistance have you met in implementing the changes that you believe are the most worthwhile?
6. Can you describe at least one program here at your school that you believe has helped at-risk 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students the most.
7. If there were no limitations for you and your school, what would you do to help these at-risk students succeed at school?
8. What do you believe has been your best work as a principal in working with 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at-risk students?
9. Can you think of an example of one of these students where a strategy from your school has turned his/her life around?

### Interview Questions for Teachers

1. As a teacher, I am sure that you encounter students who are considered at-risk of academic failure every day. Tell me a little in particular about the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students that you have here at \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary School?
2. Although you must have concerns as a teacher, what do you believe to be the most challenging part for your principal in working with 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students who are struggling academically.
3. How does your principal help you overcome challenges that you face in working with your at-risk students?
4. What changes could you and your principal make in your school's classrooms that you think would make the biggest difference academically with your 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at-risk students?
5. What resistance does your principal face in implementing changes that he/she believes are needed?
6. Can you describe at least one program that your principal has supported that you believe has helped at-risk 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students the most.
7. If there were no limitations for your school, what do you believe the principal could do to help at-risk third grade students succeed in school?
8. Describe one at-risk student in your school that has benefitted the most from a strategy that your school has implemented.

### **Interview Questions for Principals**

1. What do you believe are the reasons why young children (3<sup>rd</sup> graders) struggle in school?
2. What are some things that your child's school is doing to raise achievement scores of students?
3. How involved is the principal with strategies to make academic improvement of students here at \_\_\_\_\_ School?
4. Describe some things that you believe that a principal could do to make life easier for young children, 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in particular, in making academic gains.
5. What are reasons that principals in particular and schools in general are not as effective as they could be in working with young students who are struggling academically.
6. As young students struggle with academic challenges, what are ways that the principal or school could help?

APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER TO PARTICIAPTING PRINCIPALS

October 10, 2007

Dear Elementary School Principal:

My name is Sharonlyn Reese and I am a teacher at Chapel Hill Elementary School in the Douglas County Schools System. I am also a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. As a part of the requirements to complete the Doctor of Education degree, I am conducting a research study on the challenges that elementary school principals in Georgia face in raising the achievement of at-risk third grade students.

This letter is to request your assistance in helping me to gather data through the form of structured interviews. I will ask you questions regarding that challenges that you face in raising the achievement of at-risk third grade students. If you agree to participate in the study, I will interview you, tape recording our conversation. This data will be compared with data from other elementary principals to identify common themes and similarities. Once the interviews are completed, I will transcribe the notes and include the data in my dissertation. If you would like a copy of my findings, the data will be provided for you.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact me at: 770-489-9597 or 678-662-5395 or you may e-mail me at Sharonlyn\_Reese@douglas.k12.ga.us or [sreese1@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:sreese1@georgiasouthern.edu) . Your participation is greatly appreciated and will improve the quality of my research study. This information will prove to be valuable to all educators.

Educationally yours,  
Sharonlyn Reese, Ed.S  
Teacher, Chapel Hill Elementary School

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL LETTER

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs <b>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</b>	
Phone: 912-681-5465	Veazey Hall 2021 P.O. Box 8005 Statesboro, GA 30460
Fax: 912-681-0719	Ovrsight@GeorgiaSouthern.edu

**To:** Sharonlyn Jones Reese  
5390 Legacy Trail  
Douglasville, GA-30135

**CC:** Dr. Linda Arthur  
P.O. Box-8131

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Date:** December 17, 2007

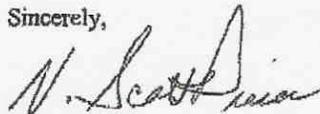
**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: H08108, and titled "Challenges that Georgia Elementary Principals Face in Raising At-Risk Student Achievement", it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

*Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.*

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, whether or not it is believed to be related to the study, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator prior to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



N. Scott Pierce  
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

APPENDIX D  
LITERATURE MATRIX

ARTICLE	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/DATA COLLECTION	OUTCOMES/ CONCLUSIONS	OUTLINE TOPIC
Adalbjarnar do, Sigrun & Runarsdottir, Eyvan (2006)	To explore the intercultural experiences of a principal's diverse elementary school	One employed principal at Reykjavik elementary school	Qualitative interview with principal	The results of the interview gave an in-depth look into the principal's vision for his intercultural school. He expects mutual respect for all cultures, delegated the work, and trusts the staff to do their part. His is learning by leading	I
Adamowski, S, Therriault, S, Cavanna, A, (2007)	To determine the perceptions of school leaders with regards to the power that they need to get the results they want	33 principals from five urban areas, in three states, aged 25 to 65 with an average of 10.5-12.4 years of experience	Qualitative, small purposively selected sample	90% of the principals stated that they had moderately strong leadership capability. Principals were asked to rank 21 school level functions in determining their effectiveness, in raising student achievement, by importance	I

Boykin, Danielle, (2006)	To gain leadership insights from an outstanding your principal	N/A	N/A	This principal, in the interview, gave several insights on his leadership beliefs and his strategies. He raised the reading performance from 67% to 85%, and in math performance from 65% to 89%. He credited his success with developing a plan, evaluating all school programs, establishing results based learning teams, and encouraging professional growth plans.	II
Brock & Johansen (2003)	To determine the process used in 54 school serving low-income students that helped them become more effective.	50 low-income minority schools with students who were at-risk.	Qualitative data collection in a longitudinal study done over 4 years. Discussion with principals, open-ended interviews with teachers, counselors, and law professionals	Several factors were found to contribute positively to becoming a more effective school. Major funding, when the principal led the implementation of school improvement the school was impacted greatly and was more successful	II

Bracey (2002)	To compare two contradictory articles that discuss raising achievement	N/A	N/A	One article (Roderick & Engel) says that if students respond in a positive way to achievement standards that are designed to help motivate them, students should have increased achievement. The other researcher (Jacob) showed that states that used test scores for achievement had higher drop-out rates	II
Bullach & Lunenburg (1995)	To examine the impact of the principal's leadership on the environment, and on the achievement of the students	2,834 third and fifth grade students, 506 teachers, 20 principals in 20 elementary schools	Quantitative Behavioral Matrix	No important difference was found in the school's climate with regard to the principal's leadership style. The significant finding was the difference in leadership style of parent and community involvement.	II

Chancey, Bradford, Lewis, Lauric (2007)	To report on principals' perceptions of their school facilities	Principals in Chicago public schools	Quantitative survey perceptions	Principals completed surveys about the state of their school building facilities. They were asked about: artificial lighting, indoor air quality, size or configurations of classrooms, acoustics or noise control, ventilation, heating, air-conditioning, and the use of portable classrooms. The conclusions showed that air-conditioning, heating, and general physical condition were the highest percent in which principals were dissatisfied. They determined that the absence of heating or air-conditioning could impact the ability of the school to provide instruction to improve student achievement	I
Chudowsky & Pellegrino (2003)	To discuss if large assessments should support learning	N/A	N/A	More collaborating and discussion among education is needed to make sure that the assessments that are taking place are supporting learning	II

Craig & Connor (2003)	To examine the performance of 50 minority children on reading comprehension	50 preschool and kindergarten students in Detroit, Michigan	Quantitative: Assessment battery-second half of the school year for both groups/ longitudinal study	Educators need to improve their knowledge of what skills minority student bring to school. Once this is done, educators will be better equipped to provide prevention for later positive reading comprehension resulting in higher achieving students.	II
Dandridge, Jennifer, Edwards, Patricia, & Pleasants, Heather (2000)	To illuminate the barriers that two urban principals face in raising achievement of at-risk students	454 students, 2 principals at an urban school with 98% of low income students	Qualitative case study design	Two principals of the same school during different years gave their narratives of the barriers they faced. The second principal was more successful because he involved the community and parents. Both principals believed the first step is to make a personal investment in students, families, and in the community.	I
Feurstein (2000)	To determine the level of influence the parental involvement on children's education in schools.	1,032 U.S. schools with eighth grade students. 1,825 public schools, 237 private schools	Quantitative Survey: rotated component matrix	Parent involvement was considered to be an important part in student's success in school. Schools can and do influence the level of parental participation (openness, parental trust, friendliness, visitation policies	II

<p>Gilman &amp; Kiger (2003)</p>	<p>To determine if class size reduction impacts student achievement, test scores, and learning</p>	<p>79 schools, rural, suburban</p>	<p>Quantitative testing of control and treatment group, motivational scales</p>	<p>Reduction in class size has been highly debated. Tennessee and Indiana tried a project STAR Results: Students performed better regardless of school location or gender. Benefits were greater for minority students of inner-city schools. There was no difference in motivation of students</p>	<p>I</p>
<p>Glanz, John, Shulman, Vivian, Sullivan, Susan (2007)</p>	<p>To examine the relationship between instructional supervision and student achievement</p>	<p>755 students enrolled at a public school in the northeast with grades pre-K through 5. Student population 62% Asian, 21% Hispanic, 14% Caucasian, 3% African American</p>	<p>Qualitative- An Instrumental case study observation, interview transcripts</p>	<p>The results were leadership is successful, it appears to have an indirect influence on the school organization and this on student learning and achievement. The results also reflected that educational leaders (principals) who pay close attention to instructional matters in the classroom do affect successful learning and teaching though it may be an indirect affect.</p>	<p>II</p>

Hall, Daria & Kennedy, Shana (2006)	To analyze student achievement patterns from state to state from 2003-2006	State departments of education in the United States from 30 states.	Assessment of data from test scores	In the elementary grades, 26 to 30 states narrowed the African American, White mathematics gap. 24 of the 29 states narrowed the Latino, White reading gap. Most states increased the achievement of White students while also raising achievement for minority students. Georgia improved by 8% between 2004-2005. The report state that the gains were made by: (1) ensuring that all students had access to rigorous curriculum, (2) making literacy a priority for all students, and (3) using students' academic needs to drive instruction and student support.	I
Harmon (2002)	To help understand some of the experiences of gifted African-American inner-city elementary students.	2 fourth graders aged 10, one male, one female. 4 fifth graders aged 11, one female, 3 males, 6 total in a moderate size metro area in the Midwestern United States	Quantitative research	The students were bused to a predominately White school away from their neighborhood (all African American school). "They won't teach us", said some of the students. The students faced racial discrimination. Effective teachers taught regardless of race, helped them indefinitely.	I

Hancock (2002)	To teach parents to support their preschool children's school experiences	Five parent participants	Qualitative study. Parents were taught to be more responsive and interactive with their children	Children showed improved behavior and communication skills. The maintenance of the improved behavior was varied	II
Janisch & Johnson (2003)	To describe a research project giving information about successful literacy practices for at-risk learners.	N/A	N/A	Fourth and fifth grade students were involved in a hands-on curriculum while teachers were given training at graduate school in core knowledge. The results were more committed teachers who improved their instruction, which resulted in greater student achievement.	I
Jerald, Craig (2006)	To gain information on the hidden cost of curriculum narrowing	Principals from Illinois, Maryland, New Mexico, and New York. Teachers	Quantitative Survey; teacher surveys used were the federal schools and staffing surveys	The results were that there is a cost that narrowing the curriculum in the elementary grades. Cognitive psychologist have found that there is another step between fluent decoding and reading comprehension, in which readers call on background knowledge. When the curriculum is narrowed, readers do not have adequate background and may not be able to comprehend text	I

Kells, Richard (1991)	To determine principal's perceptions of factors affecting student achievement	50 elementary school principals, 25 located in New York City (urban), 25 located in suburban New York City	Qualitative perceptionnaires, 25 items, each followed by a Lickert Scale	The results of the survey indicated that both groups of principals concluded that main reasons for poor student achievement are: (1) lack of nuclear family, (2) a lack of support from students' school work, which is missing	II
Lane & Menzies (2002)	To determine the effects of an elementary school level intervention program	298 general education elementary students, 1-6. 53% male, 47% female. 51% of the sample was lower elementary (1-3), and 47% upper elementary (4-6)	Quantitative: Battery of tests used at the beginning of the year, then three months later (reading skills were assessed and the student risk screening scale using teachers' perspective) school wide Behavior Plan	Students who were not able to meet their teacher's standards for academic/ behavior were at-risk of school failure. So far if a school-wide intervention plan is implemented with a commitment for all staff members. The students may increase their achievement	II

Lick, Dale & Murphy, Carlene (2005)	To demonstrate how learning concepts can be applied in a variety of school implement efforts	N/A	N/A	The idea of whole-faculty study groups is presented and used as a strategy for raising student achievement. Some of the components are aligning the whole-faculty study groups with staff development standards, strengthening school improvement plans, building commitment among the staff and using data to improve instruction.	I
Met Life (2006)	To share lessons and advice from principals who have successfully bridged the gap of family and community engagement at schools.	13 principals from surrounding Cleveland, Ohio, schools in Lincoln, Nebraska, and 50% of all schools in New Brunswick, North Carolina.	Qualitative Research Design	The principals were asked a series of questions. In the interviews, the principals agreed that active participation in family and community is critical to the success of the school. Some of the concluding keys of engagement were: (1) Know where you are going (vision), (2) Shared leadership, and (3) stay on course. Some of the barriers to getting involved were cultural differences and negative school experiences from parents. In getting the community involved, barriers were school culture versus business culture, and space/facilities use.	II

Meadows, Stacis, Karr-Kikwell (2007)	To provide recommendations for alternate assessments	3 elementary teachers, 2 principals	Qualitative informal interviews	Multiple assessments, including formal and informal are necessary when working with at-risk students. These assessments are an important step in linking the curriculum and in helping provide diversity for all young children.	II
Nagle, Katherine, Hernandez, Glenda, Embler, Sandra, McLaughlin, Margaret, Doh, Frances (2006)	To identify characteristics of effective rural schools for students with disabilities	13 principals from high poverty, high performing, rural schools. Purposive selected teachers	Qualitative Cross-Case Research Design, Classroom Observation and In-depth interviews	After the cross-case analysis was completed, four school-level characteristics emerged. They were: (1) emphasis on high standards for student performance and behavior, (2) stability within the school community and a willingness to work together, (3) close ties between the school and the community, and (4) support for at-risk students with creative use of resources.	II

Serna, 2002	To measure preschoolers who may be “at-risk” for emotional or behavioral disorders.	Children in 17 classrooms in Headstart classrooms aged 3 to 5. 77% Hispanic, 99% African American, 6% Native American, 4% Asian or other mixed backgrounds. 17 teachers all Hispanic- average age 34 years.	Quantitative: Social Skills Rating System, Early Screening Project, Critical Events Index-checklist, aggression behavior scale	Children from lower south east side in this study maybe at greater risk and are less often identified. Gender/ethnicity may have an affect on behavior problems.	I
Shellinger, Mark (2005)	To research the issue of the time as it relates to the principal having adequate time to identify effectively manage the learning environment	principals	Qualitative-interviews with teachers, parents, and students	Principals operating in a traditional role need more time to provide a quality instructional leadership program. When the School Administrators Managers (SAM) trained the principals using this business managers model, principals were perceived as more effective by parents, teachers, and students.	II

Smith (2003)	To discuss alternate forms of assessment including informal assessments	N/A	N/A	As schools search for more accurate forms of assessment, some of these ways should be used because they are authentic forms of assessment.	II
Stricherz, Marc (2001)	To focus on the role of elementary principals in raising student achievement	N/A	N/A	In a publication by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, information was written on standards for what principals should know and be able to do to lead instruction. Some of the six steps outlined were: (1) setting high expectations and standards, (2) engaging parents and community groups, and (3) rigorous content for all students.	II
Thompson & Davis (2002)	To reveal a plan that provides for supplemental vending instruction for at-risk elementary students	90, second grade, students in two neighboring school districts in an urban area	Woodcock Language Survey	The students were pre-tested for eligibility using the Woodcock Language Survey. The students made significant gains using the interventions.	II

Tucker & Zyco (2002)	To predict how teacher behaviors help to influence student performance and motivation.	117 African-American students grades 1-12.	Quantitative. Students were administered the Rochester Assessment Package for School-Students Self Report and a Demographic Data Form	There is a relationship between teacher involvement and student engagement for low-income African-American students. Because of their racial and social status, these students are already facing double negative stereotypes. Teachers who provide clear classroom standards and who are fair and consistent are perceived to be more competent. Thus, teachers who provide a positive, warm environment are more successful with their students.	II
Winger, Marc (1993)	To measure the influence of the multi-track year round calendar on the instructional leadership of an elementary school principal with regards to raising student achievement	11 principals, 5 from traditional schools, 6 from multi-track schools. 122 traditional, 124 year round teachers.	In depth- Formal Interviews. Qualitative also Quantitative survey	The results were that six year-round principals state that there was an increase in overall administrative demands, communication needs and building maintenance problems. Teachers at traditional calendar schools rated their principals higher on leadership behaviors than year-round teachers. This may be due to the increased managerial duties at tear-round schools.	II

APPENDIX E  
INTERVIEW QUESTION ITEM ANALYSIS

RQ & Specific Questions	Principal Interview Questions	Item Topic	Research Literature Primary & Secondary
1	2	Challenges of raising student achievement	Gutierrez, 2007; Glanz & Shulman, 2007; Protheroe, 2007; Barton, 2005; Greere, 2005; Hollar, 2004; Kvinsberg, Iverson, Nodland & Riehart, 2007; Mason & Dobbs, 2005; Lee, Silverman & Montoya, 2002; Chaney & Lewis, 2007; Adamowiski, Theirrault & Caranna, 2007; Feurstein, 2000; Chudowsky, 2003; Steele, 2004
2	2,3,5	Strategies for overcoming the challenges of raising student achievement	Miller & Crano, 1980; www.eric.ed.gov; Renies, 2007; Hancock, 2002; Lane & Menzies, 2002; Munoz, 2001; Dandridge, Edwards & Pleasants, 2000; Smith, 2003; Gilman & Kiger, 2003; Finn, Pannozzo & Achilles, 2003; Hardy, 2007; Protheroe, 2007
2	6	Programs that are used to raise student achievement	Brock & Johanesen, 2003; Smith, 2003; <a href="http://dibels.org.oregon.edu/dibels">http://dibels.org.oregon.edu/dibels</a> ; Bracey, 2002; Thompson & Davis, 2002; Gilman & Kiger, 2003
1	1	Identification of at-risk students	Barton, 2005; Denton & West, 2003; Graeff-Martins, Oswald, Obst, Kieling, Rocha, Goncalves & Rotidy, 2006; Gary, 2007; Craig & Connor, 2003; Harmon, 2002; Rathburn & West, 2004; Serna, 2002; <a href="http://www.ga.doe.org">www.ga.doe.org</a> ; Kozol, 2000; Knivesberg, Iverson, Noland & Riechelt, 2007; Deck, Dona & Christensen, 2007; Robinson, 2006; Lewis, 2000
2	4	Using staff to help raise student achievement	Couillard, Garnett, Hutching, Fawcett & Maycock, 2006; Decker, Dona & Christensen, 2007; Mallory & Jackson, 2007; Janisch & Johnson, 2003; Lane & Menzies, 2002; Lick & Murphy, 2005; Tucker & Zayco, 2002; Glickman, Gordon, Ross-Gordon, 2001; Zepeda, 2003; Collins, 2007; Hillard, 2000

2	8	Effective leadership practices for raising student achievement	Stricherz, 2001; Marazano, 2005; Leithwood, Seashore, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Whitaker, 2003; Marazano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Zepeda, 2007; Fullan, 2001; Cotton, 2003; Covey, 1989; <a href="http://www.naesp.oeg">www.naesp.oeg</a> ; Adomski & Theirriault, 2007
2	7	Principal's role helping to raise student achievement	Marx, 2006; Stricherz, 2001; Reeves, 2007; Hall & Kennedy, 2006; Hughes, 2005; Marazano, 2005; Brown, 2007; Leithwood, Seashore, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Pajek, 2006; Zepeda, 2007; Bulach & Malone, 1995
2	9	Examples of how effective leadership practices can raise student achievement	Owings, Kaplan & Nunnery, 2005; umsl.edu, 2005; Kohm & Nance, 2007; Kellis, 1993; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Walstrom, 2004; Adalbjarnardo & Runarsdottir, 2006

RQ & Specific Questions	Teacher Interview Questions	Item Topic	Research Literature Primary & Secondary
1	1	Challenges of raising student achievement	Gutierrez, 2007; Glanz & Shulman, 2007; Protheroe, 2007; Barton, 2005; Greere, 2005; Hollar, 2004; Kvinsberg, Iverson, Nodland & Riebert, 2007; Mason & Dobbs, 2005; Lee, Silverman & Montoya, 2002; Chaney & Lewis, 2007; Adamowiski, Theirrault & Caranna, 2007; Feurstein, 2000; Chudowsky, 2003; Steele, 2004
1	2	Teachers' perceptions of principal raising student achievement	Met Life Foundation, 206; Winger, 1993; Nagle, Hernandez, Embler, McLaughlin & Don, 2006; Dandridge, Edwards, Pleasants, 2000
2	3,6,8	Teachers' perceptions of strategies used by principals to raise student achievement	Miller & Crano, 1980; <a href="http://www.eric.ed.gov">www.eric.ed.gov</a> ; Renies, 2007; Hancock, 2002; Lane & Menzies, 2002; Munoz, 2001; Dandridge, Edwards & Pleasants, 2000; Smith, 2003; Gilman & Kiger, 2003; Finn, Pannozzo & Achilles, 2003; Hardy, 2007; Protheroe, 2007
2	4	Teachers' perceptions of use of staff to raise student achievement	Lick & Murphy, 2005; Chancey & Lewis, 2007; Couillard, Garnett, Hutching, Fawcett & Maycock, 2006; Decker, Dona & Christensen, 2007; Mallory & Jackson, 2007; Janisch & Johnson, 2003; Lane & Menzies, 2002; Lick & Murphy, 2005; Tucker & Zayco, 2002; Glickman, Gordon, Ross-Gordon, 2001; Zepeda, 2003; Collins, 2007; Hillard, 2000; Shellinger, 2005

2	5,7	Teachers' perceptions of the leadership behaviors by the principal	Stricherz, 2001; Marazano, 2005; Leithwood, Seashore, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Whitaker, 2003; Marazano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Zepeda, 2007; Fullan, 2001; Cotton, 2003; Covey, 1989; <a href="http://www.naesp.oeg">www.naesp.oeg</a> , Adomski & Theirriault, 2007
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**Research Question & Parent Interview Question Grid**

<b>RQ &amp; Specific Questions</b>	<b>Parent Interview Questions</b>	<b>Item Topic</b>	<b>Research Literature Primary &amp; Secondary</b>
1	1	Challenges to raise student achievement	Dandridge & Edwards, 2000
1	2	Parents' perceptions of principal raising student achievement	Met Life Foundation, 2006; Dandridge, Edwards & Pleasants, 2000; Winger, 1993
2	3,6	Parents' perceptions of strategies that the principal uses to raise student achievement	Prothro, 2007; Miller & Crano, 1980; Reaves, 2007; Hancock, 2002; Lane & Menzies, 2002; Munoz, 2001; Finn, Pannazzo & Achills, 2003; Hardy, 2000; Shellinger, 2005; Dandridge, Edwards & Peasants, 2000
2	4	Parents' perceptions of how the principal utilizes the staff and community to help raise student achievement	Met Life Foundation, 2006; Nagle, Hernandez, Embler, McLaughlin & Don, 2006; Shellinger, 2005
2	5	Principal involving parents in the community	Dandridge, Edwards & Pleasants, 2000; Shellinger, 2005; Met Life Foundation, 2006; Nagle, Hernandez, Embler, McLaughlin & Don, 2006