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PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP IN HIGH-PERFORMING, HIGH-POVERTY
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

Marc J. Cohen

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Professor Marilyn L. Grady

Lincoln, Nebraska

October, 2015

PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP IN HIGH-PERFORMING, HIGH-POVERTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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University of Nebraska, 2015

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The focus of this mixed methods study was on Maryland Title I elementary principals who led schools to achieving adequate yearly progress during the 2011-2012 school year. At the time of the study, slightly more than one third of the Title I elementary schools in Maryland and throughout the U.S., achieved this status (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty-five principals from Title elementary schools in Maryland. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Leader Form was administered to the participants as well.

This study findings indicated,

1. Principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools were more transformational in their leadership behaviors than they were transactional or passive avoidant.
2. Principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools shared leadership and created opportunities for professional collaboration.
3. Principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools encouraged strategic thinking and planning to achieve school goals.
4. Principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools viewed themselves as trainers and developers who built others' capacity to do the work.

5. Principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools created open, risk-free, trusting professional environments.
6. Principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools had a clearly defined, articulated, and shared vision categorized by high expectations.
7. Principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools sought ways to engage parents and the community in the work of the school.

Acknowledgments

My gratitude goes to Dr. Marilyn Grady and to the members of my dissertation committee. Your guidance, feedback, and support through my doctoral studies and throughout the process of conducting my dissertation research and writing were invaluable.

My appreciation also goes out to my “unofficial” UNL Doctoral Cohort, Sally A. Thorp, Ph.D., Lori R. Piowski, Ph.D., and Mariane A. Doyle, Ph.D. Throughout this long and challenging process, you each found time to remind me to never settle and to never give up. A special thank you to Sally for providing me feedback early in the publication process that helped me make it to the finish line. I thank you for that.

I also wish to offer thanks to Dr. Julia Orza who was amazingly generous with her time and considerable expertise. Your validation and respect of my work was so important during my writing process. I also wish to thank Marnie Cohen, Marvin Cohen, Lynne Montenegro, and Michael Montenegro for providing immeasurable moral support, encouragement, and at times, childcare as I navigated the program.

At the time of publication, my son Jared is thirteen years old and my daughter Jenna is ten. When I was their age, my family shared a home with my grandparents. I am told that my grandfather, Leon, dropped out of school in the second grade to help support his family after the Great Baltimore Fire of 1904. Lena, my grandmother, was never allowed to go to school. Her vision was too bad and her health was too fragile. They may not have had a formal education and they certainly were not people of means, but they taught me two invaluable lessons that I have carried with me personally and

professionally over the years: Always honor your word; and never underestimate the power of a hard day's work.

Now, two generations later, Jared and Jenna are watching their father earn his doctorate. I sincerely hope that as you both look back on this experience, you forgive me for the nights and weekends that I had to choose school over spending time with the family. I hope that I have taught you that you should never stop learning, never stop questioning, and never stop challenging yourself, even when the odds may seem to be stacked against you. I hope that these lessons stick with you like the ones Leon and Lena shared stuck with me.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my wife Amy. I thought long and hard about what to say to you on this page. Words will never do justice to the appreciation I have for you. You have made it possible for me to take this and so many other amazing personal and professional journeys. You have supported me unconditionally. You have been my cheerleader, my confidant, my therapist, and my coach. Thank you for saying yes to a second date, even after such an awkward first date; and thank you for always being my partner and my very best friend for the last twenty years:

אני לדודי ודודי לי

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Poverty and Student Achievement

Although schools and school systems have worked for years to close the academic achievement gap that exists between students of means and those living near, at, or below the poverty line, performance variances continue to exist in the schools. Studies suggest that children living in poverty have absenteeism or leave school because they may have to work or care for family members. Students between the ages of 16-24 years old, who come from low-income families, are seven times more likely to drop out than those from families with higher incomes. A higher percentage of young adults (31%) without a high school diploma live in poverty, compared to the 24% of young people who finish high school (Addy, Engelhardt, & Skinner, 2015).

Nearly 40% of children living in poverty are not prepared for primary schooling. Children who live below the poverty line are 1.3 times more likely to have developmental delays or learning disabilities than those who do not live in poverty. By the end of the 4th grade, African-American, Hispanic and low-income students are two years behind grade level. By the time they reach the 12th grade, they are four years behind (KewalRamani, Laird, Ifill, & Chapman, 2011). In 2013, the dropout rate for students in the nation was at 8% for African American youth, 7% for Hispanic youth, and 4% for Asian youth. These exceed the dropout rate for Caucasian youth (4%). Fewer than 30% of students in the bottom quartile of incomes enroll in a four-year college. Among that group, fewer than 50% graduate (Currie, 2014).

At the turn of the 21st century, the federal government attempted to address these inequities legislatively, through the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 ((NCLB; 20 U.S.C. § 6301). The purpose of NCLB was “to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Haycock (2001) stated, “to increase the achievement levels of minority and low-income students, we need to focus on what really matters: high standards, a challenging curriculum, and good teachers” (p. 6).

This purpose was to be accomplished by:

- requiring states to create and utilize assessments that measure commonly held expectations for student achievement;
- providing resources to help schools and local education agencies in their efforts to meet the educational needs of low-achieving children in our Nation's highest-poverty schools;
- closing the achievement gaps that exist between existing subgroups of students disaggregated by race, ethnicity, economics, and special needs;
- holding schools, local educational agencies, and states accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students, and providing choice options for students attending pervasively low-performing schools; and
- providing human and material resources to schools and local education agencies where the financial need is greatest (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Additionally, the goals of NCLB were to be made possible by:

- using state assessment systems to improve teaching and learning;
- providing greater decision-making authority and flexibility to schools and teachers in exchange for greater responsibility for student performance;
- increasing the amount and quality of instructional time by providing enrichment and acceleration to children;
- promoting innovative school-wide reform efforts;
- improving instruction by providing staff with professional development; streamlining, aligning, and coordinating services for students and families who qualify; and
- affording parents substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Porter, Murphy, Goldring, Elliott, Polikoff, & May (2008) indicated that poverty serves as an early predictor of academic difficulty for many young people and that setting high standards for every student is critical to principal effectiveness in mitigating the impact of this and other external variables. “The research literature over the last quarter century has consistently supported the notion that having high expectations for all, including clear and public standards, is one key to closing the achievement gap between advantaged and less advantaged students, and for raising the overall academic achievement of all students” (p. 13). NCLB required schools and systems to adopt these higher standards and to develop accountability measures for each student and all student subgroups as defined by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Although many schools have been focusing explicitly on closing pervasive academic achievement gaps, notable gaps persist. In fact, a 2013 Stanford study (Reardon, Greenberg, Kalogrides, Shores, & Valentino, 2013) found no support for the hypothesis that NCLB has been successful in narrowing the achievement gaps that exist in the schools. “Our estimates are very precise, and we can rule out the possibility that NCLB had, on average, meaningfully large effects (effects larger than 0.01 standard deviations change per year) on achievement gaps” (p. 31).

Children Living in Poverty

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2013), there are more than 72 million children under age 18 in the United States. Of these, 32.4 million children live in low-income families and 16.1 million children live in poor families. These numbers are higher than previous studies. In 1989, 32% of all public school children were from low-income families and the number has continued to increase. In 2000, 38%; in 2006, 42%, in 2011, 48%, and by 2013, the rate “crossed the threshold of one half so that in 2013 low-income students became a new majority in the nation’s public schools” (Southern Education Foundation, 2015).

What is true for the country also is true locally. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2015), “all regions of the United States had higher poverty rates for school-age children in 2012 than in 1990.” Likewise, “all regions had higher percentages of school-age children living in poverty in 2012 than in 2000.” Although the rate of children living in poverty has continued to rise, so too has the gap in learning that exists between those with means and those without means.

Context of the Study

According to the Maryland State Department of Education (2013), Maryland had approximately 853,000 students enrolled in its 1,452 public schools during the 2011-2012 school year. The majority of students in Maryland were White; the second largest ethnic group was African American; and the third largest ethnic group was Hispanic. (See Table 1.1)

Table 1.1

2011 Maryland Students		
Ethnicity	Number of Students	Percent of Population
American Indian/Alaskan Native	3,047	0.4
Asian	48,693	5.7
African American	305,310	35.8
Hispanic	98,404	11.5
White	366,044	42.9
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1,246	0.1
Two or More Races	29,507	3.5

(Maryland State Department of Education, 2013)

Students from households that met the United States Department of Agriculture's Child Nutritional Program Income Guidelines (2013) were eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals (See Table 1.2).

Table 1.2

 USDA Child Nutritional Program Income Guidelines

 Free

Household Size	Annual	Monthly	Twice Per Month	Every Two Weeks	Weekly
1	\$14,937	\$1,245	\$623	\$575	\$288
2	20,163	1,681	841	776	388
3	25,389	2,116	1,058	977	489
4	30,615	2,552	1,276	1,178	589
5	35,841	2,987	1,494	1,379	690
6	41,067	3,423	1,712	1,580	790
7	46,293	3,858	1,929	1,781	891
8	51,519	4,294	2,147	1,982	991
Each additional household member add	+5,226	+436	+218	+201	+101

 Reduced

Household Size	Annual	Monthly	Twice Per Month	Every Two Weeks	Weekly
1	\$21,257	\$1,772	\$886	\$818	\$409
2	28,694	2,392	1,196	1,104	552
3	36,131	3,011	1,506	1,390	695
4	43,568	3,631	1,816	1,676	838
5	51,005	4,251	2,126	1,962	981
6	58,442	4,871	2,436	2,248	1,124
7	65,879	5,490	2,745	2,534	1,267
8	73,316	6,110	3,055	2,820	1,410
Each additional household member add	+7,437	+620	+310	+287	+144

 (United States Department of Agriculture, 2013)

Maryland Hunger Solutions (2012) reported that in the 2011-2012 school year, 343,569 or approximately 40% of all Maryland public school students received Free and Reduced Meal Services (FARMS) assistance, including 49.2% of all Maryland elementary school students (See Table 1.3).

Table 1.3

Maryland 2011-2012 Free and Reduced Meal Enrollment – County

Jurisdiction	Enrollment	FARMS Enrollment	FARMS Rate
Allegany	9,007	4,657	51.7%
Anne Arundel	75,351	21,097	28.0%
Baltimore	104,309	44,108	42.29%
Calvert	16,421	3,592	21.87%
Caroline	5,673	3,030	53.41%
Carroll	27,903	4,351	15.59%
Cecil	15,923	6,108	38.36%
Charles	26,908	7,686	28.56%
Dorchester	4,720	2,829	89.94%
Frederick	40,281	9,213	22.87%
Garrett	4,349	2,074	47.69%
Harford	38,395	10,516	27.39%
Howard	51,079	8,201	16.06%
Kent	2,199	1,083	49.25%
Montgomery	144,217	44,290	30.71%
Prince George's	126,723	69,020	54.47%
Queen Anne's	7,831	1,777	22.69%
St. Mary's	17,349	5,039	29.04%
Somerset	2,911	1,918	65.89%
Talbot	4,509	1,591	35.28%
Washington	21,633	9,781	45.21%
Wicomico	14,341	7,667	53.46%
Worcester	6,821	2,813	41.24%
Baltimore City	84,605	70,962	83.87%
Total	853,696	343,569	40.24%

(Maryland Hunger Solutions, 2012)

Title I, Part A

Through Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended (ESEA), the federal government provides grants to districts to be used to support and enhance learning opportunities for economically-disadvantaged children, helping to ensure that all children have the opportunity to meet appropriately rigorous standards in reading and mathematics. “The purpose of [Title I] is to ensure that all

children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (Maryland State Department of Education, 2013). NCLB mandated that test results be publicly reported for each school, disaggregated by race and socioeconomic status (among other factors), and tied to sanctions at the school level.

In 2011-2012, there were 312 elementary schools in Maryland that received school-wide Title I services. That year, 64.4% of all Maryland elementary schools made adequate yearly progress. However, a close examination revealed that non-Title I elementary schools were more than twice as likely to make adequate yearly progress than were Title I elementary schools (See Table 1.4).

Table 1.4

Maryland Elementary Schools Making AYP in 2011-2012 School Year

Number of Non-Title I Elementary Schools	497
Number of Non-Title I Elementary Schools making AYP	398
Percentage of Non-Title I Elementary Schools making AYP	80.1%
Number of Title I Elementary Schools	312
Number of Title I Elementary Schools making AYP	123
Percentage of Title I Elementary Schools making AYP	39.4%

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), by 2011-2012, 34% of all Title I schools in the U.S. and 39.4% of Maryland Title I schools made AYP. This represents an all-time low dating to 2004 when state and national data were first publically reported (See Table 1.5) and left schools serving children most impacted by poverty vulnerable to NCLB sanctions. This number ranged from a national low of 13%

in Puerto Rico and 16% in Mississippi to a high of 86% in Delaware (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Table 1.5

National – Percent of Title I Schools Making AYP

Academic Year	National – Title I Schools	Maryland – Title I Schools
2004-05	72.6%	71.0%
2005-06	70.6%	69.3%
2006-07	71.8%	68.6%
2007-08	64.5%	75.1%
2008-09	65.9%	71.0%
2009-10	59.3%	58.9%
2010-11	49%	40.3%
2011-12	34%	39.4%

(U.S. Department of Education, 2013)

Relationship between Poverty and Academic Performance

Edmonds (1979) asked, “How many effective schools would you have to see to be persuaded of the educability of poor children?” (p. 22-23) He challenged the status quo in how we view the limitations of both students living in poverty and the teachers who serve them, stating that we already know everything that we need to know in order to successfully teach every child in our schools. “Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far” (p. 22-23).

In their examination of the relationship between student performance and family income, Reardon, Greenberg, Kalogrides, Shores, & Valentino (2013) found that a significant achievement gap in reading existed among children born between 1950 and the early 1970's who were from high-income families and those during the same time period who were from low-income families, about a 0.9 standard deviation. This gap began to widen with children born after the mid-1970's and “among those born 20-25

years later, the gap in standardized test scores was roughly 1.25 standard deviations – 40 percent larger than the gap several decades earlier” (p. 10).

Similarly, the Tauck Family Foundation, in collaboration with the Harvard Graduate School of Education, reported that the U.S. faces an education crisis that threatens the country’s fiscal and social health. “Conquering the chronic achievement gap is considered both a moral imperative and pressing civil rights issue by many of our country’s leaders, educators, and social entrepreneurs” (Tauck Family Foundation, 2015). With the poverty achievement gap typically emerging at infancy, Tauck (2015) found that:

- Children from low-income households entering kindergarten and first grade were already significantly behind their more affluent peers in terms of academic knowledge, and cognitive and social skills.
- Third graders who both lived in poverty and read below grade level were three times more likely to drop out of high school than students who have never been poor.
- Fourth graders from low-income families were likely to be academically three years behind their peers from affluent families.
- Sixth graders in high-poverty schools who failed math or English or received an unsatisfactory behavior grade had a 75% chance of dropping out of high school.
- Students in low-performing schools were five times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers from high-performing schools.

- High school seniors from low-income families were, on average, four years behind their higher-income peers.
- One out of two students from low-income families graduated high school.
- Nationally, 33% of high school students from low-income households went to college and 8% completed a degree within six years of matriculation (Tauck Family Foundation, 2015).

Tauck's findings defined the poverty achievement gap as among the most challenging and persistent educators had to face in the new age of high stakes accountability.

Role of the Principal

The role of the public school principal is to create a learning environment that provides high quality educational programming and instruction for students, regardless of their economic circumstances and in spite of strong correlations between socioeconomic status and academic performance (Gottfried, 2003). Principals' actions have a direct impact on the instruction teachers provide and elementary school principals in particular have a more significant penchant toward instructional leadership than their high school principal peers (Cotton, 2003). Principal leadership has been found to indirectly affect student achievement, mainly through its impact on classrooms and teacher practices. When principals actively lead in the changing of school conditions as they relate to governance structure, school culture, school-wide policies about retention, adherence to the curriculum, and working conditions for teachers, variations in student achievement may occur (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

Dhuey and Smith (2014) found that principals have a substantial impact on both math and reading scores. Their results showed that "a one standard deviation shift up the

principal quality distribution can increase achievement by approximately 0.289 to 0.408 standard deviations in math and reading, while shifting to the 75th percentile improves scores by 0.170 to 0.193 relative to the median principal (p. 661).

According to Kouzes and Posner (2007), “leadership is not about personality; it’s about behavior” (p. 15). Since the early 1980s, Kouzes and Posner have studied the conditions that must exist in order to promote “personal-best leadership” (p. 14). They identified five practices of exemplary leadership: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. In this study, I sought to identify practices and leadership qualities found in leaders of schools who have successfully served some of our most marginalized and often most vulnerable student populations.

Purpose Statement

The driving force behind my vision as a school principal has been an abiding commitment to eliminating the economic predictability of student achievement. I believe this goal is fundamental to school leadership and that a systemic focus on equity is the foundation upon which student success must be built. Yet, as I reflect on more than a decade as a principal, I admit that closing these gaps has been as elusive for me as it has been for many others. Why is that? More importantly, what is different in the principals who have been able to make sustainable change?

Principals recognize that economic inequalities pose a threat to the social, political, and economic health and well-being of a diverse nation, and in response, they are compelled to exercise their authority to act as agents for change to create the conditions required for student success.

The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools. The central question was: What are the leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?

The sub-questions include:

- What leadership behaviors are present in principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?
- What values and beliefs are present in the practices of principals in high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?
- What conditions support principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?

Definitions

Poverty – The state or condition of having little or no money, goods, or means of support; condition of being poor.

Title I (Maryland) - A federal program that provides financial assistance to local school systems and schools with high percentages of poor children to support the academic achievement of disadvantaged students. All 24 local school systems in Maryland receive Title I funds which are distributed to high-poverty schools within their districts so the schools can provide additional academic support and learning opportunities to help low-achieving children master challenging curricula and meet state standards in core academic subjects. Title I funds support extra instruction in reading and mathematics, additional teachers, materials of instruction, as well as after-school and summer programs

to extend and reinforce the regular school curriculum (Maryland State Department of Education, 2015).

Adequate Yearly Progress (Maryland) – Schools, school systems, and the state must show that students are making AYP in reading, mathematics, and one additional measure. In elementary and middle schools, the additional measure is attendance. In high schools, the additional measure is graduation rate. In addition to student achievement in the aggregate (All Students), AYP must be made among eight subgroups of students: African American, American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, White, Limited English Proficient, Free and Reduced-Price Meals, and Special Education. Student progress in reading and mathematics is measured by the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) or for students with profound disabilities the Alternative Maryland School Assessment (ALT-MSA). The Maryland State Board of Education has set the performance standards of basic, proficient, and advanced for the Maryland School Assessment and the Alternative Maryland School Assessment (Maryland State Department of Education, 2007).

High-Poverty, High-Performing Schools – Title I elementary schools that made adequate yearly progress, as defined by Maryland state standards in the 2011-2012 school year.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

According to Horace Mann, the first United States Secretary of Education, education is “a great equalizer of the conditions of men -- the balance wheel of the social machinery” (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 35).

On the importance of the critical need for equity in education, W.E.B. Du Bois stated:

Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5,000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental... The freedom to learn... has been bought by bitter sacrifice... And whatever we may think of the curtailment of other civil rights, we should fight to the last ditch to keep open the right to learn, the right to have examined in our schools not only what we believe, but what we do not believe; not only what our leaders say, but what the leaders of other groups and nations, and the leaders of other centuries have said. (Du Bois, 1970, p. 230-231)

Although many believe that the key to solving the social, economic, and political challenges of the nation rest in educating more people effectively, significant inequities still exist and generational poverty continues to erode the fabric of communities across the U.S. According to Growe & Montgomery (2003) “most experts agree that a range of socioeconomic factors leave poor and minority students at a disadvantage even before they enter the schoolhouse doors” (p. 26). Gonzalez (2001) declared that the failure to

provide adequate and equitable education has created an “underclass of people who will challenge our very way of life” (p.1).

In their analysis of research on what works in high-performing, high-poverty schools, Parrett and Barr (2010) reviewed findings of 18 studies and reports with participants representing thousands of schools nationwide to identify what strategies they employed to have and sustain their “remarkable results.” They found the leaders of high-performing, high-poverty schools worked to build the leadership capacity of others; focused attention, time, and resources on student and professional learning, and took steps to create safe, supportive, and healthy learning environments. Parrett and Barr identified 12 practices that mattered in sustaining high levels of success in highly impacted schools. These included:

1. Leadership – “The foundation of all effective school improvement is leadership: vision, honesty, planning, and a can do attitude” (p.4).
2. High expectations – “Students live up to...or down to our expectations. There is nothing as powerful as high expectations” (p.5).
3. Extending learning – “If students are behind, they will never catch up without additional quality instructional time” (p.6)
4. Ensure effective basic skills instruction – “Basic skills are the foundation of all learning, and nothing is as important as reading” (p. 6).
5. Teach kids to read – “It is not enough to double the amount of time that reading is taught” (p.6).
 - a. “61% of low-income families have no books in their homes” (p.6).

- b. “43% of adults with the lowest level of literacy proficiency live in poverty” (p.6).
 - c. “There is only one age-appropriate book for every 300 children in low-income neighborhoods, compared to 13 books per child in middle-income neighborhoods” (p.6).
6. Remediation/Re-Teaching – “Every time we teach, some get it, some almost get it, and some do not get it at all and must be re-taught immediately” (p.8).
 7. Ensure a personal connection – “What at-risk children want at school more than anything else is a caring relationship with an adult” (p.8).
 8. Engage Families/Parents/Communities – “Families living in poverty are often intimidated and/or uncomfortable in schools. Yet, when families and the community are involved, a significant spike in learning will occur” (p.9).
 9. Enrich curriculum – “If a student is placed in a college prep curriculum and adequately supported: they will succeed” (p.9).
 10. Employ a proven process of improvement – “If schools use data, establish goals, monitor progress, meet regularly to collaborate, and conduct audits, immediate and dramatic gains can be expected” (p. 9).
 11. Teachers make a difference – “Teacher attitude makes all the difference...” (p.9).
 12. Support teachers – “The key to all students learning effectively is the classroom teacher. There is a massive gap between effective practice and actual practice” (p.10).

Barr and Parrett (2008) cautioned that failure to employ these strategies in a meaningful and sustainable way sets a school at risk for having significant numbers of students who

will “ultimately drop out and spend their lives unemployed, underemployed, or unemployable” (p. 236-237).

Nationwide, about 55% of all students educated in high-poverty elementary schools perform below grade level and by the time these children enter high school, more than 80% are behind by at least one grade level or are reading and performing mathematics below a seventh grade level (Aud, et al., 2010). Although this harsh reality may continue to perplex educators seeking a systemic solution, Haycock (2001) reported identifying more than 4,500 schools across the county that seemed to buck that trend. These schools each fell in the top third of their states in poverty and minority enrollment. They also fell in the top third in student achievement. Haycock stated that the challenge school leaders face in closing the gaps in achievement for minority and low-income students, requires a “focus on what really matters: high standards, a challenging curriculum, and good teachers” (p. 6).

This literature encompassed sources from 2000 to 2015 in which key words or phrases: No Child Left Behind, poverty, achievement, poverty achievement gap, school leadership, effective leaders, and leadership traits of effective leaders were used. It also included literature on styles of leadership, including transformational, transactional, and passive/avoidant leadership. The literature search included sources found in the Education Research Information Clearinghouse (ERIC) database, JSTOR, LexisNexis Academic, Proquest, Dissertation Abstracts International, Premier Sources (EBSCO), reference lists from articles and dissertations, World Wide Web internet searchers, and books on leadership and the field of education.

The Poverty Achievement Gap

Research on the poverty achievement gap is centered on the American school reform movements' closing years of the 20th century and is often linked to school reformers' efforts to address the social, political, and economic inequities experienced by poor and minority children. For this study, the poverty achievement gap is characterized by the presence of disparities in success rates between students living in poverty and their more privileged peers in such areas as: test scores, retention rates, dropout rates, college entrance rates, and school grades. These gaps also can be detected in school suspensions and expulsion rates, criminal arrests, unemployment rates, earning potential, salaries, and other measures of quality of life (Sherman & Grogan, 2003; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).

Flores (2007) defined the poverty achievement gap as “a problem of unequal opportunities to learn experienced by many low-income students and many Latino and African American students” (p. 29). In his study of African American, Latino, and low-income students, Flores found that poor students from these minority population centers “are less likely to have access to experienced and qualified teachers, more likely to face low expectations, and less likely to receive equitable per student funding” (p. 30).

Gardner (2007) suggested that poverty achievement gaps stem from the social and developmental deficits that face children living in poverty. Gardner pointed specifically to the impact of long periods of inadequate nourishment that the minds and bodies of children need the most. He linked this to mothers who, in poorer communities, rarely get the pre-natal care they need, lack resources in the home once the child is born, and often

have to work multiple jobs to support the family, leaving children limited access to external stimulation they need to thrive intellectually.

In his examination of the disparities in performance between African American and Hispanic students and the performance of White and Asian American students, Evans (2005) found a similar need to look beyond race and ethnicity and to focus more attention on the external context in which these students live, most notably the consequences that come from living in or raising children in poverty. Evans found “nearly 90% of the variance in students’ math scores on some tests can be predicted without knowing anything about their schools; one only needs to know the number of parents in the home, the level of the parents’ education, the type of community in which the family lives, and the state’s poverty rate” (p. 584). Evans cited Rothstein’s (2004) finding that in virtually every place where these gaps have been studied, there existed a strong correlation between students’ literacy and the social elements of poverty, and encouraged a refocusing of the nation’s attention on decreasing the “policies and laws that have helped to increase the proportion of children living in poverty and lacking adequate health care and that have driven welfare mothers into low-paying jobs and so forced their children into low-quality child care” (p. 588).

According to a 2009 report from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, 57% of high-poverty schools made adequate yearly progress (AYP) in 2004 compared with 84% of low-poverty schools and although teachers were required to be designated as highly qualified under The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), “teachers in high-poverty schools had less experience and were less likely to have a degree in the subject that they teach” (p. 3). Likewise,

“those in high-poverty schools had less experience and were less likely to have a degree in the subject that they teach, compared with their peers in low-poverty schools” (p. 4).

Fram, Miller-Cribbs, and Van Horn (2007) conducted a study of cultural versus structural explanations for race and socioeconomic status in academic achievement gaps. The study examined data from the first two years of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) Kindergarten Study that tracked the educational development of children beginning with their entry into kindergarten in 1998. For the study, Fram, Miller-Cribbs, and Van Horn examined data related to reading skills, child and family variables, and classroom variables. They found that “all of the patterns of difference for high-/low-ethnic minority schools also held true for high-/low-poverty schools, although the magnitude of difference varied” (p.314). Although it is not surprising that these gaps exist, the study drew attention to the fact that “From a social justice perspective...the issue is not so much whether a gap exists, but where, in the multiple layers of a child’s environment, this gap is created and sustained (p.316).

Similarly, Chatterji (2006) studied the reading gaps that exist between different ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic groups of 1st graders. Using the same ECLS data, researchers examined a kindergarten to 1st grade cohort and found that reading gaps increased from kindergarten to 1st grade, and that reading level “was a significant child-level correlate, related to poverty status” (p. 489).

Garcy (2009) studied the relationship between health conditions of children living in high-poverty in Yuma County, Arizona, where the majority of children live in low to moderately low income homes, and the impact of those conditions on their performance on standardized assessments (the Stanford Achievement Test 9). Garcy examined math

achievement because “math learning is less likely to take place in the home and more likely to occur in school” (p. 284). Garcy found “student health is a non-ignorable factor that can be linked to lower and hindered math achievement” (p.306) and it would be unlikely that achievement gaps can be adequately mitigated as long as unequal home and community conditions exist.

Also, looking at the impact of poverty on student achievement in mathematics, Belfanz and Byrnes (2006) followed four cohorts of students from three high-poverty, high-minority communities through the 5th to 8th grades. The premise behind the study was “for many high-poverty students, the middle grades are a period in which achievement gaps become achievement chasms” (p.143). They linked high-poverty to lower participation and readiness for college-preparatory math courses in high school, low math proficiency at the end of eighth grade, and national and international comparisons of student achievement that show minority and high-poverty students falling behind their peers in all desired levels of achievement (p. 144). The study found that without whole-school reform, high-poverty students who enter middle school performing below grade level in math are likely to go into high school unprepared to succeed in challenging courses without substantial help.

School Reform

The issues of inequity and inequality in schools have been a focus of education reformers for decades. During the Reagan era, *A Nation at Risk* (1983) focused attention on the need for higher academic standards, improved professional development for teachers, and increases in course and graduation requirements. Five years later, in 1988, Title I was amended to require states to “document and define levels of academic

achievement for their disadvantaged children (Jennings, 2001). As a result, public school districts were required to annually assess student academic progress on the basis of standardized test scores. Consequently, receipt of ESEA funds began to be based on the achievement of educationally-deprived children (Thomas & Brady, 2005, p. 54).

In 1994, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act attempted to “increase standards and improve the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment in our nation’s schools” (Gamoran, 2007, p. 3). This legislation sought to produce improvements in learning for all students, including those who are historically most marginalized and therefore, at the greatest risk of educational failure. “Goals 2000 was explicit in its inclusive intent that all students should have access to challenging curriculum and instruction aligned with high standards and that all students should be included in assessment processes to ensure schools are meeting their responsibilities (Sailor, 2002, p.32).

Through NCLB (2001), the Bush Administration sought to provide access to a high quality instructional program for all children, regardless of race, ethnicity, or economic circumstances. This included: increasing accountability for results, focusing on research-based best practices, providing better, more consistent instruction, and providing parents with additional choice options when schools and local education agencies fail to do so (Thomas & Brady, 2005). If schools were repeatedly unable to meet performance measures, NCLB compelled districts to:

- reopen the school as a charter school;
- replace all or most of the staff associated with the continuous failure of the school;

- contract with an outside entity to run the school provided the entity has a proven record of running successful schools;
- turn the school over to the state if permitted by law; or
- undertake any other restructuring of the school that makes reform in curriculum, instruction, and/or staffing (No Child Left Behind, 2001).

NCLB (2001) sought to create a learning environment in which 100% of students reached a measure of proficiency in reading and mathematics. However, Rose (2004) reported:

virtually all the research on aspiration and student achievement has found that improvement must be measured against the point at which the student begins; that it is hard work; that it comes unevenly, with significant gains accompanied by plateaus and temporary setbacks; and that improvement requires ongoing effort and commitment. (p. 122)

Rose also asserted that he has yet to find a single person who believes that the 100% goal of NCLB is realistic or achievable, stating, “I realized that NCLB’s AYP calculations doomed the vast majority of schools and virtually every school district...to failure” (p. 125). In fact, in 2011 the Center for Education Policy reported on the large numbers of schools that had failed to make adequate yearly progress, leading U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan to exclaim, “Whether it’s 50%, 80%, or 100% of schools being labeled as failing, one thing is clear: No Child Left Behind is failing” and prompting Jack Jennings, president of the Center for Education Policy, to call for Secretary Duncan to approve waivers to states facing stark penalties as a result. Calling for sweeping changes to the punitive structure of NCLB, Jennings stated, “It needs to be changed. If Congress

can't do it, then the administration is right to move ahead with waivers" (USA Today, 2011).

The Impact of NCLB

Hursch (2007) spoke to the challenges in supporting the impact of NCLB in a study of the law's attempts to "transform publicly funded education from birth to adulthood" (p. 295). The study examined results from the core elements of NCLB: mandatory standardized testing used to evaluate students, teachers, and schools, and the consequences schools face if their test scores do not achieve adequate yearly progress (p. 296) and found:

- adequate yearly progress measures served little other purpose than to punish urban schools;
- standardized tests used to make these judgments carried little reliability or validity to assess student learning; and
- NCLB narrowed curriculum, making it more difficult than ever for teachers to help students to make connections between classroom content and their own lives, interests, or cultures (p. 298).

Bogin and Nhuyen-Hoang (2014) found that when Title I schools failed to meet AYP for two years and were therefore deemed failing, this NCLB designation had the effect of decreasing home values and increasing the stigma associated with living in these high need areas. Although the designation was designed to help communities by opening access to additional resources and supports for these schools, Bogin and Nhuyen-Hoang presented the argument that it did the exact opposite, leading to perpetually poor school performance.

Following a historical review of the federal government's role in public education, Hewitt (2011) detailed the criticisms that came from the lack of fidelity in implementation of NCLB, including that it was "alternately too far-reaching or woefully insufficient to ensure results" (p. 174). NCLB has been implemented more as an approach to educational reform than as a "means to further civil rights principles such as inclusion and equal opportunity" (p. 170). Calling for a review and rewrite of NCLB, Hewitt suggested that a realignment of the law with the intent behind the law could, in fact, lead to the changes it was originally designed to bring, including "bringing the best teachers to the places where the neediest students are concentrated...[and] break[ing] down the artificial barriers that have long meant that a child's educational opportunities are dependent upon his or her zip code, family income, and social status"(p. 194).

In her policy analysis examining social justice narratives embedded within NCLB, Gerstl-Pepin (2006) found it to be "vitaly important for policymakers to acknowledge and value the challenges faced by teachers and staff who serve children" (p. 143) whose families live with the social inequities associated with poverty. Citing Haberman (1995), researchers argue that although educators are often assigned the primary responsibility for the existence of achievement gaps, this view is entirely too simplistic and fails to acknowledge the "contextual disparities in which teachers find themselves" (p.144). The analysis found that while "the NCLB narrative of accountability claims to focus on not leaving children behind...[it] ignores the critical issue of early childhood education (via quality child care) and the often toxic environments in which these children live" (p. 159).

Forte (2010) examined the assumptions underlying the accountability and school improvement requirements stemming from NCLB. These assumptions included:

- Assumption 1: Schools are appropriately identified for improvement status (p.77);
- Assumption 2: Consequences associated with school improvement status are appropriately assigned to and effectively implemented within identified schools (p. 80);
- Assumption 3: School improvement efforts lead to increases in student learning (p. 84).

Forte (2010) dismantles each of these assumptions, which she referred to as the logic behind NCLB policies:

The assumptions underlying the NCLB policy logic hold that schools in need of improvement can be identified via a large-scale algorithm, that pre-established sanctions applied to these schools will lead to their improvement and that these improvements in identified schools will yield increases in student achievement. This argument is compelling for its simplicity and apparent rationality, but its assumptions seem to lack merit (p. 84).

Forte suggested legislators consider: making a commitment through funding to strengthen states' abilities to evaluate quality of service; creating a model that encourages states to evaluate school effectiveness rather than achievement status (most likely through a growth model); and promoting innovation in school improvement, most especially for schools that serve the most challenged students.

NCLB and College Readiness

Although states complied with the federal mandates emerging from the National Commission on Excellence in Education report and from Title I requirements, even in 2015, many of the nation's youth leave school unprepared for the rigors of a college education. Nationally, the percentage of all students who left high school with the skills and qualifications necessary to attend college only increased from 25% in 1991 to 34% in 2002 (Greene & Winters, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006).

In a study of the perspectives of high school dropouts, Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) found students who dropped out of high school, even those who took rigorous courses and got good grades, and despite career aspirations that require education beyond high school, did so because of circumstances in their lives and a lack of social emotional support from the schools and at home.

- 88% had passing grades, with 62% having “C’s and above;
- 58% dropped out with just two years or less to complete high school;
- 66% would have worked harder if expectations were higher;
- 70% were confident they could have graduated from high school;
- 81% recognized that graduating from high school was vital to their success;
- 74% would have stayed in school if they had to do it over again;
- Nearly all of the students had thoughtful ideas about what their schools could have done to keep them from dropping out and would counsel students who are thinking of dropping out not to do so (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Jr., & Morison, 2006).

Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca (2009) focused on the importance of improving college access and readiness for low-income and minority students in urban high schools. Unlike adequate yearly progress standards used to evaluate schools and districts, the study found that standards must be more student specific and must allow schools and districts to frequently assess where their students currently stand and to measure their progress over time. “Districts and states will require new data systems that provide information on the college outcomes of their graduates and link their performance during high school with their college outcomes” before any judgment can be made about how effectively or ineffectively schools prepared students for college (p. 185).

Conley (2003) studied 400 faculty and staff members from 20 research universities in order to identify what students must do to be successful in their first college level classes. Conley found that high school students would be better served developing their habits of mind than they would their specific content knowledge or test scores (p. 8).

The Principal and School Improvement

Although the vast majority of schools, especially Title I schools in Maryland and across the country, have failed to meet benchmarks of AYP, many school leaders have been able to find ways to help their students reach proficiency standards. According to Leithwood, et al. (2004),

Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn in school... While evidence about leadership effects on student learning can be confusing to interpret, much of the existing research actually underestimates its effects. The total (direct and indirect)

effects of leadership on student learning account for about a quarter of total school effects (p.5).

This impact of leadership on learning, especially in high-impact schools, is a focus in this study.

A 2005 Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) funded analysis of 35 years of studies on the impact of school leadership on student academic achievement drew attention to how effective leadership adds value to the classroom experience, both in teaching and learning. In their analysis, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) found that the caliber of leadership in a school can and often does have a dramatic effect on student achievement. Schools that required significant improvement required leaders who were committed to realizing a vision of success for all children and committed to:

- developing a strong leadership team;
- distributing some responsibilities throughout the leadership team;
- selecting the right work;
- identifying the order of magnitude implied by the selected work; and
- matching the management style to the order of magnitude of the change initiative (p. 98).

Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) reported that school leaders, in this case those who demonstrated transformational leadership practices, had a positive effect on organizational conditions and student engagement within a school. While Marks and Printy (2003) found less of an impact on students and schools coming from transformational leadership alone, they did report that when combined with a shared

leadership model, “the influence on school performance, measured by the quality of its pedagogy and the achievement of its students, is substantial.” Roberts (1985) stated:

The collective action that transforming leadership generates empowers those who participate in the process. There is hope, there is optimism, and there is energy. In essence, transforming leadership is a leadership that facilitates the redefinition of people’s mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment, and a restructuring of their systems for goal accomplishment (p. 9).

In their study of the changing nature of leadership, Bass and Avolio (2004) surveyed all levels of managers, students, and project leaders around the world about the qualities and actions that make for an effective leader. Respondents “described leaders who had the greatest influence on them as transformations: inspirational, intellectually stimulating, challenging, visionary, development oriented, and determined to maximize potential (p. 4). According to Perilla (2013/2014), “Enhancing school principal effectiveness in our nation’s lowest performing schools is essential to improving academic achievement...” Likewise, a Wallace Foundation report stated, “to date we have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership” (The Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 9).

Transformational leadership has been found to be positively associated with schools’ innovative climate (Moolenaar, Daly, & Slegers, 2010) and has indirect effects on student academic achievement (Koh, Steers, & Terborg, 2006). Leithwood and Sun (2012) suggested that transformational leadership creates optimal opportunities for individual growth through motivation and that this “has a positive impact on [one’s] ability to achieve more and perform better.” There are a small number of leadership

practices that impact the commitment and effort of leaders and followers toward the achievement of organizational goals, but “the values and aspirations of both leader and follower are enhanced by these practices” (Augspurger, 2014).

Ramalho, Garza, and Merchant (2010) employed an exploratory case-study design to examine principals who had managed to sustain a high level of student achievement in two inner city elementary schools that primarily served low-income Hispanic children between the ages of six and ten. Citing recent data on school achievement, researchers sought to study various factors contributing to or inhibiting progress for these principals who were leading schools that succeeded in meeting state and federal performance standards. The principals in the study were found to have “displayed extraordinary commitment to their schools and students by focusing on student achievement, building efficacy among faculty and staff; and collaborative and trusting relationships” (p. 50). Researchers also reported that “principals and teachers were facing strong internal and external pressure to success, and they were driven by their passion to provide students with multiple opportunities to achieve success” (p. 50).

Hallinger and Heck (2010) examined how collaborative school leadership contributes to school improvement. Specifically, they examined longitudinal data from 198 primary schools during a four-year period in the U.S. that measured teacher perceptions of leadership processes within the school. The researchers concluded that leadership has a small, but statistically significant effect on learning. They further found that the impact of leadership on the school improvement process is highly contextualized. “The type of leadership exercised by the principal and the school’s leadership team must

be linked both to the school's profile of learning results and improvement capacity at any point in time" (p. 106).

Ylimaki (2007) found evidence that suggests that "principals who made a difference in high-poverty schools exhibited similar traits of persistence, empathy, passion, and flexible, creative thinking" (p. 378). Extending on previous research conducted in single nation countries, the study examined successful principals of 13 challenging high schools in the USA, England, and Australia (4 each in the USA and Australia and 5 in England) to identify common practices and traits that made a difference and improved student performance. The study identified a number of common themes across the 13 principals that researchers asserted contributed to the improvement each school demonstrated. In each of these cases, principals:

- demonstrated the will and skill required to develop people, redesign the organization, and manage the instructional program;
- took steps to make the physical space of the school more attractive and safe;
- fostered a school environment that was open to parents and the community;
- promoted professional development and provided individual and collective support for staff; and
- modeled best instructional practices and, when possible, redesigned school structures, policies, and practices to facilitate collaboration and improve school performance (p.377-378).

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) linked leadership with the overall climate of the school, the attitudes of teachers, teachers' classroom practices, and students' opportunities to learn. They emphasized that effective school leadership is essential in any sincere effort at school improvement.

In a study of instructional leadership approaches in four high-performing, high-poverty, culturally diverse schools, Ylimaki (2007) found that the most successful of principals had strong pedagogical knowledge and capacity building skills. According to Ylimaki, these principals sought to create a shared leadership model.

Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, and Brown (2014) compared transformational and instructional leadership theories, examined the impact that school leaders have on student achievement, and determined which leadership practices were associated with increased student achievement. Using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (transformational leadership) and the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (Instructional Leadership), researchers engaged 590 participants from 37 different elementary schools. They found "instructional leadership explained more of the variance in student achievement than did transformational leadership. Principals' leadership style tended to have a meaningful impact on student achievement beyond the impact of school context and principal demographics" (p. 445). They also identified that certain specific principal behaviors "were associated with the highest levels of student achievement: monitor student progress, protect instructional time, provide incentives for learning, provide incentives for teachers, and make rewards contingent" (p. 455).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

A two-staged mixed methods approach was used for the study of the leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools. “Mixed methods is a research approach, popular in the social, behavioral, and health sciences, in which researchers collect, analyze, and integrate both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a sustained long-term program of inquiry to address their research questions” (Creswell, 2013, p. 4). In the debate about qualitative versus quantitative research, arguments for quantitative research suggest that it is superior in that it “often forces responses or people into categories that might not ‘fit’ in order to make meaning...” while “qualitative research, on the other hand, sometimes focuses too closely on individual results and fails to make connections to larger situations or possible causes of the results” (Colorado State University). As a result, current researchers lean toward a mixed-methods approach.

Mixed-methods research is “an approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms. It involves philosophical assumptions, the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixing of both approaches in a study. It is more than collecting and analyzing both kinds of data; it also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of a study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

In defining the core characteristics of mixed methods research Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) stated that the researcher:

- Collects and analyzes both quantitative and qualitative data;
- Mixes the two forms (a) concurrently by combining them, (b) sequentially by having one build on the other, and/or (c) embedding one within the other;
- Gives priority to one or both forms to address the purpose;
- Uses the procedures in a single study or in multiple stages of a program of inquiry;
- Frames the procedures within philosophical worldviews and theoretical lenses; and
- Combines the procedures into specific research designs that direct the plan for conducting the study

Because all methods of data collection have limitations, “the use of multiple methods can neutralize or cancel out some of the disadvantages of certain methods” (Plano Clark & Creswell, *The mixed methods reader*, 2008, p. 164).

Education researchers have increasingly turned to qualitative methods to “make the world visible” by studying things “in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

At its heart, qualitative research involves doing one’s utmost to map and explore the meaning of an area of human experience. If carried out with integrity, this is a process that can result in unique learning both for the person who is the inquirer, and for those who are his or her audience...good qualitative research requires an immersion in some aspect of social life, in an attempt to capture the wholeness of

that experience, followed by an attempt to convey this understanding to others (McLeod, 2001, p. 2).

“Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2007, p. 249). The very nature of qualitative inquiry requires that the researcher be inserted into a particular phenomenon. Creswell (2002) states that the researcher must learn about this phenomenon by asking broad, general questions, collecting the detailed views of participants through words and images, and analyzing the information for patterns, trends, and themes (p.58). “Qualitative analysts return to their data over and over again to see if the constructs, categories, explanations, and interpretations make sense” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 125)

Qualitative research includes the following:

- Natural setting (field focused), a source of data for close interaction
- Researcher as key instrument of data collection
- Multiple data sources in words or images
- Analysis of data inductively, recursively, interactively
- Focus on participants’ perspectives, their meanings, their subjective views
- Framing of human behavior and belief within a social-political/historical context or through a cultural lens
- Emergent rather than tightly prefigured design
- Fundamentally interpretive inquiry-researcher reflects on her or his role, the role of the reader, and the role of the participants shaping the study
- Holistic view of social phenomena (Creswell, 2007, p.38).

Qualitative studies acknowledge and recognize issues of social equity as part of the inquiry process and qualitative research should be used to advance a social justice agenda (Creswell, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The objective of a qualitative study is to capture “the lived experiences of real people in real settings...” and “the qualitative researcher seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living it” (Hatch, 2002, p. 7).

Research Design

This mixed methods study followed a concurrent parallel design (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, and Hanson, 2003). Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) explained that mixing qualitative and quantitative data sets provides a deeper understanding of the problem than had either been used in isolation. In a concurrent parallel design, quantitative and qualitative elements are independent and of equal weight to each other. They happen concurrently and the results are merged during data analysis. According to Plano Clark (2013) concurrent parallel design is an efficient, intuitive approach that allows researchers to “develop a complete picture by synthesizing multiple facets, and to develop valid conclusions by comparing results from different methods” (p. 19).

Figure 3.1 illustrates the concurrent parallel model used in this mixed methods study. The quantitative and qualitative results were integrated “to provide comprehensive and representative insights across the multiple methods” (Plano Clark, 2013, p. 20)

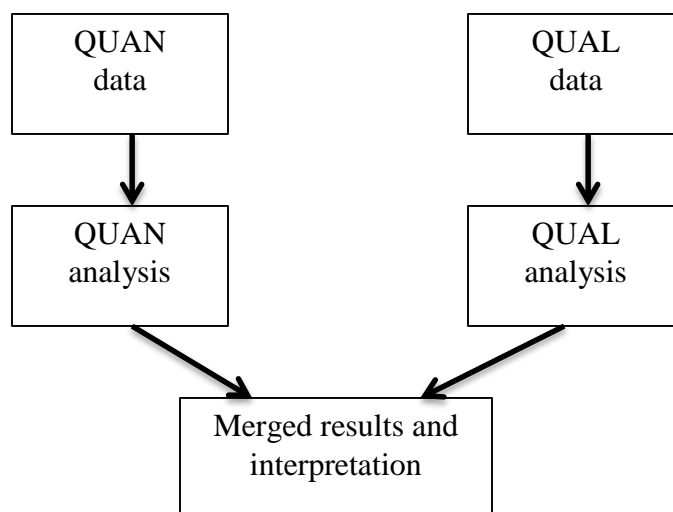


Figure 3.1 Concurrent Parallel Design

The study consisted of administration of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (2004) and a semi-structured interview. The MLQ was used to identify the presence of transformation, transactional, and passive/avoidant leadership traits in participants. The semi-structured interview was administered to each of the study's 25 participants immediately following their completion of the MLQ. I administered the MLQ and the interviews in consultation with and under the supervision of Dr. Marilyn L. Grady.

Research Questions

Using these instruments allowed me to collect data to address the central question of the study: What are the leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools, as well as the following research questions:

- What leadership behaviors are present in principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?

- What values and beliefs are present in the practices of principals in high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?
- What conditions support principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?

Population

Subjects were selected using purposeful sampling. Creswell (2007) suggested the importance of selecting interview participants who are most likely to be open and honest as they share “their story” with the interviewer (p. 133). Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research in identifying information-rich cases for study (Patton, 2002). The process of purposeful sampling involves selecting individuals who are particularly knowledgeable or experienced in the area being studied, who are willing to participate, and who are particularly capable of communicating thoughts and experiences on the subject (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Bernard, 2002). According to Creswell, purposeful sampling helps researchers find a sample population that best helps them develop a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007)

Participants had to be the principal during the year of defined success (2011-2012) and were still the sitting principals of the high-performing Title I schools at the time of their participation in the study (2014-2015). The participant population was drawn from 123 principals of high-performing, high-poverty Title I elementary schools in the state of Maryland. Once district approval was secured, each of these principals was contacted by professional email and given the opportunity to become a participant in the study. One week after the initial email invitation, a follow-up invitation email was sent to those who had not yet responded.

The first 25 principals who respond favorably to the invitation became the subjects of the study. A list of alternate participants was to be kept until all data had been gathered, after which the list was destroyed. Each participating principal was given the opportunity to complete the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and to participate in an interview. This study required a minimum of 25 total participants.

Participants represented six rural, urban, or sub-urban school districts spread out geographically across the state of Maryland. These districts included: Carroll County, Garrett County, Harford County, Kent County, Montgomery County, and Prince Georges County. Each participant had to have served continuously as principal of the identified high-performing, high-poverty elementary school during the period of 2011-2012 to the time of the study.

Instrumentation

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire

In order to measure multiple leadership styles present in individual leaders, Bass and Avolio (2004) developed the full range leadership model which examines the presence of behaviors associated with transformational, transactional, and passive/avoidant (or non-leadership) leadership in subjects. The model suggested that leaders may move across a continuum of leadership styles showing passive/avoidant behaviors when they are being the least effective and transformational behaviors when they are being the most effective.

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was used to measure the presence of these leadership behaviors. The MLQ Leader Form was administered to participants at the time of the interview (Appendix B). The MLQ has been used

extensively in field and laboratory research to study leadership. Bass and Avolio (2004) “have seen a tremendous amount of consistency across raters, regions, and cultures in terms of support” for the full range model (p. 78).

For this study, participants were asked to self-assess how frequently they engaged in transformational, transactional, and/or passive/avoidant leadership behaviors by completing the MLQ Leader Form. Questionnaire results from participants were analyzed to determine the levels of each leadership style most commonly present in these principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools.

MLQ scores can help to account for the varying impact that different types of leaders have on their associates, teams, and organizations. We can quantify the extent of the pattern of leadership of business and industrial managers, military officers, school principals, religious ministers, government administrators, sports coaches, and others whose degree and style of leadership affects associates' satisfaction, team effectiveness, and organizational success (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

The MLQ Leader Form contains 45 items that identify and measure key leadership and effectiveness behaviors shown in prior research to be strongly linked with both individual and organizational success. These behaviors have been organized into categories of transformations, transactional, and passive/avoidant leadership.

According to Bass & Avolio (2004), “for the last 25 years, the MLQ has been the principle means by which we were able to reliably differentiate highly effective from ineffective leaders in our research in military, government, educational, manufacturing, high technology, church, correctional, hospital, and volunteer organizations” (p. 14). In

multiple meta-analyses, Antonakis, Avolio, and Sivasubramaniam (2003) demonstrated that the MLQ Leader Form can validly and reliably represent the full range of leadership. The model correlates transformational behaviors most positively with leader effectiveness. Passive/Avoidant behaviors are negatively correlated with leader effectiveness.

Interviews

Following completion of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, each of the 25 participants engaged in a semi-structured interview that followed a defined protocol (Appendix A). As part of the protocol, “participants are always asked identical questions, but the questions are worded so that responses are open-ended” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed new ideas to be explored as they came up during the interview. Interviews were conducted at a time convenient to each principal.

All participants were recruited from a list of 123 qualified participants generated by a review of 2012 Maryland state records of adequate yearly progress and Title I status (Appendix C). Each candidate received an email regarding the study (Appendix D). One week after the initial email contact, a follow-up email invitation was sent (Appendix E). After accepting the offer for participation and selecting a time and place of their convenience, each candidate was sent a reminder email 48-hours before the interview (Appendix F).

Interviews were recorded digitally using the ALON Dictaphone Application, by ALON Software, which was downloaded onto the interviewer’s smart phone. Permission was requested to record the interview at the beginning of the interview, and the consent

form included a section acknowledging the participant granted permission for recording the interview. The digital recordings were transcribed by a trained individual who signed a Transcript Confidentiality Statement (Appendix G) for storage in both electronic and paper form. Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms to keep participant identities anonymous. The list of names and their pseudonyms will be kept in a locked fire-safe box in my home for three years after my dissertation defense. At that time, they will be shredded. Digital recordings were destroyed immediately after they were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts and Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire responses will be stored in the locked, fire-safe box for three years after my dissertation defense. At that time, they will be shredded. Only Dr. Grady and I will have access to the digital recordings, the transcripts, and the list of pseudonyms.

Ethical Issues

There were no risks associated with the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before interviews began. I adhered to the interview protocol. I traveled to each participant's school to conduct the interview and gather the MLQ data. Participants had the chance to withdraw from the study at any time.

Care was taken to ensure that all participants were aware that participation in the study was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time. Privacy and anonymity of participants was preserved throughout this study. All candidates signed an Informed Consent document (Appendix H) that detailed the proposed level of involvement, listed strategies for data collection, storage, and use, and addressed issues of confidentiality. The University of Nebraska – Lincoln's Institutional Review Board approved the study (Appendix I).

Data Analysis

Interviews

After the interviews were transcribed, I began analysis by rereading all of the information that had been gathered. I analyzed the transcript data using the general steps of qualitative data analysis described by Creswell (2007). These steps included:

1. transcribing interviews from audio to text format.
2. reading through the data in order to get a general sense of the overall meaning of the data.
3. generating codes and themes to organize the material into chunks to help make meaning from the information gathered (Rossman & Rallis, 2013)
4. interpreting the meaning of the themes – According to Creswell (2007), “qualitative research is interpretive research” (p. 177) and the researcher must interpret the meanings of the coded data against “her or his own culture, history and experiences” and compare them “with information gleaned from the literature or theories” (p. 189).

According to Stake (2010), the purpose of coding is to sort data into topics, themes, and other issues deemed important to a study (p. 151). Saldana (2009) defined a code in qualitative inquiry as “most often a word or phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.” It is “the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis” (pp. 3-4).

The interview data were coded and then analyzed for concepts and themes both within and between the interviews. Open coding helps to make sense of the text data,

divide it into segments, label the segments, examine these codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse them into specific themes (Creswell, 2007).

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire

Concurrent to the analysis of transcript data, MLQ data were reviewed (See Appendix J for Instrument License). The MLQ Leader Form measures leadership qualities observed from 32 leadership behaviors that form components of transformational, transactional, or passive/avoidant (*laissez-faire*) leadership. There are several versions of the MLQ available for use to measure key leadership and effectiveness behaviors that have been shown in previous studies to be linked to individual and organizational success, however, according to Bass and Avolio (2004), the MLQ (5X-Long) is more useful for training and coaching purposes than it is for research studies (p. 13).

The MLQ Leader Form instructs participants to respond to each item on the questionnaire using a five point scale 0 = Not at all, 1 = Once in a while, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Fairly often, 4 = Frequently, if not always. Each item on the questionnaire is associated with behaviors associated with transformational, transactional, or passive avoidant leadership. Once each questionnaire was scored, all individual scores were combined to calculate a mean score for the 25 participant group in the aggregate. These scores were compared to the normed data provided in the MLQ Manual and also examined alongside the transcript data to make generalizations about the prevalence of transformational, transactional, or passive/avoidant leadership behaviors found in principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools.

Bass and Avolio (2004) used data sets from nine independent researchers to test the reliability of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) instrument. Data were gathered from business leaders and government agencies from across the United States. This allowed them to examine the generalizability of the instrument. Reliabilities for each leadership factor scale ranged from 0.74 to 0.94.

- Idealized Influence Attributed, 0.86;
- Idealized Influence Behavior, 0.87;
- Inspirational Motivation, 0.91;
- Intellectual Stimulation, 0.90;
- Individual Consideration, 0.90;
- Contingent Reward, 0.87;
- Management-by-Exception Active, 0.74;
- Management-by-Exception Passive, 0.82; and
- Laissez Faire, 0.83 (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999)

Implications

The study findings provide information about the leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools. The findings are useful to principals who face challenges similar to those experienced by the study participants. Study subjects may benefit through learning more about their leadership through completing the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and participating in the interview. Principals may feel satisfaction from contributing to a greater understanding of the leadership behaviors of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools.

Qualitative Data Verification

Creswell (2002) stated that verification is critical in evaluating the quality and trustworthiness of qualitative data. Two verification procedures were used in the study: clarification of researcher reflexivity and triangulation.

Clarification of Researcher Reflexivity

Merriam (1988) focused attention on the need for researchers to be open and clear to readers about any potential biases that may impact the research. I have been a public school educator for 22 years. For 17 of those years, I have been an administrator: two as a central office supervisor of middle and high school alternative programs, four as a middle school principal, and six as a high school principal. As an administrator, I have only served in communities characterized by high levels of poverty, racial diversity, and ethnic diversity. I am committed to eliminating the racial and economic predictability of student achievement in the schools I have led. Understanding the qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools will help to enhance my leadership skills and the skills of other principals.

Triangulation

Denzin (1970) defined triangulation as “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomena” (p. 297). Creswell (2007) stated researchers triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build coherent justification for themes. If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study (p. 208).

The method employed for the study was between-method triangulation, which refers to the gathering of data using more than one independent method. This method usually combines qualitative and quantitative data. In the study, the Multifactor Leadership questionnaire and the interview were used.

Summary

This chapter documented the methods used to conduct the qualitative study of the leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools. Data were collected through interviews with Title I principals representing six school districts in the state of Maryland. Participants also completed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire to measure their propensities towards transformational, transactional, and/or passive avoidant leadership.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools. The central question for the study was: What are the leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?

The sub-questions of the study were:

- What leadership behaviors are present in principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?
- What values and beliefs are present in the practices of principals in high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?
- What conditions support principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?

Descriptive Data

The 25 individuals who participated in the study were principals who led high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools during the year of defined success: 2011-2012 and were still principals at the same school at the time of the study: 2014-2015. The participants represented six geographically diverse districts from Maryland. The districts were: Kent County and Garrett County (rural); Harford County and Carroll County (suburban); and Montgomery County and Prince Georges County (urban). Figure 4.1 illustrates the percentage of participants in the study who were from rural, suburban, or urban school districts. Figure 4.2 illustrates the school districts the participants represented.

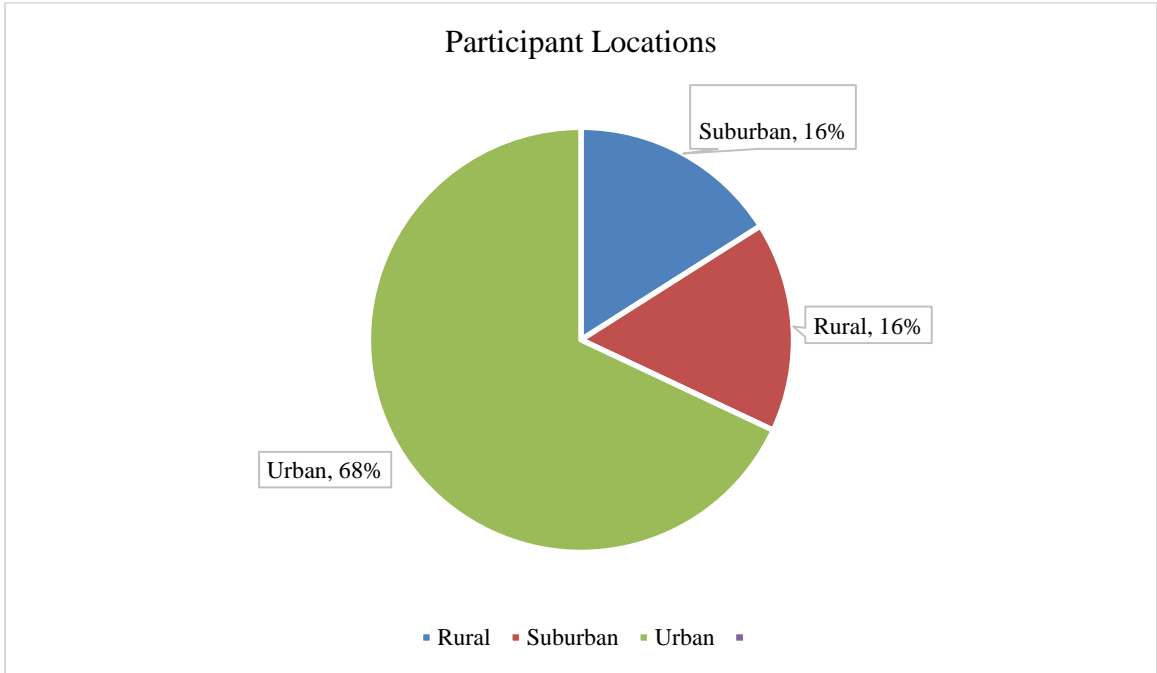


Figure 4.1 Participant Locations

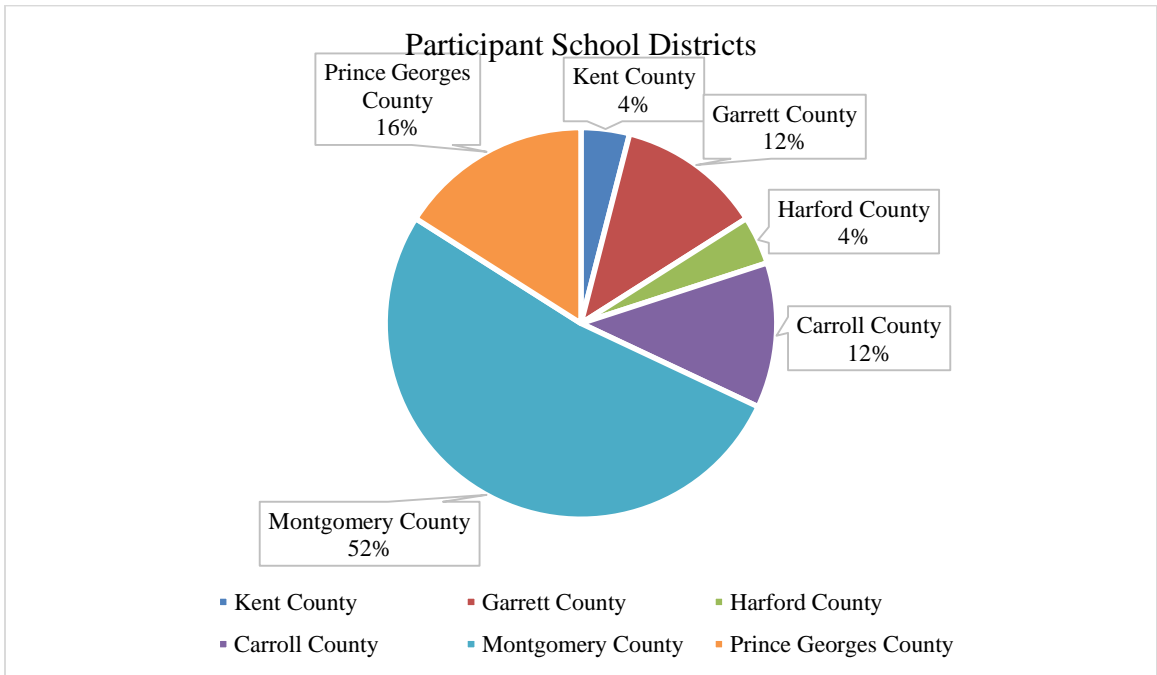


Figure 4.2 Participant School Districts

Quantitative Data Analysis

The first part of the study required the administration of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Leader Form (see Appendix A). MLQ responses were organized into nine leadership behaviors: Idealized Influence Attributed; Idealized Influence Behavior; Inspirational Motivation; Intellectual Stimulation; Idealized Consideration; Contingent Reward; Management-by-Exception Active; Management-by-Exception Passive; and Laissez Faire. These leadership behaviors were categorized into the leadership styles with which they were each associated. The leadership styles were: Transformational, Transactional, and Passive/Avoidant.

The MLQ was administered to each of the 25 principal participants (see Appendix K for individual participant results). The questionnaire was designed to take no longer than 15 minutes to complete, however participants were given as much time as they needed to respond to all items. Participants responded to each of 45 items on the questionnaire using a five-point scale: 0 = Not at all, 1 = Once in a while, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Fairly often, 4 = Frequently, if not always.

Each item on the questionnaire is associated with one of nine leadership behaviors and each of these is associated with transformational, transactional, or passive avoidant leadership (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire – Leadership Behaviors by Leadership Style

Leadership Behavior	Leadership Style
Idealized Influence – Attributed	Transformational
Idealized Influence – Behaviors	Transformational
Inspirational Motivation	Transformational
Intellectual Stimulation	Transformational
Individualized Consideration	Transformational
Contingent Reward	Transactional
Management-by-Exception Active	Transactional
Management-by-Exception Passive	Passive/Avoidant
Laissez-faire	Passive/Avoidant

(Bass & Avolio, 2004)

Leaders were classified as possessing more or less of a transformational, transactional, and passive/avoidant leadership style based on the scores they reported in the leadership behavior areas associated with each category. According to MLQ results, in this study individual participants and the group as a whole possessed more of a transformational leadership style. The grand mean for transformational leadership was 3.468. The grand mean for transactional leadership for this group of participants was 2.41; the grand mean for passive/avoidant leadership, or as Bass and Avolio (2004) called it, “non-leadership,” was 0.808. When scores for each of the 25 study participants were examined in the aggregate, the mean scores ranged from most desirable leadership behavior 3.66 for Idealized Influence Behavior to least desirable leadership behavior 0.62 Laissez Faire (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Leadership Behaviors – Frequency of Average Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Transformational Leadership					
Idealized Influence Attributed (IIA)	25	2.00	4.00	3.1400	.50042
Idealized Influence Behavior (IIB)	25	2.75	4.00	3.6600	.38784
Inspirational Motivation (IM)	25	2.75	4.00	3.6000	.37500
Intellectual Stimulation (IS)	25	2.75	4.00	3.4600	.38649
Individualized Consideration (IC)	25	2.75	4.00	3.4800	.36027
			Grand Mean	3.4680	
Transactional Leadership					
Contingent Reward (CR)	25	2.50	4.00	3.2100	.47697
Management By Exception Active (MBEA)	25	0.25	3.25	1.6100	.86325
			Grand Mean	2.4100	2.410
Passive/Avoidant Leadership					
Management By Exception Passive (MBEP)	25	0.00	2.00	0.9960	.75235
Laissez Faire (LF)	25	0.00	2.50	0.6200	.56881
			Grand Mean	0.8080	

The full range leadership model presented by Bass and Avolio (2004) represents a continuum of individual leadership styles.

The MLQ is not designed to encourage the labeling of a leader as Transformational or Transactional. Rather, it is more appropriate to identify a leader or group of leaders as (for example) more transformational than the norm, or less transactional than the norm (p. 120).

For this reason, individual and collective MLQ scores gathered for the study were compared to the norm table in the MLQ Manual (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

Percentiles for Individual Scores Based on Self Rating MLQ Leader Form

N %tile	IIA	IIB	IM	IS	IC MLQ Scores	CR	MBEA	MBEP	LF
5	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.25	2.00	.25	.25	.00
10	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.5	2.25	.50	.25	.00
20	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.75	2.50	1.00	.50	.25
30	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	3.00	2.75	1.00	.75	.25
40	2.75	3.00	3.00	2.75	3.00	3.00	1.25	.85	.50
50	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.25	3.00	1.50	1.00	.50
60	3.00	3.25	3.25	3.00	3.25	3.25	1.75	1.25	.75
70	3.25	3.25	3.50	3.25	3.50	3.25	2.00	1.25	.75
80	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	2.25	2.00	1.25
90	3.50	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	2.75	2.00	1.25
95	3.75	4.00	4.00	3.75	4.00	3.75	3.00	2.25	1.50

(Bass & Avolio, 2004)

Table 4.4 illustrates the mean score for the group of participants across each of the leadership behaviors measured.

Table 4.4

Leadership Behavior Mean Scores

	IIA	IIB	IM	IS	IIC	CR	MBEA	MBEP	LF
Count	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
Mean	3.140	3.660	3.600	3.460	3.480	3.210	1.610	.996	.620
Std. Deviation	.5004	.3878	.3750	.3865	.3603	.4770	.8633	.7524	.569
%tile	<70 th	<90 th	90 th	>95 th	<80 th	<60 th	<60 th	<50 th	<60 th

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is “a process of influencing in which leaders change their associates’ awareness of what is important, and move them to see themselves and the opportunities and challenges of their environment in a new way (Bass & Avolio, 2004, p. 103). Transformational leaders “convince their associates to strive for higher

levels of potential as well as higher levels of standards...[They are proactive and seek to] optimize individual, group, and organizational development and innovation by capitalizing on the characteristics most associated with transformational leadership are: idealized influence—attributed, idealized influence— behaviors, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Bass & Avolio, 2004, p. 103).

Data support the presence of transformational leadership behaviors in the 25 principals who participated in the study, individually and collectively. The mean score for each attribute or behavior in this leadership category ranged from 3.14 for Idealized Influence Attributed to 3.66 for Idealized Influence Behavior. This was closely followed by Inspirational Motivation; which had a mean score of 3.6 (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

Transformational Leadership Behaviors

	IIA	IIB	IM	IS	IC
N	25	25	25	25	25
Mean	3.1400	3.6600	3.6000	3.4600	3.4800
Median	3.2500	3.7500	3.7500	3.5000	3.5000
Std. Deviation	.50042	.38784	.37500	.38649	.36027
Range	2.00	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25
Minimum	2.00	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75
Maximum	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00

Behaviors associated with Idealized Influence Attributed fairly often to frequently, if not always were exhibited by 20 out of 25 participants. The mean score for this distribution of scores was 3.14 (see Table 4.6), which is between the 60th and 70th percentile on the normed scale (see Table 4.3) provided by Bass and Avolio (2004, p.107). In the category of transformational leadership, this leadership attribute had the lowest mean by nearly half a point. Five participants had average scores in this area at or

below 2.75. In the other four behaviors reflecting transformational leadership, only one or two participants recorded average scores below a 3.00 (fairly often).

Table 4.6

Idealized Influence		Attributed Frequency	
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	2.00	1	4.0
	2.25	2	8.0
	2.50	1	4.0
	2.75	1	4.0
	3.00	4	16.0
	3.25	11	44.0
	3.50	1	4.0
	3.75	2	8.0
	4.00	2	8.0
	Total	25	100.0

(Mean Score = 3.14)

Behaviors associated with Idealized Influence Behavior fairly often to frequently, if not always were exhibited by 24 out of 25 participants. The mean score for this distribution of scores was 3.660 (see Table 4.7), which is between the 80th and 90th percentile on the normed scale (see Table 4.3) provided by Bass & Avolio (2004, p. 107).

Table 4.7

Idealized Influence Behavior Frequency

	Frequency	Percent
Valid 2.75	1	4.0
3.00	3	12.0
3.25	1	4.0
3.50	4	16.0
3.75	6	24.0
4.00	10	40.0
Total	25	100.0

(Mean Score = 3.660)

Behaviors associated with Inspirational Motivation fairly often to frequently, if not always were exhibited by 24 out of 25 participants. The mean score for this distribution of scores was 3.600 (see Table 4.8), which is between the 80th and 90th percentile on the normed scale (see Table 4.3) provided by Bass & Avolio (2004, p. 107).

Table 4.8

Inspirational Motivation Frequency

	Frequency	Percent
Valid 2.75	1	4.0
3.00	1	4.0
3.25	7	28.0
3.50	2	8.0
3.75	6	24.0
4.00	8	32.0
Total	25	100.0

(Mean Score = 3.600)

Behaviors associated with Intellectual Stimulation fairly often to frequently, if not always were exhibited by 23 out of 25 participants. The mean score for this distribution of scores was 3.460 (see Table 4.9), which is between the 70th and 80th percentile on the

normed scale (see Table 4.3) provided by Bass & Avolio (2004, p. 107).

Table 4.9

Intellectual Stimulation Frequency

	Frequency	Percent
Valid 2.75	2	8.0
3.00	3	12.0
3.25	6	24.0
3.50	4	16.0
3.75	6	24.0
4.00	4	16.0
Total	25	100.0

(Mean Score = 3.460)

Behaviors associated with Individualized Consideration fairly often to frequently, if not always were exhibited by 24 out of 25 participants. The mean score for this distribution of scores was 3.480 (see Table 4.10), which is between the 60th and 70th percentile on the normed scale (see Table 4.3) provided by Bass & Avolio (2004, p. 107).

Table 4.10

Individualized Consideration Frequency

	Frequency	Percent
Valid 2.75	1	4.0
3.00	3	12.0
3.25	7	28.0
3.50	4	16.0
3.75	6	24.0
4.00	4	16.0
Total	25	100.0

(Mean Score = 3.480)

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leaders “define[s] expectations and promote[s] performance to

achieve these levels.” Data support the greater presence of contingent reward leadership behaviors than management-by-exception leadership behaviors in the 25 principals who participated in the study. Although participants were more transformational in their leadership, the similarity in mean scores suggests these participants teeter back and forth between transformational and transactional on the leadership continuum (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11

Transactional Leadership Behaviors

	Contingent Reward	Management by Exception Active
N	25	25
Mean	3.2100	1.6100
Median	3.0000	1.5000
Std. Deviation	.47697	.86325
Range	1.50	3.00
Minimum	2.50	.25
Maximum	4.00	3.25

Behaviors associated with Contingent Reward fairly often to frequently, if not always were exhibited by 19 out of 25 participants. The mean score for this distribution of scores was 3.210 (see Table 4.12), which is between the 50th and 60th percentile on the normed scale (see Table 4.3) provided by Bass & Avolio (2004, p. 107).

Table 4.12

Contingent Reward Frequency

	Frequency	Percent
Valid 2.50	4	16.0
2.75	2	8.0
3.00	7	28.0
3.50	7	28.0
3.75	3	12.0
4.00	2	8.0
Total	25	100.0

(Mean Score = 3.210)

Behaviors associated with Management-by-Exception Active fairly often to frequently, if not always were exhibited by 2 out of 25 participants while 17 out of 25 reported exhibiting these behaviors not at all to once in a while. The mean score for this distribution of scores was 1.61 (see Table 4.13), which is between the 50th and 60th percentile on the normed scale (see Table 4.3) provided by Bass & Avolio (2004, p. 107).

Table 4.13

Management-by-Exception Active Frequency

	Frequency	Percent
Valid .25	2	8.0
.50	1	4.0
.75	2	8.0
1.00	3	12.0
1.25	2	8.0
1.50	5	20.0
1.75	2	8.0
2.00	1	4.0
2.50	4	16.0
2.75	1	4.0
3.25	2	8.0
Total	25	100.0

(Mean Score = 1.61)

Passive/Avoidant Leadership

Behaviors associated with passive/avoidant leadership were the least desirable among study participants. Passive/avoidant leaders are reactive. They “avoid specifying agreements, clarifying expectations, and providing goals and standards to be achieved by followers.” Data does not support the presence of passive/avoidant leadership behaviors in the 25 principals who participated in this study individually and collectively. The mean

score for each attribute or behavior in this leadership category ranged from 0.996 for Management-by-Exception Passive to 0.620 for Laissez-faire (see Table 4.14).

Bass and Avolio (2004) defined passive/avoidant leadership as having “a negative effect on desired outcomes—opposite to what is intended by the leader-manager. In this regard it is similar to laissez-faire styles—or “no leadership” (p. 105). The characteristics most associated with passive/avoidant leadership are management by [passive] exception and laissez-faire.

Table 4.14

Passive/Avoidant Leadership Behaviors

	Management by Exception Passive	Laissez Faire
N	25	25
Mean	.9960	.6200
Median	1.0000	.7500
Std. Deviation	.75235	.56881
Range	2.00	2.50
Minimum	.00	.00
Maximum	2.00	2.50

Behaviors associated with Management-by-Exception Passive in the not at all to once in a while range were exhibited by 20 out of 25 participants and 5 out of 25 reported sometimes exhibiting these behaviors. None of the participants reported exhibiting these behaviors fairly often to frequently, if not always. The mean score for this distribution of scores was 0.996 (see Table 4.15), which is between the 40th and 50th percentile on the normed scale (see Table 4.3) provided by Bass & Avolio (2004, p. 107).

Table 4.15

Management-by-Exception Passive Frequency

	Frequency	Percent
Valid .00	4	16.0
.25	3	12.0
.50	3	12.0
.75	2	8.0
1.00	2	8.0
1.15	1	4.0
1.25	1	4.0
1.50	1	4.0
1.75	3	12.0
2.00	5	20.0
Total	25	100.0

(Mean Score = 0.996)

Behaviors associated with Laissez-Faire in the not at all to once in a while range were exhibited by 20 out of 25 participants and 4 out of 25 reported sometimes exhibiting these behaviors. One participant reported exhibiting these behaviors in the sometimes to fairly often range. The mean score for this distribution of scores was 0.620 (see Table 4.16), which is between the 50th and 60th percentile on the normed scale (see Table 4.3) provided by Bass & Avolio (2004, p. 107).

Table 4.16

Laissez-Faire Frequency

	Frequency	Percent
Valid .00	5	20.0
.25	5	20.0
.50	2	8.0
.75	8	32.0
1.00	2	8.0
1.25	1	4.0
1.50	1	4.0
2.50	1	4.0
Total	25	100.0

(Mean Score = 0.620)

Qualitative Data Analysis

Concurrent to quantitative data collection, qualitative data were collected through the administration of a semi-structured interview of each of the study's 25 participants. Interviews were recorded digitally using the ALON Dictaphone Application, by ALON Software, which was downloaded onto the interviewer's smart phone. Permission to record was requested at the beginning of each interview and each participant signed a consent form, which included a section granting permission to record. The interview questions elicited principals' thoughts on their leadership successes and challenges, reflections on how they became the leaders they perceived themselves to be, and finally, consideration of their influence on teaching and learning and the resulting academic achievement of students in their school (see Table 4.17).

Table 4.17

Qualitative Interview Questions

Research Questions (RQ)	Corresponding Interview Questions (IQ)
RQ 1 – What leadership behaviors are present in principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?	IQ 2 – How do you lead the efforts in your school to achieve academic success? IQ 5 – What do you do to maintain student academic success? IQ 11 – What are the most significant changes you have made in the school to ensure student success? IQ 12 – How have you engaged school stakeholders in support of achieving student academic success?
RQ 2 – What values and beliefs are present in the practices of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?	IQ 1 – How do you describe your leadership in the school? IQ 3 – How does your leadership affect teaching and learning in the school? IQ 4 – How do you describe your role in the success of the school? IQ 8 – How do you describe your success as a leader in the school?
RQ 3 – What conditions support principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?	IQ 6 – What educational experiences have influenced your leadership in the school? IQ 7 – What professional development experiences have influenced your leadership in the school? IQ 9 – What life experiences have contributed to your leadership of the school? IQ 10 – What are the leadership challenges in leading the school?

Data Analysis Procedures

Once all of the interviews were conducted, data were analyzed using a process defined by Creswell (2007):

1. Transcribing interviews from audio to text format.
2. Reading through the data in order to get a general sense of the overall meaning of the data.
3. Generating Codes and Themes to organize the material into chunks to help make meaning from the information gathered (Creswell 2007, p. 186).
4. Interpreting the meaning of the themes – According to Creswell (2007), “qualitative research is interpretive research” (p. 177) and the researcher must interpret the meanings of the coded data against “her or his own culture, history and experiences” and compare them “with information gleaned from the literature or theories” (p. 189).

Interview data were transcribed from audio to text format. Digital audio files were uploaded into the Transcribe software (Wreally Studios, 2014) to facilitate the transcription process. I transcribed 16 of the 25 interviews and a trained transcriptionist completed the remaining nine. Confidentiality was assured by securing a Transcriptionist Confidentiality Statement (see Appendix G). Once transcriptions were complete, files were saved into a Microsoft Word document and formatted for consistency.

I listened to the recordings again while re-reading the transcripts to verify accuracy and read through the transcripts again to get a general sense of the overall meaning of the data. Merriam (1988) stated, “Beginning the analysis is as expansive as you want in identifying any segment of data that might be useful; because you are being

open to anything possible, the form of coding is often called open coding” (p. 178). In this study, open coding was used to label chunks of data with a key word or phrase that summarized what the researcher saw in the responses. Codes were examined for similarities and patterns and combined into categories. These categories were examined for similarities and patterns and ultimately were combined into themes.

Qualitative Data

I followed the same protocol in conducting each of the 25 interviews. I began by reviewing the purpose of the study and methods with the participant. Confidentiality of the research procedures were presented to the participants as well. Participants were given the opportunity to review the questions they were going to be asked. This allowed them to ask questions for clarification and to begin to formulate their responses. Participants were reminded that they had given permission to be recorded by signing an Informed Consent form and were explicitly told when the recording began and ended. The interview transcripts were hand coded. Similar codes were matched into categories and categories were examined to determine themes. NVivo 10 software was used to facilitate the process of moving from data to codes to categories to themes and to capture supporting quotes and phrases to support each (see table 4.18).

Table 4.18

Codes to Themes

Codes	Categories	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open communication - Trust - Risk Taking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Freedom to Fail - Trusting Relationships 	Open, risk-free, trusting professional environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration - Distributed Leadership - Shared Decision-making - Professional Learning Community - Team Empowerment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shared Leadership - Collaboration 	Shared leadership and professional collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mentor - Trainer - Coach - Professional Development - Support - Lead Teacher - Feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capacity Building - Training and Development 	Principal as trainer, developer; building others' capacity to do the work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear Vision - Shared Mission and Beliefs - Expectations - Relentlessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear and Common - Shared Vision - High Expectations 	Clearly defined/shared vision of high expectations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plan, Do, Study - Root Cause Analysis - School Improvement Plan - Consistency - Student Learning Objectives - Monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic plan - Thoughtful Data Analysis 	Strategic thinking and planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parental Involvement - Advocacy - Community Resources - Ask for Help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sharing the Work 	Engaging parents and community in the work of the school

Identified Themes

Six themes emerged from the qualitative portion of the study. These included:

1. open, risk-free, trusting professional environment;
2. shared leadership and professional collaboration;
3. principal as trainer, developer; building others' capacity to do the work;
4. clearly defined/shared vision of high expectations;
5. strategic thinking and planning; and
6. engaging parents and community in the work of the school.

Table 4.19 lists each of the identified themes and ranks them in order of the frequency with which each can be found in the 25 transcripts.

Table 4.19

Themes by Rank

Identified Theme	Rank
Open, risk-free, trusting professional environment	First
Shared leadership and professional collaboration	Second
Principal as trainer, developer; building others' capacity to do the work	Third
Clearly defined/shared vision of high expectations	Fourth
Strategic thinking and planning	Fifth
Engaging parents and community in the work of the school	Sixth

Table 4.20 displays the number of participants reflected by their responses in each theme. Each of the six themes was reported by more than 75% of the participants.

Table 4.20

Number of Participants

Identified Theme	# of Principals	% of Principals
Open, risk-free, trusting professional environment	23	92%
Shared leadership and professional collaboration	24	96%
Principal as trainer, developer; building others' capacity to do the work	21	84%
Clearly defined/shared vision of high expectations	25	100%
Strategic thinking and planning	22	88%
Engaging parents and community in the work of the school	19	76%

Table 4.21 includes the number of separate theme-related statements made by participants. With the exception of “Engaging parents and community,” each of the identified themes was referenced between 4-8 times per interview.

Table 4.21

Themes – Frequency Count

Identified Theme	Frequency Count
Open, risk-free, trusting professional environment	211
Shared leadership and professional collaboration	156
Principal as trainer, developer; building others' capacity to do the work	137
Clearly defined/shared vision of high expectations	113
Strategic thinking and planning	107
Engaging parents and community in the work of the school	63

Research Question 1

The first research question focused on the leadership behaviors of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools. Interview questions (IQ) designed to get to address the research questions were:

- IQ 2 – How do you lead the efforts in your school to achieve academic success?
- IQ 5 – What do you do to maintain student academic success?
- IQ 11 – What are the most significant changes you have made in the school to ensure student success?
- IQ 12 – How have you engaged school stakeholders in support of achieving student academic success?

The themes that emerged from these questions were:

- Principal as trainer, developer; building others' capacity to do the work; and
- Strategic thinking and planning.

Principal as trainer, developer; building others' capacity to do the work

Based on the interviews, 21 (84%) of participants demonstrated a belief in the importance of the principal serving as the lead teacher in the school. These principals viewed it as their role to engage in practices that built the capacity of others. They shared actions that reflected the practices of mentoring and coaching, providing professional development, and providing teachers opportunities to reflect on feedback on their instruction. One participant noted:

I think the way I most affect teaching and learning is by creating a sense of urgency. Why are we waiting? Why aren't we making it better, right now? I

don't accept the excuse of poverty. What do we need to do to make things better?

What do we need to learn how to do better?

Another participant summed it up: "I am more of a coach and a teacher and a mentor as opposed to being a leader." A second shared, "I think my key role is to empower others to do their job. And that's how they become successful. And that's how we become successful in the end. I don't believe I can do what they are doing." This principal shared examples of how she provides professional development and real-time, in-classroom support to her teachers to help them be the successes she knows they can be.

Thirteen participants stated the need for teacher training, or at a least heightened awareness of issues related to equity, were a priority. One participant shared efforts to train her staff in equitable instructional practices after years of struggling to close the academic achievement gap in the school.

Our staff has been very involved in equity training outside of the building. That was one of the things that I asked staff to do in order to build capacity...Our staff development teacher has been working very closely with our equity specialists. A second participant, who also was focused on a similar professional development area stated:

I think equity and leadership go hand-in-hand because it's hard for me to say I'm building a relationship and at the same time, I'm going to ignore inequities. You can't. They really go hand-in-hand and I don't know who trumps who, but I do know I have to look with that lens and I have to make sure teachers are scaffolded. You have to scaffold for teachers...so they can then scaffold for students.

The common attention on the lack of cultural proficiency related to issues facing students living in poverty was illustrative of a problem that plagues many marginalized groups: the face of the teacher does not necessarily mirror the face of the student. Principals spoke of the importance of helping teachers take a walk in the shoes of their students to build empathy but also to create an emotional connection to the vision of a brighter future that can only come through education.

Strategic thinking and planning

Based on the interviews, 22 (88%) of participants reported the importance of creating school-wide structures that promote strategic thinking and collaborative planning. Structures included: Instructional Leadership Teams; Core Data Teams; School Improvement Teams; Professional Learning Communities; and the use of Action Plans and strategic monitoring tools.

Participants were consistent in their emphasis on the importance of making data-wise decisions. Mandatory state testing aside, participants had a passion for getting to the root-cause of the schools' achievement deficits. One said,

We ask a lot of why questions. Why do we think our data looks like this? Why do you think that strategy was effective over this strategy? What told you that that was the best strategy to go with for this population? I love to ask questions and you can see people really thinking.

Principals described a wide variety of strategies they have used in ferreting out the root cause of achievement gaps in the school. Strategies included: the fishbone diagram, the five whys, and circle mapping.

Once the root cause has been identified, principals were clear that systemic monitoring of teacher behaviors was the surest way to sustain positive changes in achievement. One principal described an analogy given to her by a staff development teacher who said, “If you want to change student output, you have to first change teacher input. But once you change teacher input, you must also build in quality control processes. That is where strategic monitoring comes in.” Another principal, who also had been in a leadership position in a different career prior to going into education reported her experiences learning about the importance of relentless monitoring:

When I came into the county, [my supervisor] was just a data guru, you know, strategic monitoring tools. You live it. You breathe it. Before you could carry it around with you on a laptop, you printed it out and carried it in a folder, which I still do because as a principal, you are constantly looking at data and sorting data.

This principal brought a systemic monitoring process to her leadership team and has watched scores improve ever since. Her team uses Google Drive to track and monitor data and as a result, “I’m no longer holding their hands.”

A principal discussed moving an instructional leadership team toward a collaborative data monitoring system: “So we would all get in the library and they were looking at the test, and the conversations about the questions were amazing. How would a level one or level two know what this means when it says analyze?” The principal said that prior to implementing this protocol, teachers had been on their own to gather, analyze, and reflect on this. A common protocol streamlined the process and ultimately, at least in this principal’s opinion, led to more focused and impactful instruction.

Another principal said, “The important ingredient to [our] academic success is

monitoring what needs to be done and working with the team. I don't set the goal for them. I might help them find the goal a bit. But I don't set it for them." The focus on building buy-in from staff by requiring them to develop their own work was echoed by other participants as well.

All 22 participants described the importance of having teachers be part of the strategic planning process. The comments included examples of the development of action plans and the promotion of student learning objectives. The state of Maryland requires teachers and principals to demonstrate progress of targeted groups of students through the implementation of student learning objectives (SLO). Sixteen (73%), of the participants required teachers to align SLO's to the goals of the school or to engage in action planning that was reviewed at least annually and in two cases, quarterly.

Research Question 2

The second research question focused on the values and beliefs present in the practices of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools. Interview questions (IQ) designed to address the question were:

- IQ 1 – How do you describe your leadership in the school?
- IQ 3 – How does your leadership affect teaching and learning in the school?
- IQ 4 – How do you describe your role in the success of the school?
- IQ 8 – How do you describe your success as a leader in the school?

The themes that emerged from interview questions were:

- Clearly defined/shared vision of high expectations; and
- Shared leadership and professional collaboration.

Clearly defined/shared vision of high expectations

The 25 (100%) principals reported the importance of a clearly designed, defined, and deployed vision for success that was shared by school stakeholders and characterized most directly by the creation of a culture of high expectations for students and staff. In the words of one principal,

All of the kids in this building are mine. I often joke that I claim some of them on my taxes...I'm on the teachers' side; they're on my side. I'm on the kid side. I'm on the family side. We're all in this together.

Success in schools must be about having a grounded belief system about teaching and learning throughout the organization. According to one principal, "My success as a principal can be traced back to being able to clearly communicate a consistent, collaborative vision for the school." This principal noted that prior to her arrival, there had been low morale and high levels of student failure. Large numbers of students were reading well below grade level and teacher accountability was non-existent. This resulted in high levels of staff dissatisfaction and ultimately turnover. Since implementing strategies specifically designed to "convert teachers from a fixed to a growth mindset," the principal reported sizable gains in achievement, a better climate, and little staff change. She was aware though that her building has some hold-outs who "long for the days of the Wild West," but she is happy with how far they have come. "I didn't make a lot of friends my first few years here, and some people have really good memories...So nine years later, they still remember, but they have stayed, and they have gotten better results."

In speaking about the challenges of collective visioning and “making sure you have the right people on the bus,” one principal said,

I think the challenge has been keeping people focused and when there is someone who really does not share the vision, working with that individual to try to bring that individual around...But when that doesn't work, you have to go through the process of helping that teacher find some other place to work.

The principal stated she was confident that she and the school are on the right track. They are “doing the right thing” by holding teachers personally accountable for the achievement in classrooms.

They know exactly what they need to do and they have very clear responsibilities during the day and during the school year...There is no excuse for letting anyone fall through the cracks...You are going to track the data from the start.

Principals acknowledged expectations must be clear and explicit. According to one, “The expectations are not only articulated visually, we put them in writing, and every teacher has a copy of them. We refer back to them during the school year when we meet with teams for data meetings and data chats.” A principal noted discontent at the number of teachers who presented student learning goals that aimed for 50% proficiency or less. She noted her contempt for the teacher who presented a goal that could be called successful if 12 of 60 students were able to meet standards. “I do not accept that...that's simply not acceptable. We have to get to a point where we say the majority of our kids are going to make it; and we believe it.” This principal aggressively pursued opportunities to reject any expectations lower than her own.

Those personal conversations with people as they are doing their SLO's have been a golden opportunity for staff to figure out what is really important to me. I will never lose sight of the importance of academic achievement for these kids, ever. It comes back to every conversation that we have

Shared leadership and professional collaboration

Based on the interviews, 24 (96%) of the participants noted the importance of leading an environment that is participatory and distributed and that reflects a school-wide culture of collaboration and professional respect. Each principal demonstrated this in how decision-making teams, professional learning communities, and committees, were structured.

One participant stated:

What I've learned over time is that if you build up a good team around you and you have them understand what you are after basically, you will certainly do a tremendous amount of work, but if you set it up properly, the others will share that work with you. And I think that's really been one of the cornerstones of my work here.

A principal spoke of the importance of collaboration in the creation of a school wide vision,

We needed to re-create a vision of where we wanted to go, and we needed that direction to be changed... We have worked together as a team to create a vision that includes a lot of coaching from me, from the assistant principal, from other teachers... we just support and mentor each other. We stick with each other and we stand by each other.

Every principal made noted the teams of professionals in their buildings who were committed to collaborating for the betterment of students. Professional learning communities (PLC's) were cited by 19 as a strategy used to build collaboration among teachers, to help balance planning and grading, and for examination of achievement data in a manner that could have a direct impact on instruction.

All 24 principals referenced having a shared decision-making body. For some, it was a core team of individuals who included assistant principals, professional developers, and reading specialists. For others, more comprehensive teams included content specialists, parents, and central office professionals. One principal said, "I like that I don't have to know how to do everything. I have a team of professionals on my team. They have been hired to do a job. My job is to help make that happen." Two principals reported how grateful they were to have the flexibility in their budgets to hire Title I specialists for behavior, literacy, and math interventions. One said, "I am 100% certain that we would not be where we are today without them. I hire good people and I get out of their way."

I feel like I depend on strong people who know how to implement plans and who have great ideas regarding the curriculum and the programming; strong people who know about discipline and building relationships. I work hard to bring the best and brightest to my school and to empower them to teach our students and lead our school to greatness.

Principals stated there were a variety of decision-making modalities they follow. They seek consensus, but five principals emphasized the importance of being clear when the team is providing input that the principal was going to be making the decision.

Research Question 3

The third research question focused on the conditions supporting principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools. Interview questions (IQ) designed to address the question were:

- IQ 6 – What educational experiences have influenced your leadership in the school?
- IQ 7 – What professional development experiences have influenced your leadership in the school?
- IQ 9 – What life experiences have contributed to your leadership of the school?
- IQ 10 – What are the leadership challenges in leading the school?

The themes that emerged from the interviews were::

- Open, risk-free, trusting professional environment; and
- Engaging parents and community in the work of the school.

Open, risk-free, trusting professional environment

Based on the interviews, 23 (92%) of participants described their need to create and work in an environment that promoted informed risk-taking, fostered a “no-fault” environment for staff who wanted to try something new “for the good of the group,” and characterized by the presence of trusting relationships between and among teaching staff and school administration. “I have an open door. I’m open and I’m here to serve.” One principal said, “It is very important for me to send the visuals...People need to see me as someone who is here to serve their needs...[I want them to say] she’s ready to really roll up her sleeves to really do what we do.”

Another principal stated,

I value the relationships I have [with my staff] wholeheartedly, professional and personal...particularly because I've been in the trenches. So I can speak to exactly what they are doing and I can speak and I can model, and I can coach. I can direct, and I can do all those things and stand firmly that I've been where you have been and I understand what you are doing. I feel very blessed to be here.

Regarding teacher reactions to mandated public data chats, one principal noted the need to change teachers' mindsets that data chats are "hidden gotchas." She described her belief that the only way the organization was going to improve was if they created an environment in which honest conversations about data were the norm.

At first they were wary of it, but once we started having data chats around the table, they were scheduled data chats and they saw the worth and the progress from quarter-to-quarter; that was exciting...they were excited about the growth they saw.

Phrases such as, "I encourage them to try out new ideas in their roles and we have a no fault atmosphere here..." were frequent during the interviews. One principal stated the importance of being explicit about the expectation that staff take well-informed risks this way: "I expect them to take their job and run with it. And that means trying this, and trying that, and failing. Okay. But you tried and I appreciate that."

Engaging parents and community in the work of the school

Based on the interviews, 19 (76%) of participants reported a desire for significant and meaningful involvement in the school's improvement efforts by parents and other members of the community. Although principals reported parental involvement to be a significant challenge, the principals stated a belief that student achievement improves

significantly when parents are provided opportunities to become involved in the education of their children.

One principal noted that she has struggled to get parents to serve on the school improvement team. “There is rarely a lack of parents to come forward when I ask for food to be baked for an event or child-care for a meeting...Now if I could only get them to attend the meeting itself.” Another principal described a perspective echoed by three other principals. “I would really love to have a parent, community coordinator here full time. I need support.” These principals work in a district that has paid personnel to reach out to families, help them navigate school bureaucracies, and facilitate workshops to aid in the development of parenting skills. According to one principal, these coordinators are not allocated from the district to Title I schools because Title I money can be used to hire someone to perform these tasks. Each of these principals reported that competing priorities kept this from happening on a practical level.

One principal described efforts to engage parents. She tried to “break down that protective barrier” that some in her parent community hide behind. “I say to them that I have high expectations for your child and I am going to work really hard with you to get him from this point to that point, but I need your help.” Another principal cited the “harsh reality that many of our parents didn’t like school, weren’t good students themselves, or just don’t trust us.” A principal described a telephone call to a parent as, “Let me describe what happened today,” rather than “Here is what Johnny did wrong.” The principal noted that by tapping into parents as a resource by asking for advice on how best to approach their child on discipline matters, she has found parents more willing to volunteer in the classroom and to try to help their kids at home.

Another principal said she had to seek out opportunities to build parental trust. This involved frequent visits to local businesses, home visits to families, and assurances that she was not going to leave in a year or two, “like the last three principals” had.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe the leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools. The central question for the study was: What are the leadership qualities of principals of high-performance, high-poverty elementary schools?

The sub-questions of the study were:

- What leadership behaviors are present in principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?
- What values and beliefs are present in the practices of principals in high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?
- What conditions support principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?

A mixed-methods approach was used to gather data from 25 Maryland principals of schools identified as high-performing and high poverty during the 2011-2012 school year. Participants had to be the principal during the year of defined success (2011-2012) and were still the principal of the school at the time of participation in the study (2014-2015).

Each participant was administered the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to identify their transformation, transactional, and passive/avoidant behaviors.

Findings

Results from both the quantitative and qualitative components of the parallel designed mixed-methods study were merged to develop findings. Based on the analysis of MLQ data and the interview transcripts, the following findings emerged:

- Finding 1. Principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools are more transformational in their leadership behaviors than they are transactional or passive avoidant.
- Finding 2. Principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools share leadership and create opportunities for professional collaboration.
- Finding 3. Principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary school encourage strategic thinking and planning to achieve school goals.
- Finding 4. Principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools view themselves as trainers and developers who build others' capacity to do the work.
- Finding 5. Principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools create open, risk-free, trusting professional environments.
- Finding 6. Principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools have a clearly defined, articulated, and shared vision categorized by high expectations.
- Finding 7. Principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools seek ways to engage parents and the community in the work of the school.

Conclusions

The major contribution of this research to the existing body of literature is the identification of the behaviors, values and beliefs, and school conditions that were reported by the principals of the high-performing, high-poverty schools.

The central question of the study was: What leadership qualities are present in principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools. The research questions were:

- What leadership behaviors are present in principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?
- What values and beliefs are present in the practices of principals in high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?
- What conditions support principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools?

The study revealed that principals were more transformational in their leadership behaviors than they were transactional or passive avoidant; shared leadership and created opportunities for professional collaboration; encouraged strategic thinking and planning to achieve school goals; viewed themselves as trainers and developers who built others' capacity to do the work; created open, risk-free, trusting professional environments; had a clearly defined, articulated, and shared vision categorized by high expectations; and sought ways to engage parents and the community in the work of the school.

Recommendations

The findings of the study may be useful to principals who face challenges similar to those experienced by the study participants. Principals in the study may have benefitted from learning about their leadership by completing the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and through participating in the interview. The principals in the study may experience satisfaction from contributing to a greater understanding of the leadership behaviors of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools.

Recommendation 1:

A cost efficient, reliable instrument that can be used in the measurement of leadership qualities of candidates for principal positions in high-poverty schools may be useful. This instrument should be grounded in the principles of transformational leadership and responsive to challenges school leaders experience.

Recommendation 2:

The emphasis on the development of transformational leadership behaviors is a critical step in preparing future leaders. This is one recommendation for high-poverty, low-performing schools.

Recommendation 3:

Principal professional learning communities could provide a problem solving, experience rich forum for principals. Principal PLCs as a strategy may make the work of the principal “less lonely.”

Recommendations for Future Research

1. The findings of a longitudinal study to track the academic performance of the students educated in these high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools during the timeframe of the study would be a contribution to the understanding of the possibilities that exist for a vulnerable population of students. At the time of the study, the measure of adequate yearly progress was tied to attendance, reading levels, and math proficiency. Such measures still exist and as a study progressed, can also be tied to graduation rates (four-year and five-year cohorts), SAT/ACT scores, enrollment and performance in Advanced Placement courses, and college admissions. These findings would provide further evidence supporting the

importance of identifying principals who possess the leadership qualities described in this study.

2. A multiple case study exploring the relationship between personal childhood learning experiences and the decision to become a school leader would be an important contribution to the study of principals. The findings may illuminate why certain principals are able to be more effective than others in leading high-poverty schools.
3. At the time of this writing, Congress was on the verge of replacing the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) with the Every Child Achieves Act of 2015. This has created an opportunity to examine the effect NCLB has had on principal leadership. Has NCLB enhanced or inhibited principal leadership? What role has NCLB played in determining whether principals demonstrated transformational, transactional, or passive/avoidant leadership behaviors?

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APPENDIX A

MULTIFACTOR LEADERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE SAMPLE

For use by Marc Cohen only. Received from Mind Garden, Inc. on August 8, 2014

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire

Leader Form

My Name: _____ Date: _____

Organization ID #: _____ Leader ID #: _____

This questionnaire is to describe your leadership style as you perceive it. Please answer all items on this answer sheet. If an item is irrelevant, or if you are unsure or do not know the answer, leave the answer blank.

Forty-five descriptive statements are listed on the following pages. Judge how frequently each statement fits you. The word "others" may mean your peers, clients, direct reports, supervisors, and/or all of these individuals.

Use the following rating scale:

Not at all	Once in a while	Sometimes	Fairly often	Frequently, If not always
0	1	2	3	4

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I provide others with assistance in exchange for their efforts | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I re-examine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I fail to interfere until problems become serious | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I focus attention on irregularities, mistakes, exceptions, and deviations from standards | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. I avoid getting involved when important issues arise | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. I talk about my most important values and beliefs | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. I am absent when needed | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. I seek differing perspectives when solving problems | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. I talk optimistically about the future | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. I instill pride in others for being associated with me | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. I discuss in specific terms who is responsible for achieving performance targets | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. I wait for things to go wrong before taking action | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. I talk enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. I specify the importance of having a strong sense of purpose | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. I spend time teaching and coaching | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Continued →

Not at all	Once in a while	Sometimes	Fairly often	Frequently, If not always
0	1	2	3	4

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. I make clear what one can expect to receive when performance goals are achieved | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 17. I show that I am a firm believer in "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 18. I go beyond self-interest for the good of the group | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How do you describe your leadership in the school?
2. How do you lead the efforts in your school to achieve academic success?
3. How does your leadership affect teaching and learning in the school?
4. How do you describe your role in the success of the school?
5. What do you do to maintain student academic success?
6. What educational experiences have influenced your leadership in the school?
7. What professional development experiences have influenced your leadership in the school?
8. How do you describe your success as a leader in the school?
9. What life experiences have contributed to your leadership of the school?
10. What are the leadership challenges in leading the school?
11. What are the most significant changes you have made in the school to ensure student success?
12. How have you engaged school stakeholders in support of achieving student academic success?

APPENDIX C

2011-2012 MARYLAND TITLE I ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS THAT MADE AYP

Adelphi Elementary	Crellin Elementary	Grantsville Elementary	Monocacy Elementary	Seat Pleasant Elementary
Battle Grove Elementary	Cresthaven Elementary	Green Holly Elementary School	Mt Hope/Nanjemoy Elementary School	Shady Spring Elementary
Bay View Elementary	Deep Creek Elementary	Greensboro Elementary School	Mt Rainier Elementary	Snow Hill Elementary
Beacon Heights Elementary	Deer Park Elementary	Greenwood Elementary School	New Hampshire Estates Elem	South Penn Elementary
Beall Elementary	Delmar Elementary	Guilford Elementary	North Bend Elementary	Stevens Forest Elementary
Bear Creek Elementary	Dodge Park Elementary	H. H. Garnett Elementary	North East Elementary	Summit Hall Elementary
Berkshire Elementary	Dogwood Elementary	Harmony Hills Elementary	Northeast Elementary	Sussex Elementary
Bladensburg Elementary	East Salisbury Elementary	Havre De Grace Elementary	Oak View Elementary	Talbot Springs Elementary
Broad Acres Elementary	Eastport Elementary	Hilltop Elementary	Owings Mills Elementary	Taneytown Elementary
Brown Station Elementary	Elmwood Elementary	Hilton Elementary	Park Elementary	Templeton Elementary
Bryant Woods Elementary	Eva Turner Elementary School	Holly Hall Elementary	Phelps Luck Elementary	Tyler Heights Elementary
Buckingham Elementary	Forest Heights Elementary	Jackson Road Elementary	Pocomoke Elementary	Victory Villa Elementary
Burnt Mills Elementary	Freetown Elementary	Johnnycake Elementary	Powhatan Elementary	Viers Mill Elementary
Calverton Elementary	Friendsville Elementary	Langley Park/Mccormick Elementary	Princess Anne Elementary	Walter S. Mills - Parole Elementary
Calvin M. Rodwell Elementary	G. Lisby Elementary At Hillsdale	Lansdowne Elementary	Randallstown Elementary	Washington Grove Elementary
Carmody Hills Elementary	Galena Elementary School	Laurel Woods Elementary	Ridgely Elementary School	Weller Road Elementary
Cash Valley Elementary	George Washington Carver Elementary	Lewisdale Elementary	Robert Frost Elementary	West Salisbury Elementary
Cecil Manor Elementary	George's Creek Elementary	Lincoln Elementary	Robert Moton Elementary	Westernport Elementary
Cesar Chavez Elementary	Georgetown East Elementary	Logan Elementary	Robert R. Gray Elementary	Wheaton Woods Elementary
Chadwick Elementary	Germantown Elementary	Mars Estates Elementary	Rock Hall Elementary	White Marsh Elementary
Charles H. Chipman Elementary	Gilpin Manor Elementary	Martin Boulevard Elementary	Rolling Terrace Elementary	Woodmoor Elementary
Charlesmont Elementary	Gladys Noon Spellman Elementary	Mary Ann Winterling Elementary At Bentalou	Roscoe R Nix Elementary	Woodridge Elementary
Church Lane Elementary Technology	Glen Haven Elementary	Meade Heights Elementary	Sandalwood Elementary	Woodside Elementary
Colgate Elementary	Glenridge Elementary	Milbrook Elementary	Sandy Plains Elementary	Yough Glades Elementary

APPENDIX D

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE – EMAIL

Date:

Dear Principal:

As a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, I am conducting a study of the leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools. This study has been approved by The University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Institutional Review Board.

You are invited to participate in this research because you have been identified as a sitting principal of a high-performing, high-poverty elementary school. Included in the study is an interview that may require up to sixty minutes of your time. The location and time of this interview will be at your convenience.

At the heart of the role of the public school principal, is the challenge of creating a learning environment that provides high quality educational programming and instruction to all students regardless of their economic circumstances and in spite of strong correlations between socioeconomic status and academic performance. Principals have a direct effect on the kind of instruction teachers provide. As instructional leaders, successful principals exercise their influence on teaching and learning by committing fiscal resources, human and material, to mitigating the institutional barriers faced by children living in poverty.

If you are willing to discuss your leadership of a high-performing, high-poverty elementary school, please reply to this email and indicate times that would be convenient for the interview.

Thank you for considering our request. If you have questions, please contact us at any time.

Sincerely,

Marc J. Cohen, M.S.
Doctoral Candidate
University of Nebraska, Lincoln
Department of Educational Administration
marcjcohen@verizon.net
240-372-8542

Marilyn Grady, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Educational Administration
Mgrady1@unl.edu
402-472-0974

APPENDIX E

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE – FOLLOW UP EMAIL

From: Marc J. Cohen, marcjcohen@verizon.net

Recipient: Principals of high-performing, high poverty Maryland elementary schools

Subject: Leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools

Date

Dear Principal:

You recently received an email from me inviting you to participate in a dissertation study of leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools. You are invited to participate in this research because you have been identified as a sitting principal of a high-performing, high-poverty elementary school. This study has also been approved by The University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Institutional Review Board.

At the heart of the role of the public school principal, is the challenge of creating a learning environment that provides high quality educational programming and instruction to all students regardless of their economic circumstances and in spite of strong correlations between socioeconomic status and academic performance. Principals have a direct effect on the kind of instruction teachers provide. As instructional leaders, successful principals exercise their influence on teaching and learning by committing fiscal resources, human and material, to mitigating the institutional barriers faced by children living in poverty.

If you are willing to discuss your leadership of a high-performing, high-poverty elementary school, please reply to this email and indicate times that would be convenient for the interview.

Thank you for considering our request. If you have questions, please contact us at any time.

I look forward to learning about the efforts of your district to close the achievement gap. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at marcjcohen@verizon.net or my doctoral advisor, Dr. Marilyn Grady at mgrady1@unl.edu.

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW REMINDER - EMAIL

Email Reminder

Participation in Research Project

Leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools

Date:

Dear Principal:

This is to confirm the date, time and place for the interview we scheduled regarding your leadership of a high-performing, high-poverty elementary school.

Date: _____

Time: _____

Place: _____

I'm looking forward to visiting with you. If this is no longer a convenient time for you, please contact me at marcjcohen@verizon.net and we can arrange a more convenient time.

Thanks,

Marc J. Cohen, M.S.

Doctoral Student

University of Nebraska, Lincoln

APPENDIX G

TRANSCRIPTIONIST CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Statement

I, _____ (name of transcriptionist), agree to hold all information contained on audio recorded tapes and in interviews received from Marc Cohen, primary investigator for “Leadership Qualities of Principals of High-performing, High-poverty Elementary Schools,” in confidence with regard to the individuals and institutions involved in the research study. I understand that to violate this agreement would constitute a serious and unethical infringement on the informant’s right to privacy. I also certify that I have completed the CITI Limited Research Worker training in Human Research Protections.

Signature of Transcriptionist

Date

Signature of Primary Investigator

Date

APPENDIX H

IRB INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

IRB INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools

This research project seeks to describe the leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools. Information gathered will be reported in a dissertation, journal articles and presentations at professional meetings. You are invited to participate in this research because you have been identified as a principal of a high-performing, high-poverty elementary school.

Included in the study is an interview which will require no longer than sixty minutes of your time. Additionally, all participants will be asked to complete the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire which has been designed to take no longer than fifteen minutes to complete. The location and time of this interview will be at your convenience. The interview will be audio taped to ensure all responses are recorded. All digital recordings will be transcribed verbatim by a trained transcriptionist. Only the Principal Investigator and the Secondary Investigator will have access to the digital recordings. All digital recordings will be destroyed once the transcripts have been made.

There are no known risks involved in participating in the study. Transcripts will be stored in a locked, fire-safe box in the investigator's home for three years after which they will be shredded. Transcripts will only be seen by the investigators. The information obtained in this study may be published in education journals or presented at professional meetings.

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may call the investigator at any time, phone number (402) 372-8542, or Dr. Marilyn Grady at (402) 472-0974. Please contact the investigator if you want to voice concerns or complaints about the research or in the event of a research related injury.

Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 for the following reasons: you wish to talk to someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant; to voice concerns or complaints about the research; to provide input concerning the research process; or in the event the study staff could not be reached.

You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise



entitled.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study.

_____ Please initial here indicating that you agree to be audio recorded for this study.

Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Printed Name of Research Participant

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Marc J. Cohen, M.S.
Doctoral Candidate
University of Nebraska, Lincoln
Department of Educational Administration
marcjcohen@verizon.net
240-372-8542

Marilyn Grady, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Educational Administration
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APPENDIX I

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



November 11, 2014

Marc Cohen
Department of Educational Administration

Marilyn Grady
Department of Educational Administration
128 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20141114620 EX

Project ID: 14620

Project Title: Leadership qualities of principals of high-performing, high-poverty elementary schools

Dear Marc:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as Exempt Category 2.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Exemption Determination: 11/11/2014.

1. Your stamped and approved informed consent document has been uploaded to NUgrant (file with "Approved.pdf" in the form files). Please use this document to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes to the informed consent document, please submit the revised document to the IRB for review and approval prior to using it.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- * Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- * Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- * Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- * Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- * Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to

the Board. If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965. Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman, CIP for the IRB



Becky R. Freeman

APPENDIX J

MLQ INSTRUMENT LICENSE

For use by Marc Cohen only. Received from Mind Garden, Inc. on October 2, 2014



www.mindgarden.com

To whom it may concern,

This letter is to grant permission for the above named person to use the following copyright material for his/her research:

Instrument: *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire*

Authors: *Bruce Avolio and Bernard Bass*

Copyright: *1995 by Bruce Avolio and Bernard Bass*

Five sample items from this instrument may be reproduced for inclusion in a proposal, thesis, or dissertation.

The entire instrument may not be included or reproduced at any time in any published material.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Most", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert Most
Mind Garden, Inc.
www.mindgarden.com

APPENDIX K

MULTIFACTOR LEADERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANT RESULTS

	IIA	IIB	IM	IS	IC	CR	MBEA	MBEP	LF
Subject 1	3.25	3	3.25	3.25	3.25	3	1.5	2	0.75
Subject 2	3.75	4	4	3.5	3.75	3.75	2	0.75	0.75
Subject 3	3	3.75	3	3.75	3.75	2.5	1.25	0.25	1.25
Subject 4	3	4	2.75	3.75	3	2.5	1	0.25	0
Subject 5	3	3	3.25	3	3.5	3	1.25	1.5	1
Subject 6	2	4	4	3.5	4	3	1.5	0	0
Subject 7	3.25	3	3.25	3.25	3.25	3	1.5	2	0.75
Subject 8	3.25	4	3.25	3.25	3	3	2.5	0.5	0.25
Subject 9	3.25	3.75	4	3.75	3.75	3.5	2.5	1.75	0.25
Subject 10	3.25	4	3.75	3.75	3.25	2.75	1	1	0.75
Subject 11	4	4	4	3.5	4	4	0.25	1.15	0
Subject 12	3.25	2.75	3.25	3	3.25	2.75	2.75	2	1.5
Subject 13	2.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.5	3.25	0.75	0
Subject 14	3.75	3.5	3.25	3.5	3.75	3	3.25	1	0.25
Subject 15	2.5	3.75	4	4	3.75	2.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Subject 16	3.25	3.5	3.75	2.75	3	3.5	1.5	0	0.75
Subject 17	3.25	4	4	3.75	4	3.75	1	2	0.5
Subject 18	3.25	3.75	3.75	4	3.25	3.5	1.75	0.25	0.25
Subject 19	3.25	3.75	3.5	3.25	3.5	3.5	0.25	1.25	1
Subject 20	3.25	4	3.75	3	3.75	3.5	1.75	2	0.75
Subject 21	3.5	4	4	3.75	3.5	3.75	2.5	1.75	2.5
Subject 22	2.75	3.5	3.75	2.75	2.75	2.5	1.5	0	0.25
Subject 23	3	3.5	3.75	4	3.5	4	2.5	1.75	0.75
Subject 24	2.25	3.75	3.5	3.25	3.25	3.5	0.75	0.5	0.75
Subject 25	4	4	4	4	4	3	0.75	0	0