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Principals' Practices Contributing to the Attainment of Adequate Yearly Progress in Georgia

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PRINCIPALS' PRACTICES CONTRIBUTING TO THE ATTAINMENT OF

ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS IN GEORGIA

by

SEAN MICHAEL CALLAHAN

(Under the Direction of Linda M. Arthur)

ABSTRACT

The leadership focus for school improvement has changed from managing the political environment of the school to focusing on continuous improvement. The purpose of this study was to examine Georgia school principals' practices that are used to improve student achievement in order to meet Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP). The study included elementary, middle, and high school principals from selected schools that made AYP. Focus groups from each of the schools were also interviewed and included parents, teachers and other school leadership. The same interview questions asked of the principal were also asked of the focus groups. The responses from the unstructured interviews were reported in narrative form and identified leadership practices principals used to improve student achievement. After conducting a thorough review of literature in the area of school principals' practices, the relationship of the impact of practices and student achievement was examined. The findings of the study included organizing the school to support students who are struggling academically, communication of expectations, and controlling the instructional program. This study also found differences between

elementary and middle and high schools: The community and school leaders' beliefs at

the elementary level were primarily related to instructional practices, where as at the

middle and high school levels more focus was placed on programmatic practices. Based

on the results, the study concluded that principals' practices can impact the potential for a

school making AYP, but continued educational research is needed to expand the

understanding of the specific practices that principals need in order to create

environments in which students can achieve higher levels of learning.

INDEX WORDS: Student Achievement, Principal's Practices, Redesigning School
Organization to Support Student Achievement, Communication of Expectations,
Adequate Yearly Progress

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Beth, your encouragement and love for me carried me through the many nights and hours I had to spend to accomplish this daunting task. I am very grateful for you revitalizing my spirit when I just wanted to quit. You are a women filled with more integrity than I have ever experienced in my life. I know you are always on my side, and your encouragement and faith in me never go unnoticed. I love you! I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my two sons, Dane and Kyle. Remember education is the deposit for success.

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I want to thank my parents for being my heroes; my mother Frances Grace Callahan (deceased), and my father Charles Edward Callahan Jr. Thank you for being the backbone my entire life. Thank you for encouraging me to get something that nobody could ever take away from me, an education. Without your support, encouragement and belief in me my entire life, I could not have accomplished this monumental endeavor. Dad, I have been amazed by your commitment and devotion to everything you have set out to accomplish. I can only hope one day to be like you. Thank you for all you done for me. I would also like to thank my two brothers Charlie and Dwayne Callahan. I am blessed to have you two as my brothers. Without the help of many other very special people, Dr. Linda M. Arthur, I cannot thank you enough for your support and enthusiasm in this process. Your love and passion for helping your students to become successful is to be commended.   I am grateful for the patience and cooperation of my dissertation committee: Dr. Abebayehu Tekleselassie and Dr. Walter Polka, thank you. Finally, this acknowledgment would not complete without giving thanks and credit to God. Each of our life choices, decisions, and actions involves some consequence. Something will happen because of what we think, say, and do. The consequences may bring gladness, but they also bring sadness. Every investment has a consequence. Am I willing to accept the pain that my investment may cost me? Am I ready to be generous with my commitment even if it brings suffering my way? Am I willing to walk in the footsteps of Jesus?

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2001, the most recent

reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary School Act, focuses attention on

low-performing schools and sets standards of accountability in public schools. The

NCLB legislation sets higher expectations for improved academic standards in schools,

creates clear and immediate sanctions for weak performance, and determines bonuses and

recognition for increased achievement. States are required to set and assess a minimum

proficiency rate in every school in the academic areas of reading and math. These

performance targets rise incrementally towards a final goal of 100% proficiency in

reading and math by the 2013-2014 school year. As a result of the law, a significant

numbers of schools will likely be identified as "in need of improvement" (Olson, 2003).

Initially low- performing schools will be required to make the largest gains (Elmore,

2004). The NCLB act will hold local educational agencies and public elementary schools

and secondary schools accountable for student achievement and for ensuring that they

make adequate yearly progress in accordance with the State's definition (U.S.

Department of Education, 2001).

At the core of the NCLB legislation is the identification of those schools that meet

or did not meet the performance criteria set forth by the state. Schools that do not make

adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two consecutive years must offer students the option

to move to another higher performing school within the district, thus forcing schools and

local districts to critically look at internal instructional practices and organizational

structures.

Defining Adequate Yearly Progress

The <u>No Child Left Behind (NCLB)</u> legislation defines Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as setting the same high standards of academic achievement for all public elementary school and secondary school students in the State. Yearly academic assessments determined by the State measure the academic prowess of all students, thus providing the data used to determine proficiency of a school and district. Adequate yearly progress is established by the state as a targeted percentile of proficiency that all students, schools and districts are expected to obtain. In reporting test results, the State must follow the NCLB requirements that test results be reported as a minimum of two achievement levels: high achievement is reported as advanced or proficient, and lower performance is reported as basic (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Student Achievement

Under the federal NCLB legislation, states are held accountable for improving student achievement. Defined as academic progress towards an established standard, student achievement is based on performance within the individual content areas of English Language Arts, math, and beginning in the 2007-2008 school year, science. Within each content area, standards define what students are expected to know and be able to do. The rigor of these standards encourages the instruction of advanced skills and improvement in student achievement (U.S. Department of Education 2001).

Effects of Leadership

Pressure for improving student performance in our current standards based accountability system has forced school principals to focus their efforts on teaching and learning and fundamentally change their understanding of instructional practices

(Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001). Within the realm of school improvement, identification of the principal's practices and the impact of those practices on instruction and student achievement becomes critical (Elmore, 2004). Administration of a school often requires managerial and political responsibilities, creating an ongoing struggle to preserve a substantial proportion of time to focus on instruction (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001). Spiri (2001) contends that "principals must perform their myriad tasks well to ensure that their schools (measure up) in a climate of heightened expectations, scrutiny, choice, and censure" (p.1).With a majority of time spent by the principal on managerial, day-to-day tasks, and political aspects of the position, the instructional improvement responsibility often reverts back to the individual teacher: this often causes the instructional culture to splinter, quality of instruction to vary, and the content received by students to differ from class to class (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001). It is important for the principal to be aware of the relationship between the roles of the principal and the teacher and the combined impact on instructional improvements.

As Elmore (1997) states, "a decade ago, only a few states and a relatively small proportion of localities collected and reported data on student test performance at the school" (p. 43). Today student performance is more visible and is used constantly to compare school to school, district to district, state to state, and even country to country. With the increased emphasis on collecting data and comparing student performance levels between schools, the individual school becomes the unit of accountability (Elmore, 2004).

With student achievement as the determining factor of whether a school is improving, the instructional practices of the teachers and the understanding of these

practices by the administrator becomes even more critical. In the past, the focus for school leadership was on managing the political environment but now, because student achievement is an ever-changing process, school leaders are influenced to learn continually refine their knowledge of instructional practices (Elmore, 1997). According to Price and Burton (2003), " many principals are simply ill-prepared to create and manage a building infrastructure that supports effective instruction that has as its constant focus the technical core of teaching and learning" (p. 94). The other critical part to improving student achievement is what goes on in the classroom. Teacher knowledge and skills within content areas are critical to student performance (Thornton, Peltier, & Perreault, 2004).

Teachers will be required to teach to the standards and to learn how to teach in ways most teachers have never taught before; administrators will have to redesign their organizations into a format of continuous improvement, where more complex instruction that targets higher levels of learning becomes the rule, not the exception. Performance expectations will have to be met by all in the school environment. Elmore (2004) believes that administrators will need to provide a quality investment in the instructional knowledge and skills of teachers. Mulford and Moreno (2006) believe successful school leadership makes important contributions to the improvement of student learning and that leadership primarily affects work indirectly through variables related to curriculum and classroom instruction. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) state that successful school leadership makes important contributions to the improvement of student learning by influencing other people and other features of the organization.

A case study done by Spiri (2001), which looked at the factors that influenced the principals interpretation of their roles, concludes that principals were quick to characterize themselves as instructional leaders within their buildings, but absent from the principals' discussions were any reference to specific goals and activities through which they could assess their effectiveness as instructional leaders. They perceived that they had been trained to provide such leadership; however, they did so without defining what such leadership looks like and what results it might yield (Spiri, 2001).

Supovitz and Poglinco's (2001) study on instructional leadership identified how effective school leaders organized their school to emphasize instructional improvement, improve instructional quality, and how principals lead the process of school improvement. Principals of schools located in high poverty urban areas demonstrated how schools could attain the instructional emphasis that leads to notable improvement in student performance. The instructional focus included developing instructional expectations for each classroom, developing communities of instructional practice, and the principal organizing their time to spend more time in the classrooms.

In a study done by Cohen and Ball (1999) on instruction, capacity and improvement, the researchers concluded that curriculum reform or restructuring is not likely to improve instruction. What will improve instruction is building the capacity to do so by affecting the ways in which teachers and students understand, make use of, and influence one another. Stoll et al. (2002) believes that "schools may not have the internal capacity to improve, and it is the heart of leadership to build the capacity for school improvement to occur" (p. 46). Hess and Kelly (2005) also conclude that "the evidence indicates that preparation has not kept pace with changes in the larger world of

schooling" (p.35) and "in this new era of accountability, where school leaders are expected to demonstrate bottom-line results and use data to drive decisions, the skill and knowledge of principals matter more than ever" (p.2).

Hess and Kelly (2005) surveyed 56 programs and collected at least four "core" course syllabi from 31 programs that met the standards, permitting systematic coding for a total of 210 syllabi. The syllabi yielded 2424 total course weeks. One of the key findings was that just 2% of the 2424 course weeks addressed accountability in the context of school management and fewer than 5% included instruction on managing school improvement (p.1). According to Stoll et al. (2002), school leaders need to promote relevant and practical research and evaluation across the school and adopt a more systematic approach to collect, analyze, and use data to support learning in the classroom. Fullan (2001) also believes that the "administrative leadership is primarily about enhancing the skills and knowledge of people in the organization, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, holding the various pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective result" (p. 65). The ability of the administrator to create school capacity is the key to successful school improvement.

Fullan (2001) defined school capacity by identifying five components: (1) teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions; (2) professional community; (3) program coherence: (4) technical resources; and (5) principal leadership (p. 64). He also stated that each of these components must function simultaneously in order for a school to build capacity for improvement. Teachers' knowledge of instructional practice is very

important, but as Fullan (2001) states, "it is not sufficient, because the organization must change along with the individuals" (p. 64).

Statement of the Problem

There have been many challenges over the past decade for administrators to lead in the reform process of school. As the educational accountability landscape has changed for student learning, the pressure on the students, teachers, principals and superintendents to achieve has never been greater. Although there is little hard evidence about effective educational leadership, principals are increasingly responsible for managing a complex learning environment. Through challenges posed by curriculum standards, benchmark assessments, and diversity in student characteristics, cultural background, and students who learn in different ways, schooling is becoming more and more challenging. These challenges make the definition of effective school leadership progressively more essential.

In these times of standards based accountability, school level leaders are being held accountable for how well teachers teach and how much students learn. A school's success is often directly and openly attributed to the ability of the principal. If a principal is thought to be essential for improving student learning, what professional practices are necessary for that principal is to lead the way in providing a quality education for all students within the school?

The researcher would like to collect comparison data on the knowledge level and practices of selected principals of schools that have met Adequate Yearly Progress.

Research suggests that principals that understand and successfully incorporate practices of standard based reform guide their schools through the challenges of the

reform process and improve student achievement. It will be important to identify schools that are successfully incorporating the practices of standards based reform and how their practices contribute to meet Adequate Yearly Progress. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify principal practices that contribute to the attainment of Adequate Yearly Practice in Georgia.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

With the literature suggesting a clear relationship between principal practices in the instructional system and school improvement, the following overarching question will guide this study: What leadership practices characterize Georgia principals that made AYP in Northeast Georgia? And the following sub-questions will be addressed:

1. Do leadership practices used by the principal very by the level of the school?

2. How do principals' beliefs and other school and community leaders' beliefs relate to each other regarding practices that contribute to AYP?

<div align="center">Conceptual Framework</div>

The capacity of leadership is at the center of school improvement, student achievement and teaching practices that occur in the classroom. Accountability demands are getting the attention of school leaders. The school environment is constantly changing and often requires strong leadership to provide guidance. Principals have to address these changes while creating purpose (student achievement) and direction (school improvement) and at the same time understanding teaching and learning (instructional practice).
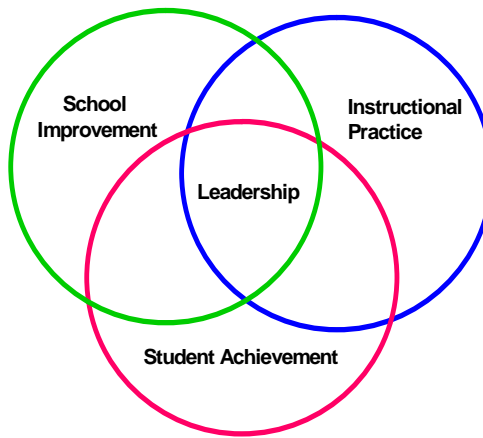
Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework*

Importance of the Study

The standards based reform accountability system is going to require schools to perform differently in order for student achievement to occur. This reform movement is based on definitive expectations for student learning outcomes, an emphasis on administrative instructional guidance, and a focus on the content and performance related instructional practices of teachers. As a principal, this researcher was assigned to a school that had the previous administrative team reconstituted and was left with the overwhelming task of effectively leading the school improvement process. Across the nation, state and local education agencies have initiated the policies deemed necessary for meeting the requirements set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act. As a result schools have begun to look critically at the school improvement process and its impact on continuous growth in student achievement.

Public schools are being scrutinized by many. Some seem to think this is public education's last chance to make the necessary changes needed to maintain education as

we know it. Teaching practices have to change. Administrators will be the organizational leaders and facilitators in the standards based reform movement.

In the field of educational administration, this study is important because of increased accountability for student achievement through the NCLB act. Building principals must examine all areas that may affect student achievement, including instructional practices and organizational support. This study will identify specific practices used by principals of schools that are successfully incorporating the practices of standards based reform.

This study has important implications for identifying specific leadership practices identified in the school improvement plans of individual schools which have shown continuous growth in student achievement under the guidelines of the NCLB Act.

Procedures

The research design for the study was built upon unstructured interviews that was to be used to gain a deeper insight into the practices of Northeast Georgia principals whose schools have made AYP. Open-ended interview questions provided a rich understanding of effective principal practices. The sample of 5 principals is suitable for the study because it represents a controllable number of participants from the entire population. In addition to the 5 principals, a focus group in the same school was interviewed to corroborate what the principal has said in the interview. The focus groups validated the leadership practices that Georgia principals have used to improve student achievement to meet adequate yearly progress.

The population for this research included purposive selection of principals from selected schools that have met Adequate Yearly Progress. The principals were employed

in Georgia pubic schools that include grade levels kindergarten through twelfth grade. The sample for the research study included 5 principals and 5 focus groups selected from schools from the Northeast Georgia Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) district. This research can only be applied to the state of Georgia. Included in the focus group will at a minimum, one assistant principal, two teachers, at least one paraprofessional, and one parent representative from the School Council or the Parent Teacher Organization from the school where the principal was interviewed. The focus groups will validate the leadership practices that Georgia principals have used to improve student achievement to meet adequate yearly progress.

In order to get the selected principals to participate in the research study, the researcher prepared a letter requesting their participation that emphasizes how this research may be used to impact student achievement. The instrument for the proposed interview consisted of unstructured interviews that were audio taped and transcribed. The unstructured interviews consisted of five to ten open-ended questions in an interview that ranged from 45 to 60 minutes in length. The interview guided approach allowed the data collection to be more systematic and the interviews to remain fairly conversational and situational. The researcher also kept anecdotal notes during the interviews to record perceptions during the interview in addition to the written transcriptions to follow. After approximately one week a follow-up letter was mailed to the participants thanking them for their participation in the study.

In the proposed research study, data analysis consisted of the researcher comparing the responses to interview questions given by the selected principals and focus

groups. The researcher reported the findings in narrative form. The narrative looked for consistencies recurring in practices across the narratives of the study participants.

Limitations/Delimitations

Delimitations

This study is designed to look at principals in Northeast Georgia that are successfully implementing strategies that impact student achievement. The research assumes that the participants will speak honestly and that the focus groups will speak freely about the principal's practices that they believe affect the school's AYP.

This study is being done on behalf of my school improvement experiences as a principal. In 2004, I was assigned as a first year principal to a school that had the principal removed as well as her three assistants. Besides the removal of the administrative staff the counselors' of the school were also removed. This particular school had never met Adequate Yearly Progress and was going to have to offer choice to its students for the first time. The school improvement process for the school that I was assigned to became a process that was both focused on academic achievement for all students and understanding how leadership practices affected the school improvement process. Understanding these practices became the challenge as the school improvement process became a reality.

Definition of Terms

Internal Accountability- agreement and coherence around expectations for student learning, and the means to influence instructional practice in classrooms in ways that result in student learning (Elmore, 2004).

Practice- externally validated protocols of behavior that serve as a basis for authoritative decisions about what to do in a given situation (Elmore, 2004)

School Improvement- the way a school organizes, promotes, and supports student learning (Elmore, 2004)

Summary

In these times of standards based accountability, school level leaders are being held accountable for how well teachers teach and how much students learn and a school's success is often attributed to the ability of the principal. A principal's leadership is thought to be essential for improving student learning, however the current body of research does little to provide a complete understanding of the specific practices required to improve a school in terms of its organizational structure and instructional practices.

Using a qualitative research design, the researcher presented interview questions to 5 principals and a focus group in the same school in the state of Georgia from elementary, middle, and high schools. Responses from the interviews were gathered, analyzed, and reported in narrative form by the researcher The interviews allowed the researcher to develop a representation of the instructional practices of each school, and through these descriptions seek commonalities among the schools that have met Adequate Yearly Progress under the current guidelines of the No Child Left Behind Legislation.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to look at selected Georgia school principal's practices thought to be essential for improving student learning. There has been an incredible amount of research specific to what school structures, programs, and processes are essential for instructional change for student improvement. Where the research becomes limited is how the principal utilizes these practices daily in promoting student learning. Therefore, current research gives no clear indication of the specific elements needed in order for a principal to increase student achievement. Under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2001 a higher expectation for improved academic standards in all schools has created a different expectation for today's principals. From managing a school to impacting student achievement, the role of a principal has generated researchers to try to answer specifically what are the essential and most effective leadership practices. Research clearly shows effective leadership makes a difference in improving student achievement. Second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning, it becomes ever more essential to identify these practices. Identifying these practices can help develop leadership capacity to better support the learning of students.

With this in mind, this review of the literature has been designed to emphasize the most important and overall significant areas of study as it pertains to the practices of principals and the impact these practices have on student achievement.

Effects of Leadership on Student Achievement

It is important that the researcher is able to discuss current research related to principal's practices. This research is related to the current area of study and may be able to provide valuable insight into the practices of principals and their effects on student achievement.

Edmonds (1979), discusses the impact school leadership has on improving student achievement. Edmonds identifies four inner city schools where students were successful based on national norms. He identified these schools as having "strong leadership" a principal that was "instrumental in setting the tone of the school, helping decide on instructional strategies, and organizing and distributing the schools resources" (p. 16). He went on to discuss the findings of a study the State of New York's Office of Education Performance Review did on comparing two inner city schools that were serving predominately poor students. One of the schools was high achieving and the other was low achieving. The study wanted to understand why the differences existed in the two schools. The findings concluded: 1) student performance was attributed to factors under the schools' control, 2) Administrative behavior, policies, and practices in the schools appeared to have a significant impact on school effectiveness, 3) The more effective inner city school was led by an administrative team that provided a good balance between both management and instructional skills, 4) The administrative team in the higher achieving school had developed a plan for dealing with content deficiencies and implemented the plan throughout the school.   The evidence suggested that although these two schools were poor inner city, student performance improved with the school that had a principal that demonstrated leadership practices that support student achievement.

Leithwood and Reihl (2003) conducted a study identifying six claims on school leadership. The results of these researched base conclusions find leadership effects are primarily: (1) indirect and work through the existing organizational protocols such as mission or goals, classroom curriculum and instruction; (2) primary source of successful leadership in schools are principals and teachers, despite the fact that there is not enough evidence concerning how these two influences together effect student achievement; (3) leadership practices need to specifically identify the framework which is most beneficial to student achievement; (4) the core set of "basic" leadership practices that contribute to success are setting direction, redesigning the organization, and developing people; (5) leaders must act in ways that acknowledge the accountability-oriented policy and need to know how to work in an organization publicly more accountable; (6) successful leaders in schools serving highly diverse student populations enact practices to promote appropriate and powerful forms of teaching and learning, create strong communities in school, develop family's educational culture, and expand student's social capital.

Research by Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), studied the relationship of how effective leadership affected student achievement. The researchers concluded that the impact of leadership can play a highly significant role on improving student learning and the existing research shows that leadership effects tend to be greatest in schools where learning needs of students are needed most.

In a four year longitudinal study done by Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) which sought to examine a better understanding of leadership and practices in high poverty urban schools in Chicago, it was concluded that influence over classroom instruction involved many leaders in the school including the principal, assistant principal

and the classroom teacher. Practices for improving instruction did not depend on individual skill and knowledge solely from the administrator but a multiple of school leaders. Upon completion of the study, the researchers concluded that administrators are very influential. Of the 84 teachers that were in the sample, 83.3% indicated that the principal shaped their instructional practices. According to Carbo (2000) successful school research emphasizes the importance of the principal's role in controlling the instructional program of the school. According to the Educational Research Service (1999), today's principals must be willing to learn and expand their knowledge base. They must also be able to analyze and use data to determine and focus on what needs to be improved, so a plan can be developed to improve student achievement (Doughty, 2005).

International Research on Leadership's Effects on Student Achievement

It is important that the researcher is able to discuss current research as it relates to student achievement and principal's practices from an international perspective. This research is related to the current area of study and may be able to provide valuable insight into how leadership practices are examined and their impact on student achievement in global trends in educational reform.

Hopkins (2001) highlights three broad categories that a leader must do in order to improve student outcomes: (1) defining the school mission; (2) managing the instructional program; and (3) promotes the school climate. He continues by stating there is enough empirical data that supports these categories. In a research based program study by Hopkins (2001), he identifies six propositions for school improvement: (1) school improvement will not take place if there is not a balance between change and stability;

(2) develop a set of priorities that represents the overall need of the school; (3) focus on conditions that affect classroom practices; (4) all levels of the of the school must be impacted; (5) use data to collect evidence of impact; (6) providing the opportunity for teachers to discuss appropriate teaching strategies impacts student achievement.

With few research studies focusing exclusively on leadership practices and approaches a research project commissioned by the National College for School Leadership in England, investigated leadership approaches in a group of 10 schools that exhibited different levels of student achievement. The project wanted to find what leadership practices and approaches were used within the challenging school's circumstance. It was found that authoritarian forms of leadership are most prevalent in schools that need the most improvement. When immediate action was needed for improvement leadership approaches were often very directive and task focused (Harris, 2002). The study also finds that of the ten schools, the schools that were steadily improving, different leadership styles and leadership approaches existed. Harris (2002) concluded leadership approaches were determined by the particular phase of improvement a school was going through.

In two qualitative studies done by Geijsel, Sleegers, and Berg (1998), they examined the relationship at the primary and secondary levels between leadership and teacher's changed practices within the Dutch context of school restructuring. The results for those secondary schools that were highly successful school leaders created: 1) target idea; 2) created a supportive atmosphere; 3) supportive school leadership; 4) initiatives were stimulated by the school leaders; 5) improve existing culture; 6) paid attention to the well-being of the teachers. The results of the primary schools that were highly successful

school leaders created: 1) had a certain charisma that inspired teachers; 2) worked continuously on the vision of the school; 3) continuously initiating innovations in the school; 4) using his or her power to motivate the team; 5) showed respect of the ideas of others; 6) delegated responsibilities without neglecting their own; and 7) collaboration had become self-evident. The researchers also found that school leaders of low achieving schools had no educational vision, favored traditional teaching and were a great deal less of an initiator for innovative change. Upon completion of the study the researchers concluded that a principal's vision is an important dimension for direct influence on teachers' changed practice.

Hallinger (2003) investigated educational change with emphasis on the effects on the leadership practices. He states that there were predominately two models of leadership practices as it related to student achievement: 1) instructional leadership and 2) transformational leadership. Instructional leadership models emerged in the 1980's and transformational models became prevalent in the 1990's with the beginning of school restructuring. Now in the 21st century Hallinger believes the contingency model of leadership is more suitable to how a principal responds to student achievement. The contexts of the school include student background, school culture, and organizational structure. He states that school improvement is a journey, and initially a principal of a "turn around school" may choose a top down approach focused on instructional practices of teachers because the contexts of the school dictates this approach and then later when the school is moving in the desired direction, the staff would assume more of the ownership in the improvement process. The principal should understand and respond to these contexts in order to direct change. In conclusion of the investigation Hallinger

believes that a successful principal will be one that can respond to their current situation, and impact student achievement.

West (2000) focuses on the role of the change agent supporting school improvement. Using an existing project, he focused on five secondary schools that had already gone through a period of at least five years of attempts to overall restructuring and change in classroom practices. After analyzing the results he found that the principals were committed during these improvement efforts. The principal involvement had been an important factor in the influence of making significant changes, but the principal did have difficulty in finding a suitable balance between leading and supporting the effort. In conclusion of the project, West believes that principals look for some guidance as it relates to school effectiveness, improvement and change.

The researcher presented above clearly illustrates that universally the same concerns on how the leadership practices improve student achievement. It is obvious as shown in the research that the principal must be able to decipher and decide what practices should be used when school improvement efforts dictate the level of improvement to be made.

How Does Successful Principals' Practices Influence Student Achievement

Glickman (2002), states that leadership should be to enhance quality student learning. He continues by identifying four approaches for the use of principals when working with teachers to improve student achievement: 1) nondirective approach used for a faculty who are self starters, 2) collaborative approach used for a faculty where collaboration among teachers is minimal 3) directive-informational approach used for a faculty who lacks common goals across departments and grade levels, and 4) directive

control approach used for a faculty who works in isolation. Glickman concludes stating these approaches provide guidance for the leadership of a school to bring about instructional change.

Cotton (2003) conducted a summary of the research conducted from the 1970's to the present, with a special emphasis on research from the past 15 years investigated the relationship between principals and student achievement. The review found that there were 26 principal behaviors that contributed to student achievement. Cotton also found that these 26 principal behaviors fell into five categories: 1) establishing a clear focus on student learning, which included having a vision, clear learning goals, and high expectations for learning for all students, 2) interactions and relationships, these behaviors include communication and interaction, emotional and interpersonal support, visibility and accessibility, and parent outreach and involvement, 3) school culture, which included such behaviors as shared leadership and decision making, collaboration, support of risk taking, and continuous improvement, 4) instruction, which includes behaviors as discussing instructional issues, observing classrooms, giving feedback, supporting teachers autonomy, and protecting instructional time, 5) accountability, which includes monitoring progress through the use of student data for improving instruction.

In addition to the 26 principal behaviors, Cotton found that instructional leadership behaviors of principals in elementary schools are different from instructional leadership behaviors of principals in secondary schools, and behaviors from principals in high and low socioeconomic schools found that principals of high socio economic are more likely to be instructional leaders than principals of low socio economic schools.

The research review presented above clearly illustrates a relationship between principal behaviors and student achievement. Behaviors by principals clearly establishes how critically important principals are to school success.

Hoerr (2005) found that leadership is about creating relationships. The major premise he makes about leading a school are helping people grow and develop so the organization can improve, communicate and listen, and create and execute a vision. Hoerr concluded that a leader needs to be inclusive, clear, fair, and someone who makes a difference.

Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) conducted a quantitative meta-analysis study examining to what extent principal's leadership affects student outcomes. Direct and indirect effects models were discussed. They found that leadership does have a positive and significant effect on student achievement although on an average school leadership effects are absent in secondary education and are related to student achievement in primary schools. They suggested that secondary school leaders may have less opportunity to directly affect student outcomes than primary school leaders. Witziers et al. (2003) went on to say that specific leadership behaviors that impacted student achievement were reviewed and of the nine that were reviewed four had a positive effect on student outcomes. The leadership behaviors were supervision and evaluation, monitoring, visibility, and defining and communicating mission. The research suggests that when looking at specific leadership behaviors defining and communicating mission seems to be the most relevant leadership behavior in terms of improving student outcomes.

Youngs and King (2002) conducted a multiyear qualitative study of four traditionally low-achieving high poverty elementary schools examining the relationship

of capacity to instructional quality and student achievement. The researcher's state, that through professional development school leaders affect student achievement indirectly through their influence on school organizational conditions and instructional quality. Principal leadership for professional development should address several aspects of school capacity these include knowledge, skills, and dispositions of individual teachers, professional community, and program coherence.

Youngs and King (2002) describe knowledge, skills, and dispositions as teaching staff maintaining high expectations for student learning, being professionally competent in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, classroom management. They characterize professional community as shared goals for student learning, meaningful collaboration among faculty and staff, in-depth inquiry into assumptions, evidence, and alternative solutions, and opportunities for teachers to exert influence over their work. They define program coherence as the extent to which student and faculty programs at a school are coordinated, directed at clear learning goals and sustained over time. The researchers conclude that principals have the influence to affect aspects of capacity in varying degrees depending on the quality of the leadership and that a school is unlikely to improve the achievement of all students unless the principal sustains professional development activities to the faculty that addresses teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions, professional community, and program coherence.

Reeves (2006) conducted a study of detailed analysis of student achievement, teaching practices, and leadership planning for approximately 300, 000 students in more than 290 schools. The researcher concludes that there are adult variables including professional practices of teachers and decisions made by leaders which have more of a

significant impact on student achievement than the demographic make up of the student population. These decisions by the leaders include correctly analyzing the underlying causes of deficiencies and success in student achievement, recognizing successful implementation, and monitoring the impact of improvement on a frequent basis.

Fullan (2001) also studied the principals' role for creating a practical theory of school improvement. One study discussed by Fullan was the Chicago schools study that identified four strategies used by the successful principals in these schools: 1) inclusive, facilitative orientation, 2) an institutional focus on student learning, 3) efficient management, and 4) combined pressure and support. "They had a strategic orientation, using school improvement plans and instructional focus to attack incoherence" (p. 142). In another study Fullan identifies leadership roles in 12 schools that raised student achievement. The researcher found that these principals were relationship centered, focused on professional standards and monitored school performance. Fullan identifies effective practices that a principal needs to understand in order to understand the complexity of being a school leader: 1) create a learning culture that is going to be sustained so the change can be long lasting not superficial, 2) create an adaptive learning environment, 3) effective leaders combine different leader characteristics depending on what phase they are in the change process, 4) school improvement is not linear and needs guidelines for improvement. Finally, as described by M. Fullan (personal communication, November 28, 2006) principals need to lead with a purpose and focusing direction, sharing responsibility through building partnerships, design a coherent strategy, and developing proficiency in knowledge skills and daily practices for improving learning.

Marzano, McNulty, and Waters (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of the research on school leadership using research from 1978 to 2001. The researchers investigated how leadership responsibilities impacted student achievement. Some of these 21 responsibilities included situational awareness, outreach, order, knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, monitoring and evaluating, and flexibility. After identifying the 21 responsibilities, Marzano et al. realized these responsibilities related to one another. The researchers then conducted a factor analysis which helped identify traits common to the 21 responsibilities. The factor analysis identified two factors that seemed to underlie the 21 responsibilities and these two factors were first order change and second order change. The 21 leadership responsibilities were not as equally important in relationship to first order change, although all 21 leadership responsibilities were identified the order of importance changed. When a principal needed to provide leadership responsibilities for second order change initiatives, only seven of the 21 leadership responsibilities were identified. These seven responsibilities must be emphasized.   These seven responsibilities were identified in rank order: 1) knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, 2) optimizer, 3) intellectual stimulation, 4) change agent, 5) monitoring/evaluating, 6) flexibility, 7) ideals/beliefs. In conclusion Marzano et al. believes that the results of their research can provide principals a guide to better enhance the academic achievement of their students.

The research presented above clearly illustrates a relationship between principals' responsibilities and student achievement. Understanding first order change and second order change is critical when providing when addressing student achievement.

As described by R. F. Elmore (personal communication, October 23, 2006) school administrators must communicate clear expectations, understand how children learn, set high standards for student learning, actively monitor instruction, and press for practice. The researcher goes on to say that inequality among schools is not the most important to student achievement; it is variability of instruction inside a classroom and the variability of instruction from one classroom to another. 40 percent of variability is among students in the same classroom, 30 percent is among classrooms in schools, 20 percent of the variability is among schools and 10 percent of the variability is noise. He went on further to suggest that in order for student achievement to occur relationship between teacher and student must be based on content. The administrator needs to realize that student achievement improves when the relationship governed by a focus on curriculum and instructional core takes place. Focus on curriculum and instructional core becomes a practice when the administrator directly observes instructional practices, organizes groups around observation of teaching and analysis of student work, focus problem solving on instructional issues presented in student performance data, and development of protocols for observation analysis. Finally Elmore stated that administrators tend to focus on the technical aspects, schedules, role, structures to improve student achievement, but in order for a school to improve an administrator must create a culture that establishes beliefs about student learning, understanding of pedagogical content knowledge, norms for group work, discourse about practice, and mutual accountability.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

As the review of the literature demonstrates principals' practices has been shown to impact student achievement in the United States as well as in European countries.

According to the available literature the impact in principals' practices on student achievement can be viewed from several different leadership aspects. The literature describes, through a series of studies, how principals' practices impact student achievement. The literature also describes an international aspect on leadership practices that effect student achievement.

The research in the area of the effects of leadership on student achievement suggests that school leadership impacts student achievement indirectly through organizational protocols such as mission or goals. Leaders must be willing to learn and expand their knowledge base, and leadership effects tend to be greatest in schools where learning needs of students are needed most.

At a time when educational reform in the United States is taking place our European counterparts are examining leadership practices that impact student achievement. The research identified that leadership impacts student achievement when the leader set priorities that represent overall need of school, focus on conditions that affect classroom practices and leadership approaches were determined by the particular phase of improvement a school was going through.

As principals' practices relate to behaviors and responsibilities, student achievement is affected by what behavior and or responsibilities are used by the administrator. School leaders that are in the process of improving student achievement need to become very familiar with these practices

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of Georgia school principals' practices that are used to impact student learning. Through challenges posed by curriculum standards, benchmark assessments, diversity in student characteristics including, cultural background, and students who learn in different ways, schooling is becoming more and more challenging. The areas of study that were consistently evident as a result of the previous literature review included: instructional improvement, student achievement, and existing research and reviews on effects leadership has on student achievement. This chapter presents research questions, research design, population, participant selection, and the sample used.

Research Questions

With the literature suggesting a relationship between principal's practices in the instructional system and school improvement, the following research questions guided this study:

- What leadership practices characterize Georgia principals that made AYP in Northeast Georgia?

- Do leadership practices used by the principal very by the level of the school?

- How do principals' beliefs and other school and community leaders' beliefs relate to each other regarding practices that contribute to AYP?

Research Design

The research design for the study was built upon the presentation of open-ended format interview questions to gain a deeper insight into the practices by both the principal

and focus groups. According to Patton (1990) qualitative interviews allow the researcher to obtain qualitative data through the use of open-ended questions. The justification for the use of the qualitative method is because this method allowed the researcher to obtain information about the real-world experiences of principal leaders and then critique these descriptions for variances and commonalities. The major premise for the design of the collection strategies employed in the study are embedded in concepts described by Marshall and Rossman (1999). The focus groups validated the leadership practices that Georgia principals have used to improve student achievement to meet adequate yearly progress. This research can only be applied to the state of Georgia. Included in the focus group was, one assistant principal, two teachers, at least one paraprofessional, and one parent representative from the School Council or the Parent Teacher Organization from the school where the principal will be interviewed. The focus groups validated the leadership practices that Georgia principals have used to improve student achievement to meet adequate yearly progress.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

The population for this research included principals from Georgia schools that have met Adequate Yearly Progress the Northeast Georgia Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA). The principals were employed in Georgia pubic schools that included grade levels kindergarten through twelfth grade. In addition to the 5 principals, a focus group in the same school to corroborate what the principal said in the interview. The interview allowed the researcher to develop a representation of the instructional practices of each school. Interviews permit the researcher to gather data that cannot be simply obtained from observation (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The unstructured interviews consisted

of five to ten open-ended questions in the interview that ranged from 45 to 60 minutes in length. The interview guided approach allowed the data collection to be more systematic and the interviews to remain fairly conversational and situational.

Participant Selection

The random sample for the research study included 5 principals from the Northeast Georgia RESA whose schools made AYP. The 5 principals characterized one high, two middle school and two elementary schools that have met Adequately Yearly Progress in Georgia. The five principals were randomly chosen to include one high school, two middle schools and two elementary schools that have met Adequately Yearly Progress in Georgia. The sample of 5 principals was suitable for the study because it represents a controllable number of participants from the entire population. Interviews were also conducted with a focus group in the same school to corroborate what the principal has said in the interview. The unstructured interview questions were set out in an instrument and by design were open-ended and probing (See Appendix A). Included in the focus group was at least one randomly selected assistant principal, two randomly selected teachers, at least one randomly selected paraprofessional, and one parent representative from the School Council or the Parent Teacher Organization from the school where the principal was interviewed. The focus groups validated the leadership practices that Georgia principals have used to improve student achievement to meet adequate yearly progress.

The researcher completed a mandatory application and training session as it related to guidelines in research that included human subjects. This was deemed necessary by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Georgia Southern University which

determined that the research was acceptable. The application was submitted upon approval of prospectus defense.

Data Analysis

In order to get the selected principals to participate in the research study, the researcher prepared a letter requesting their participation that emphasizes how this research on their effective practice may be used to impact student achievement in other Georgia schools. The instrument for the proposed interview consisted of unstructured interviews that were audio taped and transcribed. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), entire and partial audio tapes can be transcribed and field notes derived as the researcher listens and relistens to the recorded interview. The unstructured interviews consisted of five to ten open-ended questions developed by the researcher in an interview that ranged from 45 to 60 minutes in length. The interview guided approach allowed the data collection to be more systematic and the interviews to remain fairly conversational and situational. The researcher analyzed the data by comparing the responses given by the principals and the focus groups and report the findings in narrative form. Yin (1989) defines data analysis as a process of examining, categorizing and tabulating evidence, and then presented in a meaningful format. Gay and Airasian (2000) also state qualitative researchers use personal interpretation to analyze data and provide an explanation of the information and specifically what it means to the participants. The researcher also kept a journal during the research study. After approximately one week a follow-up letter was be mailed to the participants thanking them for their participation in the study.

In the proposed research study, data analysis will consist of the researcher comparing the responses to interview questions given by the selected principals and focus

groups. The researcher reported the findings in narrative form. The narrative found consistencies in practices across the narratives of the study participants.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is currently employed as a principal at a Title I middle school in the Walton County School System. Walton County borders Morgan County and Oconee County to the east, Gwinnett County and Barrow County to the west and Newton County to the South.

The researchers' role in the present study included the following: determining which Georgia school principals in the Northeast Georgia RESA that made AYP would be used for the study, establishing focus groups from the same schools as the principal, getting permission to participate in the study, interviewing these principals as it relates to practices they use to improve student achievement, interviewing the focus groups to corroborate principals practices, unveiling a portraiture of each school, conducting on site interviews, and presenting the data in Chapter IV of the dissertation.

Summary

In these times of standards based accountability, school level leaders are being held accountable for how well teachers teach and how much students learn and a school's success is often attributed to the ability of the principal. A principal's leadership is thought to be essential for improving student learning, however the current body of research does little to provide a complete understanding of the specific practices required to improve a school in terms of its organizational structure and instructional practices.

Using a qualitative research design, the researcher presented interview questions to 5 principals and a focus group in the same school in the state of Georgia from

elementary, middle, and high schools. Responses from the interviews were gathered,

analyzed, and reported in narrative form by the researcher The interviews allowed the

researcher to develop a representation of the instructional practices of each school and

through these descriptions seek commonalities among the schools that have met

Adequate Yearly Progress under the current guidelines of the <u>No Child Left Behind</u>

Legislation.

CHAPTER IV

REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

As a result of <u>No Child Left Behind</u> Act, schools have had to change practices in curriculum and instruction. Standards-based reform is causing principals to respond differently to how they improve student achievement. Identifying practices principal's use to impact student achievement is becoming more significant to how a school improves student achievement.

The researcher was interested in knowing what practices Georgia principals used to successfully meet Adequate Yearly Progress. The researcher also wanted to assess the knowledge level of the focus group to see if they validated the leadership practices that Georgia principals have used to improve student achievement to meet adequate yearly progress.

If principals understand what practices are being used to improve schools, they would be more competent in providing support to school improvement initiatives. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine and gain an understanding of Georgia school principals' practices that are used to impact student learning.

Along with the research suggesting a clear relationship between principal's practices in the instructional system and school improvement, the following overarching research question guided this study:

- What leadership practices characterize Georgia principals that made AYP in Northeast Georgia?

- Do leadership practices used by the principal very by the level of the school?

- How do principals' beliefs and other school and community leaders' beliefs relate to each other regarding practices that contribute to AYP?

In the following chapter a presentation of the qualitative data obtained from the use of open-ended questions. This chapter will also provide real world experiences of principal leaders and corroboration of focus groups validating the leadership practices. This chapter will also present a demographic profile of the participants from one high school, two middle schools and two elementary schools used in the study. The researcher notes that in order to maintain anonymity amongst the participants, their schools and school districts have been coded with fictitious names. The researcher will refer to the schools and districts as such.

Information obtained from the open-ended questions allowed the researcher to answer previously stated research questions. Prior to conducting the research using open-ended questions, the researcher piloted the questions with other school administrators. The piloting was to identify any questions that were irrelevant to area of study or misleading and to ensure the interview items were able answer the research questions.

<div align="center">Respondent Demographic Profile</div>

The principals in the research study included four men and one woman. Of the four men participating in the study two were African American and two were Caucasian. The one woman interviewed was African American. Of the five principals three held Doctorates and two held a Specialists Degree in Education. The average age of the principals was approximately 44 years of age.

The focus groups in the research study included twelve women and five men. Of the twelve women participating in the study seven were African American and five

were Caucasian. The five men interviewed four were Caucasian and one was African American.

<div align="center">School Portraitures</div>

Elementary Schools

Main Street Elementary School is one of 14 schools in West County School System.The school building is currently one year old and the current population consists of over 500 students. The demographic profile of the student population is 49 % Black, 46 % are White, 14 % are Students with Disabilities, 2% are Hispanic, 1% are Multiracial, 1% are Limited English Proficient and 76% are Eligible for Free and Reduced Meals. The principal is serving in her third year at Main Street Elementary, which serves as a Title I elementary school. Main Street Elementary did meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards for the 2005-2006 school year.

Willow Road Elementary School is one of 20 schools in Class County School System. The building is approximately 15 years old and the current population consists of over 500 students. The demographic profile of the students population is 58% are Black, 28% are Hispanic, 10% are White, 11% are Students with Disabilities, 4% are Multiracial, 15% are Limited English Proficient, 5% are Migrant, and 84% are Eligible for Free and Reduced Meals. The principal is serving in his third year at Willow Road Elementary, which serves as a Title I elementary school. Willow Road Elementary did meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards for the 2005-2006 school year and was awarded Distinguished Title I school in 2006.

Middle Schools

Britton-Hugh-Leans Middle School is one of 20 schools in Class County School System. The building is approximately 20 years old and the current population consists of over 600 students. The demographic profile of the students population is 55% are Black, 28% Hispanic, 14% White, 15% are Students with Disabilities, 2% are Multiracial, 11% are Limited English Proficient, 3% are Migrant, and 75% are Eligible for Free and Reduced Meals. The principal is serving in his fifth year at Britton-Hugh-Leans Middle School, which serves as a non Title I middle school. Britton-Hugh-Leans Middle did meet Adequate Yearly Progress standards for the 2005-2006 school year.

Miller Middle School is one of nine schools in Only County School System. The building is approximately 15 years old and the current population consists of approximately 600 students. The demographic profile of the students population is 84% White, 5% are Hispanic, 6% are Black, 8% are Students with Disabilities, 4% are Asian, 2% are Multiracial, 2% are Limited English Proficient, and 16% percent are Eligible for Free and Reduced Meals. The principal is serving in his seventh year at Miller Middle School, which serves as a Title I targeted assistance middle school. Miller Middle did meet Adequate Yearly Progress standards for the 2005-2006 school year and was awarded Distinguished Title I school in 2006.

High School

Mason High School is one of four schools in Moon County School System. The building is approximately 20 years old with several renovations being done over the past ten years. The student population is over 1000 students. The demographic profile of the student population is 64% White, 32% Black, 11% are Students with Disabilities, 2%

Hispanic, 1% Multiracial, and 33% are Eligible for Free and Reduced Meals. The

principal is serving in his fourth year at Mason High School which serves as a non Title I

high school. Mason High School did meet Adequate Yearly Progress standards for the

2005-2006 school year.

<div align="center">Elementary School Principals' Interviews</div>

1. What type of incentives do you offer staff and students in making AYP?

  Principal of Main Street Elementary

 Well, we first start, Sean, with an AYP pep rally before the test, and that pep rally

usually involves some different movie clips. We've done movie clips about just

motivating kids, kids that are unmotivated to do well. We do an AYP celebration; it's a

big ice cream sundae. Actually, the ice cream sundae party we do the last day of CRCT.

The students are worn out, the teachers are worn out, and our PTO sponsors that. And we

have tubs and tubs of vanilla and chocolate ice cream, and we do toppings galore, and

some of my other support staff members come out and they actually serve all the

students. We serve every student and every staff member on the last day of CRCT, just

for a job well done, and we tell them how proud we are. Once we made AYP the last two

years, we've done a staff celebration; we did a big luncheon from KFC; the first year I

was here and the second year I was here, we did a big luncheon from Charlie's. That's

two of the favorite restaurants locally. And so we do a meal celebration for a job well

done, good job for a team effort. And Sean, and one thing I do all along, we start

planning for CRCT and AYP the first day of school. We don't wait for January and hit it

hard; we start from day one. I make my daily practice to make sure that I am visible; I'm

supportive; I'm cheering them on. I meet with them during the school year. In January I

put the previous year AYP data from the previous year, back in front of them. I put the

grid back in front of them, talking about…these are our language arts expectations; these

are our math expectations. We also in January, we do a mid year progress report. I meet

with each teacher; we go through all the students that they are concerned about, who we

call our ACT Promise students. We outline specific issues concerning reading, issues

concerning math: Is this child Pyramid of Intervention (POI)? Is this child in after

school tutoring? Is this child in before school tutoring, fall intersession, spring

intersession, etc…Saturday school?…to make sure we are doing everything possible to

get that baby over the hump. Once they're over, once we have those meetings, I meet

with all grade chairs. I say, "Hey guys, we have 233 3rd grade students. Out of those 233

3rd grade students, we are concerned with about 70 of those kids right now. What are we

going to do differently for this next 2nd semester to impact those students so they will

move forward?" And that's the preparation for AYP. But again, the things we've done is

the sundae celebrations, the AYP Pep Rally, as well as for the teachers, we've done the

luncheons. The little appreciations along the way, I think, are just as important as the

culminating activities we do at the very end.

Principal of Willow Road Elementary

Well, at the beginning of the year, Sean, we have a kickoff breakfast with the faculty.

And one of the things I do, while working with the faculty, is to share the data. I share

the progress data that we'd had the year before, and in working with our students, I want

the teachers to understand and know what we looked like the prior year. We are

apparently a Title I Distinguished school, two years running with the distinguished school

status, five consecutive years of making AYP. We're looking forward to another year of

distinguished status, hopefully coming up very soon. So we start the year off so the

teachers know the data. We set the tone and go with what we would like to do for the

year. And then we share the data with parents, and then with the student body. It's a lot

of setting the tone with what we want to accomplish. We have monthly assembly

programs. We have major assembly programs the first of April, which is our testing

assembly. And that's were we've set goals, and the kids understand and know what

incentives and awards we give. Last year, I said that the homeroom with the highest

growth, the highest number of students to pass, I would take to the Aquarium. So, this

year I'm coming up with an incentive and trying to figure out what it would cost me,

because last year it cost a pretty penny. It was $500.00 for the bus, $700.00 for the

tickets for the Aquarium. That was a pretty penny for a class trip. But, we sent them

away in style. We sent them in a nice bus. The kids were excited. The parents went. I

paid for about 40 people to go. The parents were chaperones, we had teachers…we had a

bunch of folks to travel with the class. This year I'm considering a cookout for the entire

school.   Just for all the hard work and the amount of stress they've been under. I thought

of surprising them during lunch, not even saying a word to them about it. Just when they

come, we'll have a family day, you know. We'll have a cookout. They'll take their

students out onto the lawn. We'll have food, song and dance, and whatever---sort of

wind down the year, because it's a lot of stress. It's a lot of stress to make AYP. You

know our motto is, "When you miss school, you miss out." We guaranty students that

we're going to have 100% on our CRCT. I've gotten in my car several days this week

during the process. We finished up today. We've got a few make-ups. But I've gone to

their houses; I've gotten them out of bed. I've gotten parents up to make sure they

understand that their kids need to be at school. I use our county phone system to call the houses the night before the CRCT, to encourage parents to make sure the babies are in the bed. I encourage them to go to bed by 8:30. If they can't get in there at 8:30, go at 8:00. Try to get them motivated, encouraged, and rested. I, as well as my counselor, my assistant principal… someone's at the front door, and someone is in the cafeteria. Anyone who has not had breakfast…we rush them into the cafeteria to make sure they've eaten prior to the CRCT. We try to get them to relax and to understand that it is super, super important…that first test, Reading; the second day Language Arts, the third day, Math. That's all AYP. We make sure that our subgroups are up to par, meaning that the attendance rate is going to be great. Even though we are a Title I school, we had 3.7% of our students miss 14 or more days, which was the 2nd highest in the county. AS far as perfect, that is what we're shooting for. As far as that subgroup, we're staying on top of it. The 2nd subgroup, we break it down by students with disabilities, our minority students, our Hispanic students. And there's an all-students subgroup, and our disadvantaged or whatever. And we try to make sure we make AYP in all those areas. That's first and foremost when we're looking at data. We're constantly looking at data, and making sure we're on top of it. We had a mother/daughter, father/son dance this year, which was during Valentine's. It was a community dance, and we probably…it was not a fundraiser. It was not a fundraiser, but we still made $1,700.00. We charged $5.00 per family, and if you only had two people, it still cost $5.00. And some of our other families, we've got families with 10 people, and they only paid $5.00. But we sold pictures. That's were we made our money. We sold pictures. We had parents to bring in food, and they brought in cakes…whatever the nationality. We have a large Hispanic

population. I invited and sent out letters for the planning of this dance. We probably had 75 parents to show up the night of the planning meeting. We divided them up into committees, and they did their own spin-off from that, setting up there own dates and times to meet. We have a decorating committee. We had a public relations committee. We had a ticket committee. We had a clean up committee. We had all these different committees to work and contact folks. We had a photography/Photoshop committee. We had a raffle committee, I guess it was a door price committee, where you would come in and spend $1.00 and you would win a basket of books, a basket of gift, a basket of lotion or whatever. But we had all these different things going on. They made $75.00 on those baskets alone. And we had more food that you could even imagine. More food than they even would eat in a lifetime. We had six tables, long tables now, Sean, of food. And I was just blown away, because this was my first time doing this. We have Donuts for Dads. The first time we did Donuts for Dads, we fed close to 700 people that morning. My cafeteria staff and all my teachers were blown away by the number of men that were in this building with their children. And the key is trying to get them back and keep them here. We do a Muffins for Moms right before Mother's Day and try to get more of our parents involved, but we're also looking at our Hispanic community. I would like to set up GED classes, as well as English classes for our parents who do not speak English. That's important to bridge that gap between the Hispanic community and the rest of the school community, without being afraid that someone's going to deport them, that's not my purpose. My only purpose is to educate their child: the only purpose.

2. What instructional practices are emphasized in your school?

> *Principal of Main Street Elementary*

What is it that you expect throughout the school? I think, Sean, the key to our school's success is how we have our data organized. We have long embraced Learning Focus and Best Practices. Our children get two blocks of reading and two blocks of math every day. Our school improvement plan is a living document. Our school improvement plan is always a part of the leadership team agenda. It is the first item on the agenda each month that we meet. We review our school improvement plan. We make adjustments to our school improvement plan. And that's why we're keeping it in front of them. We not just doing things in the summer and setting them on a shelf. This is an accountability measure. Another practice we've also implemented this year is our school wide mock writing assessments, which have been phenomenal. It's real life. We post signs on the door…we have our entire school…we have our prompts. It's a real life test preparation for …a month of writing preparation before the writing assessment. My teachers' schedules are posted outside their doors. Part of my leadership style is also the visibility. I'm in the classrooms. I do try on a daily basis, some days of course I can't get there, but very rarely does that happen. They know what's expected. I try to lead by example. I try to keep data in front of them at all times. One example of that practice would be our benchmark assessments. Each quarter we have our benchmark assessments. I have meetings with my teachers about those boys and girls… to rate those boys and girls that are in that green area in Performance Matters…the yellow you know…we're not quite there, but we've got some masters there that were in the yellow. And what are we doing with those babies there that are in the red? We have those discussions, and I guess people

can say that that's very time consuming -- time consuming, but also very necessary. To keep student achievement is a top priority. You can probably ask any teacher or any staff member in this building about the leadership style of this team. Their top priority is to keep those boys and girls moving forward. They know why we're here. They work hard to make sure that it's happening, and they know that nothing else is acceptable outside of that.

Researcher of the Study

When you talked about the schedules…talk to me more about…is that school wide?

Principal of Main Street Elementary

The schedules that we have are for two approximate reasons…that's two blocks of math, and two blocks of reading…those schedules are posted outside. That's expectations. Of course when I'm coming in, I know exactly that it's 10:10. That it's this block of time; that it's reading EDNA 1 what have you. That's expectations…I know some… unless it's run over that happens… Teacher practices…you don't want to loose a teacher for a moment, but that keeps that accountability, and keeps that consistent throughout our school. And every grade level has their two blocks of reading and two blocks of math every day. And what we're finding, Sean, at this point is that…we found in 3rd quarter, our students are doing so well in math, and that's…right now, that we're actually in that 3rd block of reading, so what we're doing right now is replacing…and that's why it's good planning on a living document. Instead of doing those two blocks of math that 3rd quarter, we replaced that 2nd block of math with reading, because that's our area that we're struggling with. The implementation of last year's GPS…there was a big shift from the previous year, so we found that that 3rd block of reading has

helped…vocabulary is a big issue without boys and girls, and we know that. We…these

are the areas that we really struggle in. Reading comprehension, we really struggle in.

So we found as a leadership team… what we really need to do… we're in 3rd quarter now

to really impact that reading. We had seen such success with our math…and that was

taking that 3rd block of reading to replace a 2nd block of math. But it's been different for

those boys and girls.

Principal of Willow Road Elementary

We have a Reading First grant: 135 minutes of uninterrupted reading. We use a 4 x 4

block reading model, in which we incorporate reading, writing, small group, whole

group, phonics, phonemic awareness; all the standards of reading. I have found it to be

very important to our students. Our major goal is fluency. Our goal is to have fluent

readers with great comprehension skills, and that's the ultimate goal. And I've found for

instruction, that if they can't read, nothing else matters. We have broken down our

classes into segments, in which they have to work on phonics and phonemic awareness

every day. We use a program called Dibels. It is a computerized program, a test that the

kids take to make sure they are familiar and aware of their reading centers and their

reading program. We've been using Dibels to determine the levels of our students and

their reading ability. Through this, our students are in intensive, or what I call red, in the

red area. We use the data room and identify those students that are on the red card at the

beginning of the year. We have a group of retired teachers that come in, and they do a

Dibels assessment, a pretest per say, on every student in Kindergarten, 1st grade, 2nd

grade, and 3rd grade. And these students are categorized and placed on the big board.

The people that really know what area they're in are the teachers. The students are

divided up by grade level, and we do a mid-year assessment. The SWAT team comes back in and they access these students. But during the entire time now, if our kids are in the red, or even our yellow students, but our red students are progress-monitored every two weeks. And we keep up with the progress that they're making. We're able to actually look at what areas they're weak in, and to actually bring in…we do a corrective action plan for those students. If they're weak in the area of phonemic awareness, we are able to actually work on those outside of the reading block, to help pull that up. What we've done in Kindergarten classes, we've got the smart boys and we've got the LCD projectors…I've created a PowerPoint with our students, with our teachers. A site works, and they work with them on the site works. But they also work with them on the forming, the blending of sounds. What sounds do certain alphabets make? And we try to pull all of that together, and once they get it they take it and run. They're able to read. They start to read a little better, read a little better, read a little better, then we work on the comprehension skills, to figure out what all's going on, and how come they're not making it. Once we've identified our progress-monitoring throughout the year, once we've identified our corrective action plan, we do a midyear testing. We figure out where they're at once again. We want to make sure they haven't regressed, and not gone backwards. We found that our students that are in the green…we don't progress-monitor as much, can end up going backwards. And they will end up becoming our fence sitters. I'll use an example. A kid made an 810 on the CRCT; that's the kid we would place in the yellow group. An 800 is passing in the CRCT, so an 800 to an 810 is in the yellow group. An 810 on up might be in the green. A 799 and down would be in the red. So when we start looking at the kids, we try and dig deeper to find out what's going on. I

also have an assessment known as a MAPP test. We MAPP test is a test given across the entire county. This particular test is an assessment that takes a look at several areas. On the MAPP test, it's all computerized. Every student in the county takes this assessment testing. It's done in the area of Reading, Language Arts, Math, and Social Studies, as well as Science. We take a look at our MAPP data; it is very close to our CRCT except it's not normed to our state. It's a national type test. We're able to really identify the weak areas and strengths of our students. And what I love about the MAPP test is that it not only identifies our weaknesses, it gives you solutions for correcting their deficiencies. It tells you what they should know, what they do know, and then it tells you what they should know in the future. I guess it tells you what they should know, what they do know, and what they don't know.

3. *What practices do you do that you feel are the most important in making AYP?*

    Principal of Main Street Elementary

About the instruction, Sean, I would say consistency, consistency, consistency, would be the first thing I'd like to say. But as far as instruction practices, I think it is so important when we have those two blocks of reading and those two block of math, that we accelerate during that time. That is it so important too for the Special Ed and EIP teachers to have the benchmarks, so they will know exactly what to prepare for. You know, two weeks ahead of time, so they can get that previewing. They get a second dose, and third dose, and a fourth dose for those at-risk babies. I also think that knowing what your sub-groups are, and being very clear throughout the year. Know what your sub-groups are, and how many students are impacted by them. I also have a great knowledge about AYP, knowing that you can have a child may fall into four categories. You can

have a white male that's Special Ed, that's economically disadvantaged, that's also in Special Ed. So that little baby's scores count four times toward you AYP. I think the education of how the AYP is calculated…that is what helps you. Also being very aware of what your second indicator is. With that second indicator, also march on that second indicator. At Elementary level right now, it's attendance. We have Friday at 2:00, administrative staff meetings. My secretary, myself, and my school counselor…so we know those boys and girls that are already beyond their 15 days, that would impact our school…right now we have 29. With a school our size, we can have up to 90 and still make AYP, but it's important not to let the ball drop in any sub group area. Knowing them, knowing what children are impacted in them multiple times…what are you doing to impact that? To me, that's the most powerful thing here in front of you.

Principal of Willow Road Elementary

Having the kids here every day; having the faculty show up with a positive attitude; that's first and foremost. You've got to believe that all who walks through these doors can and will learn. To me that's the most important facture of our school. You have to buy in to what we're selling. And our kids believe. I have been here, Sean, and I can knock on wood that I have not had any major discipline problems. We've not had any major knockdown drag out fights. We do not have kids walking up and down the halls pushing. We are at 87% free and reduced lunch. We have single parents; we have parents with major degrees. We have middle class. We have very, very poor children, we have upper class children, but we all have the same goal: that is to educate our kids. Well, the practices that we have been working on, and making sure that we are consistent with are making sure our teachers are using graphic organizers; making sure that our teachers are

using rubrics; making sure that our teachers are using essential questions; making sure that we come up with rubrics whenever we doing a lesson, or create a lesson for our students. Making…using Best Practices of sound instruction. I think that's most important. But I think that also, on the instructional level, we have common planning time. And we also have school wide planning time. We have time that we set aside every Wednesday. Wednesday is staff development time at Whitehead Road. Whether that's staff development for K through 3 or in 4th and 5th, it's in Math. We try to make sure that we keep a focus in front of our teachers. Next year, at the beginning of the year, right now, I'm working on a book study, "What do Grade 2 Teachers do differently?" I've already purchased the DVD series. I'm purchasing a book for every employee in the building. We consider them to be a teacher; whether they're a Para-pro; whether they're a teacher; whether they're the assistant principal; the counselor; the instructional coaches. Everybody's involved. It's mandatory that everybody attends, whether they believe they're a good teacher or not. We grow, even the principal. Everybody has to be there. And by doing just that, all of us are on the same page. One thing I learned a long time ago…I learned from Harvey Franklin, that if it's important enough for the teachers to be there, it's important enough for you to be there, as a principal, in the training. And, so when we have training going on, I drop everything, and I'm there, because I can't access what I don't know. I can't go in the class looking for something and I don't have the slightest idea what's going on. Just because I felt like it was a good idea for them to go. And so, Harvey taught me a great deal on that one.

4. What communication practices do you use to facilitate the instructional practices in the school?

Principal of Main Street Elementary

As a leader, the first thing I thought of was my school leadership team. On that team we have representation of two teachers from each grade level, because we are divided into pods, because we are so large. WE have a DEES representative, we have an EIP representative, our instructional coach, our school counselor, and our special area representative. And in that leadership meeting it's very clear that I give my expectations, and also my coach follows up in the Wednesday professional developments those expectations. It's also very important to do those walkthroughs. I said, "If we are going to do them, we're going to do them." Not only do I do my walkthroughs, Madena does her walkthroughs, and Barbara does her walkthroughs. And I find that it has really helpful too with Barbara, because she's not their evaluator. They'll tell her things that they won't tell us, because they feel more comfortable towards…she's not evaluating me. I can discuss my concerns. You know, some teachers are not great at teaching writing. They'll tell Barbara that; they won't tell me that. So when Barbara gets that knowledge, she may shift that person's development calendar a little bit, to hit that particular area in the personal professional development every Wednesday. She may shift that calendar a little bit, to address that with that particular pod that may have difficulty with writing conferences or writing conferences, etc. Writing conferences are difficult when you do them correctly. So I guess keeping everything in front of them in that accountability…bringing reminders to them throughout the year. We have faculty meetings every first and third Tuesdays, and keeping expectations in front of them at all

times. I guess it's back to consistency…keeping it in front of them at all times, hold them accountable, make sure it's happening. And when it's not happening, ask them the question, "Why?"

Principal of Main Street Elementary

No, it's not always that way. In my first year I met quite a bit of opposition because they were not used to doing things in a consistent and pervasive manner. With my leadership style, I can't do things any other way. So there were some teachers that was not the school for them, and they are no longer with us, and that's okay. I told them early on that MES was not the school for everybody, and that's okay. So people who bought into the vision, and understood where I was going… I had a vision. They followed that vision, and they're still with us. And now it's just an old hat. They know what's expected. I don't have any difficulty getting them to embrace that. My first year, first year and a half, that was not the case. I can say, in year three, they have really turned the corner. Very rarely do I get opposition. I can't even remember the last time.

Principal of Willow Road Elementary

We have a weekly newsletter. It's called, "The Week at a Glance." It goes out every Sunday night. On a good day, it comes out on Saturday. But every person in the building has an opportunity to add to "The Week at a Glance." Because I don't feel like I know everything. They all might send me the same e-mail reminding me about different events that are going on during the week. We have Science Night coming up on the 26th, where we have a group of students that are 4th grade working with science teachers from the University of Georgia. Students that are in a science class at the University of Georgia, working on a practicum, come over and work with our students, and they're all

working together. And so, the newsletter comes out as a general reminder. We remind

that about testing. We remind that about training. We remind them about different

things going on throughout the year. We also have a system in the district called

"MyLearningPlan.com." Under my learning plan, that's a way for them to keep up with

their staff development credits. If I go into my learning plan right now, I can identify

classes I took 10 years ago. I can find my staff development credit. I know how many

credits I am short, or how far I need to go to get what I need. I use my communication

level there to communicate with my parent weekly or monthly. We use that newsletter or

phone calling system to alert parents that we have something going on that they need to

know about, and meetings, whether they are formal or informal for teachers throughout

the day. One thing I do every morning…I go to every classroom in the building every

morning. I walk the halls, make sure I meet and greet the students every morning. I

make sure I know who's there and who's not. I can also find out who's strong, who's

hot, and who's not. You know things of that nature. You would be shocked and

surprised at what you learn by just walking around the building to find out what's going

on. Just letting the kids know who you are. That's very important, and that the teacher

sees you not as someone who's coming in as a villain, but as someone who's coming in

as helping. My job is serving teachers, to make sure they have what they need to be

successful. And that's the bottom line: to make sure they have what they need, and I

think every teacher in this building knows that. Whatever they need, we will do in order

to help them to help our children. But they've got to be about the kids, Sean. We have

had terminations here for people that did not have the children's best interest. You know,

if you're here just to draw a paycheck, you're in the wrong place when you're dealing

with our children, when you're dealing with anybody's child. You know, oftentimes, the only mistake I've made in teaching, in my education career, was my first year as principal…and I'll never make that mistake again…was to hide a teacher in EIP. I made that mistake, and I will admit that mistake. It was a poor teacher I stuck in EIP so parents wouldn't complain. At the end of the year I terminated that teacher. But I also stepped up to the plate and admitted my mistake. So often in schools, we let people sit there for 30 years that you knew was a poor teacher from the time they starting teaching. But we allowed them to stay, and think of the number of lives they've ruined. You know, in a 30 year period.

Researcher of the Study

It sounds in your communication, though, you constantly say that you can do…just in the past three or four questions…your communication practice is that you keep saying to students and teachers, "This is my expectation; this is what I want to do; this is what I want to see done; and this is what you can do as a student and teacher."

Principal of Willow Road Elementary

And listen to this, I have to listen to what they want also. It's a two-way street. I have to listen because sometimes you talk to hear yourself speak, and sometimes it sounds good until it comes off my lips. You know it sounds good to me, and then not taking in everything has a reaction with an action to it. Just because you move a teacher into a certain time slot, I have to keep in mind that certain people are affected by it, because we have a great deal of inclusion. We have a lot of push in of our EIP teachers that are going into classrooms and teaching with the teacher. Not sitting in the corner, they're teaching. They're not glorified hall monitors. They're in there working with these kids to help

them make AYP. We're taking a close look at our standards. There's something I want to show you before you leave. We're taking a close, close look at our standards…making sure that those standards match up, because they really, really do. When you break down the standards, and take a look at standards for the CRCT, it matches item by item. So that's a life changing experience. You should really take a close look at it. And, I communicate with my assistant principal everyday; we sit down and meet. Anytime I come back from a principal's meeting, we sit down and debrief. When she comes back from an assistant principal's meeting, the first thing we do is sit down and debrief. There is no hidden agenda, not if we are all on the same page. And that's important. I never want the Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent to come into the building and ask my AP something, and she doesn't have the slightest idea what they're asking about. To me that's not good business. To me, that's not being a good leader either. There are things we know that are confidential, but if you trust her, and I do trust her, I know that she is going to do right, and I respect the decision that she makes. And if I don't agree with her, you'll never know. She and I will talk about it in private, and we move on.

5. Are there any routines that you use daily that affect the instructional practices used in the classroom?

Principal of Main Street Elementary

Sure, we have some consistent things that we put in place at MES. Some of those things are your morning chats. I expect you to have your morning chat. You use that as a writing prompt, in your morning chat with a specific question. And the students respond to that. We also have a word of the day. We have that word displayed in the Frayer model. They know it…it is there. I also expect them to have their math problem of the

day. Everyday there are morning announcements. The reason we chose this year to first

do the math problem is our children have a problem with one, two, and three step --

mostly two and three step -- work problems. And we find that we have problems…it's

through data again…our benchmark assessments in grades 3, 4 and 5. So what we've

done is, we've did the word of the day for the least three years, it's our first year of doing

the math problem of the day, and that's consistent and that's pervasive throughout our

school. So they know when I come in, I expect to see boys and girls actively engaged; I

expect to see groups; I expect to see summarizing; I expect to hear students summarizing.

I want to hear the kids. I want to hear that they're able and can summarize. If they can

summarize, they know it. If they can explain it to someone else, they know it. Some

other things, this is just Best Practices. Word walls are displayed. I expect to see student

work samples, and by gosh they know…don't show Dr. Swint a color sheet. We don't

run them in this building. She will pull them off the wall if she sees it. And that I want

to see projects. I want to see work that shows mastery of a certain concept. I love to hear

the students; I love to hear their presentations. And so, I don't expect a traditional setting

when I come in. I don't want to see children sitting in rows with you asking them

questions and they're raising their hands. I expect group collaboration. We're not just

talking Best Practices; we're doing best practices.

Researcher of the Study

Has the change been challenging for you as a principal?

Principal of Main Street Elementary

It's been very challenging. It's probably the hardest job I've ever done in my life. It's

challenging yet very rewarding. People are resistant to change oftentimes; it's out of

their comfort zone. These professionals in this building have grown by leaps and bounds.

I don't know if they realize how much they've grown from three years ago. Some of

them have been here the entire three years. They've grown. They take pride in what they

do. They take ownership of what they do. I always tell them that school improvement is

-- and I've said it before -- is a journey. Our destination, we'll never get there. We're

always trying to see what we can to better at MES. In my annual evaluation conferences,

that's one of my last questions. I ask them, "What area should we target for growth for

the 07-08 school year?" Once we're done, I want to compile a list with all the comments

I've heard from the teachers, other staff members about things we're doing very well. But

you know what? We need to improve in these areas. Then for next year, in the leadership

team this summer, we'll talk about some of those things we can implement for the next

school year. But you never get comfortable. And I suppose…I have to share this with

you. My first year we made AYP, a teacher asked, "Are you going to back off this

now?" She's no longer with me, us. She was a good teacher, but didn't want to do what I

call "private practice." She said, "Well, you can get off our backs now, Ms. Swint." She

said it jokingly, but I really thought she meant what she said. And I told her, I said, "No

ma'am, we have not arrived."   We're always on, but we're not there yet. She's not with

us anymore, and I hate it because she really was a great teacher. But she wanted to do

what she wanted to do, and that was not the way we were going to do things at MES. She

thought we could sit back and be comfortable because we had made AYP.   I said this is a

yearly expectation. You can never get comfortable. You are always on your way, and

you never arrive. So I think they know that's my leadership style. They've adapted very

well to it. I can say enough about the importance of leading by example. I hold people

accountable. I think those two things have been the most important ingredients in our

recipe for success. I really do.

Principal of Willow Road Elementary

>   *Researcher of the Study*

Of the communication practices you just discussed, are there any things that you use on a

daily basis that will affect instructional practices used in the classroom?

Mainly just walking around every morning. I walk around the building every morning,

making sure that everything's in place. Making sure I meet and greet… I forgot to tell

you that I found that a newspaper…we give a newspaper to every parent who's dropping

off a child in the morning. Our parents are ready. Even people who don't have children

come through get their morning newspaper. And I don't mind because I've got people

reading. But they would have never known about our school if they hadn't come by. So

these same people are now volunteering to sit down in the hall with the children to help

them learn to read. And that's our goal. That's our ultimate goal. Because once you

learn to read, everything in life will be successful. So that little small token of a

newspaper…if putting a newspaper in the car with them, and saying good morning, and

opening the door for them…Our student leaders in 5th grade open up car doors for them

every morning and pass them a paper. They welcome them, and this, that, and the other.

That to me is powerful, because one of the major questions on surveys is, "Do you feel

welcome at your child's school?" And I can guarantee you that 99.9% of our parents will

answer that question, "Yes," because there's a counselor that meets them at the front door

and says, "Good morning," every morning. There are students at the front door that open

the door when you walk in. There's somebody out there at the curb opening doors for

you. All of our bus drivers get a newspaper every morning, and they look for it. They

began to look for it every morning. And to me that's a ritual that's ongoing.

Researcher of the Study

That's a great routine.

Principal of Willow Road Elementary

Yes, it's a great routine. During testing…sometimes when we are in stressful moments,

we get donuts and coffee for our teachers. There are times I feel the stress level is getting

out of hand, I go to the store and get maybe, candy bars for our teachers. I'll walk around

with bags of chocolate and stop by their doors. It sounds flimsy and it sounds flakey, but

they appreciate it, and they know that it's time for a little break. And you also have to

give and take. You know, school's supposed to be fun. You know we want them to

learn, but school is also supposed to be fun. And so you have to reward them for all the

behavior things that you think are right. It can't always be punitive. There has to be a

flipside. And so we try to make that known to the students.

Researcher of the Study

In your routines that your teachers do, you talked about Dibels, you talked about…just a

follow-up question. Are there certain practices that you expect to see all teachers doing?

Not necessarily at the same time, but I'm saying, when you walk around, are there

routines that you expect to see? Do you expect to see a Daily Oral Language; do you

expect to see…

Principal of Willow Road Elementary

One of the things I expect to see, Sean, is…and I speak to the teachers about this often…I

expect them to be up and teaching. I don't expect them to be sitting behind a desk. My

kids can't learn if you're sitting down. I expect the teachers to have sound lesson plans.

I don't expect them to write dissertations every week, I expect them to have sound lesson

plans that they can carry out. And if I ask what's going on in the class, the kid needs to

answer me. The kids need to know what's going on also. I don't need to talk to the

teacher. 99% of the time I walk into a classroom, I'm talking to the kids. I'm asking the

kids, "What are you doing today? Do you know? Can you tell me what you're doing

today? What have you gotten out of this lesson? How can you tie this lesson into what

you did yesterday? If he can't tell me, and if I go to another child, and he can't tell me, I

need to know what exactly is going on this classroom. You can tell good instruction

through children.

<div align="center">Middle School Principals' Interviews</div>

1. What type of incentives do you offer staff and students in making AYP?

Principal of Britton-Hugh-Leans

We don't per se have a celebration for making AYP. What we do for the attendance

piece is celebrate, if 95% or more attend during the session's window. For instance,

tomorrow, Friday, we are going to have a cookout. Each grade level will have a cookout.

Eighth grade chooses to do a dance. I'll provide the meat, and the kids bring the drinks

and the cookies. As far as staff is concerned, we've made it two of the three years I've

been here. We really haven't per se had a huge celebration, and that's about it.

Principal of Miller Middle

Really not, other than pride. We have a flexible schedule here. If there's a doctor's

appointment, a teacher can get here early in the morning, and leave at that time in the

afternoon. I don't know if that's been shared with you, but they can do that. And the

reason is...as long as the students are taken care of in the afternoon transition, then they can get out of here for doctor's appointments and what have you. I say pride; I think seeing the big picture of AYP is really important. Understanding test data and how to utilize it, and gives you a nice picture of where you've been and where you want to go. It's not the total picture, but it's a part of it. A climate... being able to give input on major initiatives and decisions without fear of reprisal. As long as it's done that way...it has to be spelled out to them, so you know they can do it in private or in the context of factual discussions. And we appreciate that. We don't want to become antagonists or advisories. You have to have discussions to talk things through, so that you can reach a position of strength. You can't do it with one or two people making decisions. Sometimes you have to hear some things that are painful, or uncomfortable, but you have to do that in order to get the real goal of the situation or decision. So we take all those comments as a little gold dust that we can use. But there are people on your staff that have to talk things through to fully understand the future, so that makes them more comfortable. So that's about the only awards that really are intrinsic. The pride is in your build-up, the honor is in your journey, not in the result. So I don't go around bragging, "Oh, I made AYP." We have a somewhat diverse population, but not as diverse as other schools that do make it. But we're not perfect, and don't claim to be perfect. It's in the struggle. It's in the journey, not just the result.

2. *What instructional practices are emphasized in your school?*

Principal of Britton-Hugh-Leans

We emphasize writing across the curriculum. We're big on doing our extended learning time, the first thing in the morning, the first 15 minutes of the day.   What we are doing

next year, and what we are doing this year is…1st nine weeks is reading; the 2nd nine

weeks is math; then it rotates until the end of the school year. Then those who need

remediation get help from those people certified in those areas. And that has really

helped in our making AYP.

 We organize our school day in that the first 15 minutes are designated as extended

learning time/study skills. And the rest of the day is on a 90 minute block. The Extended

Learning Time rotates every nine weeks.

Principal of Miller Middle

Well, we're a Learning Focus school, so we've done the training. Every new teacher that

comes in the school does the training in the summer. So what we look for is the

consistency in using Learning Focus concepts. This year we did a... we try to have a

professional dialog using Learning Focus. I think that as a leader, and go through the

training...if you just allow them to do their own thing for long, you're going to get

embedded ambiguity, embedded apathy, so we try to keep it at the forefront of

discussions. What we did this year is, was we did walkthroughs where they used a rubric

to assess 10 areas of Learning Focus schools. And then we took all their answers in focus

groups at the end of the year to where we were on continuing the rubric of Learning

Focus schools. We had a couple of areas... a 2.5, a 3, and it just simply indicates that the

work is never done, that we have to keep working at it. So we did that this year. We also

had a book study. We do a book study every year. And our book study this year was

about poverty kids and how they learn... how their brains operate. For example, a child

from a poverty situation may have a reading vocabulary that year of 250,000 words of

vocabulary, or something like that, and a child that comes from a good learning home

may have a million words vocabulary. So what that tells you is, that child that you are working with, you have to introduce and sustain new vocabulary throughout the year, just to try to shore up that gap, and it has to do with their brain, as how they acquire that knowledge. It's not that they can't learn, they just haven't been exposed. So that's just one thing we did, and we broke up into focus groups in March and reviewed that book, "The Biggest Concepts," and we'll give it back to them in rubric in the fall, that we will work on in the summer, when we have time, if we have time. And then we'll try and give it back to them, so they can see the focal points of working with kids that don't have the vocabulary, or how the brain works, blah...blah...blah. It was really interesting. One concept in one chapter was that you have to make a connection with a child...establish a relationship with them to help them learn. Because once they establish that trust with you, then they will make that effort to learn. It's not the fact that you're the content guru or anything like that, not that you're a content guru; they're going to learn because they identify with you. And it's little things like, speaking to every child every day, asking them about things that are going on in their life. Those are just a few examples. I find that really interesting because when I first became a principal, I asked the State Teacher of the Year to come and speak to my faculty. So I got on her list real early, and the first thing she said was, "I have to make a connection with every child, and then I can teach them some math. That was in 1993. And for me to read this in a book, and applied through research, and then go back in the beginning of my career, I tend to say the same thing: 'It is definitely true.'" So a lot of our faculty identified with that. And that's the kind of person you'd like to hire. It's the one that teaches children, not just content. So it comes from within, and it's a good focal point to focus on so they can keep doing that.

Every day, every year, you know it's the same approach. So we do the book study. We do exploration teams each year. This year the exploration was on Assessment for Learning. And we send four people, and the principal goes, then we go to RESA and did a four day workshop out at Athens Country Club on Assessment for Learning. Beth Reynolds was teaching. And that's our exploration. Next year we do the book study…we send one other team. Let me see, another thing we did… we kind of reinvented our school organization, where everybody has a place in something instructional. So, even connections teachers. One of my best teachers of learning focused schools is my Spanish teacher, of all people. You go in that room, and I mean it's just incredible what goes on in there. You know our SACS team is now our leadership team. They just basically run day to day operations procedurally. We don't have a team leader meeting any more; we just do grade level meetings now, once a month. And we do SACS instruction leadership, and then we report back to the faculty meeting about what's going on with the SACS, where we are, what our timetables are. You know, this is what we're looking at, blah…blah…blah. And them we have people off that team that can go to grade level teams or are involved with grade level, so they report back on their grade level…instructional items. We also have a data team now. The data team does the big report for the school-improvement team. The data teams are off of each grade level, so we go back and do an analysis of the data. Then we have the computer module where they can go in and look at each class, and see who those are that are in the upper level twos, or threes, or lower level ones, and how they can see what the weak areas are. Kind of be aware of that as they do their instruction and differentiate in target areas. And we have a few areas… professional learning is everyone. Our SACS

took over the professional learning, so they took over all the professional learning. And

what we did this year was…we had strands. We had a learning-focus strand, a

technology strand, and one other strand. I just can't think right now. So we had three

major strands, and they had a choice for one for one PLU. And it was interesting how

they were all evenly divided in those areas. Next year we're going to change that. We're

going to make differentiation the one big piece, and we'll have two smaller pieces they

can make a choice with. So, they have choices in their professional development. And

so they have to do a write up on the book; they do a write up on the walkthroughs; they

do that through their focus groups. And anybody that was absent through coaching or

whatever has to do one individual, which is a little motivation.

3. What practices do you do that you feel are the most important in making AYP?

      Principal of Britton-Hugh-Leans

The extended learning time is where we have a huge focus on our level one student's.

The teachers who have those students for language arts and for math are…that's a

specialty area for them where they're certified, and we just really hone in …we take the

MAPP test which breaks down where there weaknesses are, so they can start exactly

where that group needs instruction. The classes are grouped by their levels of

achievement based on that test. We look at past CRCT and MAPP tests that we take

three times during the school year, so we can look at the benchmark and that helps

teachers…it breaks it down by domain, where they can focus where they need. We also

have the CRCT coach books, which helps the students. We do test readiness skills; you

know just to prepare the students. We really focus on vocabulary of the test, so that the

students can do that. We have all the vocabulary on the walls. We call it, "Teaching

from the Walls," so those students see those words constantly, every day when they go to class. Then the teachers take those words and emphasize how it's used in context with how they will see in the test instead of pulled out of the context of the test. So we reinforce those kinds of things, not just the CRCT or what's on the test, but how they can be better test takers. You know, with vocabulary and that kind of thing.

Principal of Miller Middle

To be honest with you, in this stage of my career, I think it's the ability to talk about learning in a professional dialogue…how kids learn, how things are tried, and work and don't work. Eventually we want to start looking at student work, and that's really where we're heading. It was in our school-improvement plan five years ago. And we just haven't…and the key…OK, we're going to look at student work; this is the module we're going to do next year. Now that doesn't mean a thing to anybody, but if you start by creating the dialogue environment, then you can inch into these things if you can show how it will help with learning. Not how it will improve instruction. If you improve learning, you're improving instruction. That's the way to look at it. And you do that without threatening people. You do that by…this person over here, their light might turn on immediately, where this one over here may need several opportunities for their light to come on, and it may be a 40 watt versus a 60 watt, and that's fine, but if you've got that much of their mental capacity thinking about that improvement, and that is really most of your challenge. It's a challenge and an opportunity all at the same time. So I think creating an environment of dialogue is important, and then you can move into things like… oh, here's this work according to this standard. One of the things we're going to do next year…we're changing content needs from four times a year to monthly. And we're

going to do them on a certain day, and you will know what that day it is ahead of time,

and you don't schedule a doctor's appointment, and this is what we're going to do.

We're going to meet in the content area. We're going to rethink and re-look at the

standards according to our test scores. And then we're going to talk about… and at the

end we will talk about our activities and our unit plans, and things of that nature. And we

need to do that. We haven't done that. What's it been, three years since we first started

on language arts? We need that. It needs to be talked about again. You need to establish

a vehicle for that dialogue to take place. What is the purpose of it? This purpose is to

revisit standards, and have discussion on what we're all doing. And the whole purpose is

consistency, you see. And people have to get out of their comfort zone. And it's out of

my comfort zone. It's the same thing. It's not evaluation; it's all about the learning.

That's what you have to focus on, and you get away from… well, we got good kids.

Everybody's got some good kids or we've got parents that are non-supportive. You're

teaching the kid. You're not teaching the parent. It will help if you had a supportive

parent, but not everybody's got one. So, you know, we've got some people that make a

lot of money, and their not supportive. So what?

We've got that kid here. Let's put that kid in a position where he can learn. You know,

that's what it's all about.

4. What communication practices do you use to facilitate the instructional practices in

the school?

> *Principal of Britton-Hugh-Leans*

Our Instructional Lead Teachers (ILTs), are a great resource that we have for all grade

levels. Dr. Hooker and I meet every other Friday with our grade levels to go over any

concerns…what's coming up…what we need to do. And on the other Friday, we have

collaborative planning so our language arts teachers can meet and plan together. Also, if

social studies is doing a big paper, language arts can plan with them, so they can both

grade the paper, one for content and one for grammar. We have a specialist to come in,

liker our math specialist. Ms. Linda Huff comes in and meets with our math teachers.

We have so many resources in Clarke County, where outside of our building, people

come in…staff development is utilized…teacher planning days. We're just constantly

collaborating and talking and getting support in various ways.The ILTs also play a part in

that. I'm fortunate that I have to half time ILTs, but they work like they're full time.

One special area is English language arts. The other one is science. I have a gifted

facilitator whose specialized area is social studies. So he also interacts with the teachers

as well as hones in on those skills. Even though he is a gifted facilitator, he may work

with level-one students or students who are behind in their classes, to help them catch up.

We call it the "Catch-up Bunch," so everyone is involved. We have been fortunate this

year too, that we've partnered with Piedmont College, Gainesville College, and some

University of Georgia students that come in, and they do practicum's. We use them in

that, if a student is behind or needs some remediation in match or language arts, they're

pulled aside in small groups to do that. And going back to our ELT groups, if the student

is a level-one student, the classes are not more that 14 or 15 students.

 Principal of Miller Middle

I can give you that diagram of our school organization. That was really the renaissance

for me, in that it did not happen until we got the new Superintendent, and he requires you

to set three goals. He wants to see three goals from you. He wants to see a system goal,

what you're doing in your building; he wants to see a school goal, and a personal goal. And I missed it the first year. Even as experienced as I am, I misunderstood his intent. But basically he's going to look at your school-improvement plan…whether you're in alignment with the system. We're going to system SACS this year, so two years ago we started revising our school plan to fit in with the system plan, so he's going to want to know that. When I talk to faculty, then I come back, and I've had two goals that they do, and they submit their goals; they have to follow the same alignment. But I think where we're going… I think we're going to go toward more specific goals. I think at the end of this year, I'm going to give them two or three example of things that I want them to look at. I'll give them a choice of those three. I really want them to undertake the differentiation process, and use that as a system goal. Then their personal/professional goal can be something of their choosing. But since I think the school-goal and the school-improvement plan is differentiation, they can take that on. We have that goal process that's predominant here, and when they come in at the end of the year, they have to reflect on that, and they have to do a written reflection. Most of them are about a page and a half to two pages. And it forces them to think about it. There's not any pressure from me, unless they don't do it. You know, I've never had anybody not do it. But I think it forces a person to think about their place in the organization, and their value, which everybody has value…and how do they see that working. And I'll always ask them…well let's look at next year. You know, what are your thoughts on next year? Based upon our school improvement plan, where do you see yourself going? But I don't want them to do some low-maintenance thing; I want them to step out and look at something that is meaningful. And some of them you've got to help along. You know,

it's busy at the end of the year, and we set up these meetings; they're all charted out, and they know when they are supposed to come. You know we just knock them out and get them done. So that's it.

5. Are there any routines that you use daily that affect the instructional practices used in the classroom?

Principal of Britton-Hugh-Leans Middle

We're fortunate that we're Learning Focus schools. We have essential questions; there should be a project activity posted in each room. Some classrooms have smart boards. Each day, my ILT and language arts person send out what they call a "DVD," a Daily Vocabulary Development, or the "DTP," the Daily Test Preparation question, and she e-mails that out, and so when students come in, especially if you have a smart board, you just turn on your computer, and as they walk in, they have to answer the questions. And those are some routines we're going to put in better place for next year, but it…I think it has been effective thus far this year.

Principal of Miller Middle

In Learning Focused schools, we expect to see an outline of what activities are taking place. We want the teachers to put the essential question, and the outline of what activities are taking place so the student can transfer that into their agenda. And when I walk in a room, I expect to see where they are in that agenda. So there's that consistency from room to room to room. We ask that they meet content-wise once a week to look at pacing activities so that they are pacing with each other. You may see a day or two difference, but that's fine. I think that's the big crux of it…what I like to see. The teacher is the one in charge of instruction. I provide the leadership on the big stuff, but

they have to have some autonomy in their room. And you know, when I walk into that

room, I don't want them to acknowledge me. I have like baseball signals. I have one

little signal, and if I need to see them, I'll raise my finger just like this, and nod my head,

that I need to ask them something. And at that point, they don't have to stop and come to

me, but for them to get to a point that they can check with me. So I may stand there five

minutes waiting. And then if I walk in and they don't see any of that, then they know I'm

just walking through. So I do five minutes checks…walkthroughs to look at things. If I

don't understand something, I'll say, "I just want to chat with you a minute." Or I'll

come by during planning and say, "I didn't understand so and so. Please tell me about so

and so. And they'll tell me about the lesson, and it will make sense to me. When you go

by for five minutes, you don't see everything; you just want to see the main piece. I'll

tell you one other thing we do, and I don't know how other schools do it, but it makes

sense to me. But CRCT testing, kids get anxious about test-taking, and so we try to

alleviate that in several ways, and this is how we do it. We don't teach to the test. We

take the units, and when we're through with the units, we'll take ten sample questions of

the release CRCT that fit with what we've taught.

<div align="center">High School Principals' Interviews</div>

1. What type of incentives do you offer staff and students in making AYP?

 Principal of Mason High

Well, we really don't spend too much time talking about AYP. We spend most of the

time here talking about what we're doing on a daily basis. And the big part of incentives

that we do here…we do most everything positively based. We're encouraging our

students to do their best. There are a couple of phrases that we have bought into. One of

those is "Rigor, Relationships, and Relevance." Those three R's are a part of our school

culture, in the fact that we've raised the rigor with more of our students. We have

eliminated lower level classes. We have AP classes; we have an IB class… that's all we

have. Our expectations are very high. Every student takes two years of foreign language

their first two years of high school. We're trying to get everybody ready for college. All

our students may not go to a four-year college or a two-year college, but we want

everybody in a position that they can make that decision. So we start everybody off in

that direction. Relationships are big in that we have an advisory program, that the

climate of our school, because of the caring adults we have here, and their commitment to

students, creates a place where students feel safe, and feel that someone cares about them.

They feel like this is a place where they like to be. Our students, by and large…they

enjoy being at school. Adults like working here. There's great collaboration between

teachers and teachers, between teachers and students, and between student and students,

as well. Then the relevance-part of that piece is that we'll work with the students… we'll

talk with somebody to be able to find out what they want to do, or work toward their

career goals or towards their interests. We will create classes and programs and

opportunities for our students. Instead of trying to make one package, that's what we do.

We try to take all our resources and service students. So I say all that to say that, every

day we're trying to make our school a place where students enjoy coming to school,

where the adults enjoy coming to work, and where everybody can be successful. And

that's our greatest incentive. The only other thing that we do is, with the graduation

test…we offer the juniors an exam exemption if they pass the Math, English, Science and

Social Studies part. It's really low key. We really don't make a big deal about it…in

that, we're really not talking about AYP. We let our kids know about it, but we're generally dealing with their individual interests and their individual success. And one thing that I believe is that I know that most teachers work better in a system of support and nurturing, than they do in a system of fear and anxiety over tests. And we have very specifically here… we don't spend lots of time talking about the test or about AYP. We do talk about kids graduating. And we do talk about what we can to do get kids to graduate. We do talk about rigor and preparation. That's pretty much what it is. We talk more about the means than we do the end.

2. What instructional practices are emphasized in your school?

 Principal of Mason High

Well, we've been fortunate to have a good bit of technology in the building. We have a lot of what we call COWs. That's Computers On Wheels. Some of our teachers have even put ears and spots on them. It's pretty neat-looking. We encourage the teachers and the students to use the technology that we have available to us. We have gone through training for Understanding by Design. We've done backwards design, where the teachers learn to develop units with the end in mind, and going backwards from there. We encourage our teachers to use a variety of techniques when they are delivering. We encourage real-life issues. There's somebody at this school going on a field experience just about every day. Our kids get out, they see things. They're doing hands-on experiences. I think the more our students get out, the better they're going to be. I think that Richard Riley, who is the former Secretary of Education, that in 2010, 70% percent of the areas that people would want a job in, didn't even exist in 2004. So a great deal of what we're doing is preparing students for jobs that we don't even know about. A great

deal of what we do with our students is problem solution. We spend a great deal of time talking about citizenship, and being nice to each other. We have a Good Dog Deed award every Friday. We take nominations… it's like a random act of kindness. We have the little Bulldogs. It's really neat when somebody's been recognized for doing something good. So we emphasize in our classrooms and outside our classrooms, working together, working to solve your problems. One of our groups recently presented to our Regional Board of Commissioners for the multi-county region, with the idea of a plasma torch that could come and burn fuel and create energy for Morgan County. And this is part of what they did in Environmental Science class. So they're actually going out and proposing a renewable energy source to their community. It's not practice, it was real. And they're a thousand little pieces that are just out there that make up what we're doing. The reason those instructional things are happening is that we have really good teachers here who care about their kids, and whose greatest source of accountability is to themselves.

3. What practices do you do that you feel are the most important in making AYP?

   Principal of Mason High

I think that whatever teachers need to engage students in, what they're doing is important. I think that means variety. I think that means that we're going different things, that we're mixing in discussion with lecture, with the media, with hands-on. We're doing a variety of things. I don't think that I know one that's better than all. It's interesting, I still teach a class. I team teach with one of the other teachers. We have brought our classes together. It's great to play off each other. It's US History, and we're talking about the Cold War and the 50's today in class. And today we were talking about how with the

advent of Sputnik, how in American schools, we were very much driven by Math and

Science. And as the Cold War waned, we started moving into where people took more

humanities and things. And we asked students a question, "25 years from now, what

would you tell people about what was the focus of your education here?" And the

student kind of looked at each other and they came up with the answer, "In the school our

focus is on being well-rounded." And I was very proud of their answer. And that was

unsolicited. But I think the kids usually have if figured out. I really think that in our

actions, and in our words, here is, we're trying to help our kids be well-rounded because

of the variety. Education doesn't end in the classroom. We have a homecoming week

that looks like all the activities come from the Stephen King movie, Children of the Corn.

There are no adults around because the kids do it all. The adults are in the background

and the kids do everything. On Friday we have a thing called "Friday Live." And during

lunch time, there's a different event that happens. Sometimes it's our kids who have

garage bands, and they're playing on the steps of the auditorium. One week we had a

rodeo. We had a group of kids that organized and planned their own rodeo. We have

barrel racing in the front yard of the school. They learned so much that I dare say that that

was a great educational experience for them because they had to learn to market; they had

to learn to organize, learn logistics. They had to learn all those things. They had to learn

bureaucracy. They had to learn to manage to do all that. And we intentionally… where

standing close enough to catch them if they fall, and far enough away to let them reach

out and see how far they can get. So that's pretty much how we do in our student events

and activities. So that's a big part of what we do. I don't think there's one thing we do

instructionally that's greater than the other. But I do think one thing that our students get a sense of is, experience school here. And I think that's probably an important one.

4. What communication practices do you use to facilitate the instructional practices in the school?

　　Principal of Mason High

Well, we have a book that we produce annually. It's called "Pursuits." It's a book that covers all the programs we have at school, all the programs. It's part course-catalog and part what we do, and why we do it. It covers clubs; it covers our International Baccalaureate program, our AP classes, our Middle College program. It covers a lot of things. That's an important part of communication. As many schools do, our students create a daily television show that's in-house for the students. The news that's presented there is a different class. It's our Web Page class. They pick up all of the news. They create a formatted page and send it to all our students. All our students have school e-mail. They send it to every student's e-mail and every faculty member's e-mail. They also send it to any parent who's interested in being on the list. We have other students who do a local radio show every day. They take those same announcements and record via the internet. They do an MP3 recording and send it over to the radio station. It's produced here and sent over there. A lot of what we're doing curriculum wise here is also covered in that. We talk about what we're doing in our classes and all of those formats. Our local newspaper comes in and covers what we're doing in our classes. We have lots of visitors. We're real transparent about what we're doing and why we're doing it. As far as goals and as far as what we're doing… that's everybody's responsibility every day. It truly is. The school's goals for our students are out there in the hall posted.

But we talk about it, too. We talk about how we want everybody to graduate. We break it down into what we want 9th graders to do, and what we want 10th graders to do. We want all of our students to have a post-secondary plan. And that's really carried out and communicated via our advisory team. This is a fun place, but a serious place where people talk about what we're doing with our kids. We talk about it all the time and it's what the adults really enjoy. And so, it's almost like the communication piece on curriculum is on-going. It lasts all school year. We have an instructional team of teachers. It's a different lead teacher from each department, plus our IB coordinator. We have our IB coordinator. We have someone whose AP classes and our AP program. We have a graduation coach. We have our counselors. We have administrators and teachers. We often invite the middle school principal. We also invite someone over from the county office. We have a meeting in January and a meeting in June, and at that time we make many of the decisions that drive the next… we kind of set the agenda for what's going on the next six months. These are day-long meetings away from campus that we refer to as bank meetings, because we start at the local bank. Even if it's not at the bank, they're called the bank meeting now. That's where the decisions that have moved us forward were made. We had somebody in yesterday from one of the Daggett schools. We are a Daggett school now. The way we make decisions here is, it's neither pushed up from the bottom, nor pushed down from the top. That is really something that's a mix of that. That's really all I was ever after. And the teachers are really excited about it. Because administratively, we're not just sitting there waiting for something to happen, to occur, but at the other end, at the other part of that, we're not just dreaming stuff up and saying "Do this." Generally there's hardly anything that comes out that is not in the draft

form to begin with. Whether it is an exam schedule… we'll send out an exam schedule

for May in January and say maybe, "There's dumb things in here, please help us find it."

If you don't do that and send it out as the final version, the teachers will find the dumb

things that are inside.

5. Are there any routines that you use daily that affect the instructional practices used in

the classroom?

Principal of Mason High

We don't have certain requirements of teachers. I've worked in schools and there was a

list of four or five things that everybody needed to do in every class. And there's value in

that, and I think that's OK, but we haven't done that here. A great deal of why we've

been successful is our teachers really feel that they're treated professionally here. They

have autonomy. Autonomy can be a bad word in school. I don't mean autonomy where

the administrator sits far away, and the teachers just do their thing, and we don't care.

It's autonomy to the point that we expect a lot out of our teachers, but we don't tell them

how to do it. We tell them what we want. And what we want is for our students to be

engaged. We want our students to be challenged and prepared. We ask them to do that

but we don't tell them how. You could go to any classroom here at the school and find

30 different ways that it could be done. I don't tell our teachers that they've got to do a

bell ringer that you've got to have the essential question. We don't tell them those

particular things. But what happens, because we have so much intentional time between

teachers that they'll learn what works from another teacher and they'll expand. And

they're many common practices that are in our school, but there are none that are

required on the school's part. We have basically set the vision, and we have done that

collectively; we have set expectations, and the teachers rise up to meet those

expectations. And in a few cases, we've been very fortunate with personnel, but we talk

very plainly in private, with people who aren't doing what we think they need to be

doing. And the teachers are responding. I have found particularly during interviews that

people like to be a part of something that they think is success. And they like to able to

do their job. I've often heard that over the years, "If they would just let me do my job."

We really try here to let them do their job. We have teachers that practically have no

duty. One nine weeks out of the year, they actually do morning or afternoon duty.

Nobody does any lunch duty. We handle that administratively; with mirrors sometimes it

seems. We don't over-duty them. I don't check lesson plans. When we go into

classrooms… every Friday we go around visiting every classroom and taking them a

Happy Friday treat. We have a couple of students that go around with a basket and give

them treats. We just celebrate Friday. Friday's a big day around here. I'm not sneaking

around on them, but I'm always amazed. It's serendipitous at the level of engagement

between our teachers and students at 3:00 to 4:00 on Friday afternoon. You know, it's

the real world and sometime somebody might not be on their A game, but I'm always

amazed at the level of what we're doing on those late afternoons. And that's something

I've been very pleased with. A certain percentage of our students ride the bus in the

morning and the bus in the afternoon. And fortunately our bus system is very efficient.

Our school lets out at 3:15, and all the busses are gone by 3:35. That's good, but also bad

because a lot of kids don't have the opportunity to get help for their academics. So we

embed it into our schedule. It's actually three things. One of those is enrichment, a very

open opportunity. It can give you an ice cream headache. You've got to trust your

students to go where they're supposed to go, but basically the students have a starting

point in enrichment. If you're an 11th grader you go to Ms. Dartnell and you get extra

help in Environmental Science. It's a point where everybody has to cooperate. If the

teacher has too much business you have to go to another room. It's never chaotic. For a

couple of minutes there are kids out in the hall, but the kids have generally come around

to appreciate this. It's during this time that a student in the 11th grade, perceived to have

difficulty in passing the graduation test, is given extra help at this time. If it's a senior,

and they have passed a portion of the graduation test, we give them extra help at that

time. Our Choral director put together am ensemble and they performed God Spell. And

they had a handful of afternoon and evening rehearsals just prior, but basically they

produced God Spell, and a great performance of, during this enrichment period. Because

as that period evolves, I want to hear people say, "I want to learn Latin. It's not on my

schedule, but I want to learn Latin." So that period is for a variety of things, and it's

tough for school people because we like to schedule things, but this has to be a little

loose. The other two pieces that are routines and important to our instructional program

are the advisors that I previously mentioned. Every student has an advisor. We have a

Freshman Academy, so our 9th grade students remain as advisees of those 9th grade

teachers. They don't stay with that teacher for four years, and I think there is a lot of

value in that, but for the way we're structured, we are kind of like Hogwarts out of Harry

Potter. We have 1st years and 2nd years and…3rd and 4th years…as 10th grade students

they have an advisor, and once kids get to the 11th and 12th grade, the kids who were in

Agriculture, the AG teacher, his advisory students are AG students. So when we get

ready to college applications, you will end up helping somebody that you were going to

help with their college application anyway. So it fits very neatly for us in the 11th and

12th grade. We kind of have a European or a collegiate model here in that 9th and 10th

grade is foundational. There are a lot of developmental things that we do here. We pick

up a lot of things from the middle school. But once students get to the 11th and 12th

grade, much of nearly everything they're doing there is interest-based. We have students

that are in Construction class. We're partnered with Dekalb Tech. We have students that

are full time in our IB program. We have students that are interested in Criminal Justice,

so they're taking classes for that. 11th and 12th kind of expands and we've make progress

and our greatest goal is that the transition out of high school is something we spend as

much attention to as we've previously spent from 8th to 9th grade. So that's our growth

area. The third routine, and it really does make a big part of difference in our instruction,

is on Thursday mornings, our students have a late arrival at 8:45 and our teachers come at

7:30. We have every teacher on campus. They all come together and we're able to

divide… we can put all our 9th grade teachers together, and let them work together. We

can put our math teachers together.   We can put the teachers who teach IB together. And

we change the configuration of who meets each Thursday.   And we sit down and plan it

out with the teachers in for the semester in January and June, and we come up with what

our schedule's going to be. We don't have any faculty meetings after school, ever. Any

time we're going to get together as a faculty, which is probably every month to six

weeks, and those are just usually for celebrations, and they're brief. We'll do that in the

morning when we have our whole faculty together. On any given afternoon, 30% percent

of our students are being served by our teachers from 3:15 to 6:00 so we will never be

able to do anything collaborative after school. But in the mornings we can. We've gone

beyond getting teachers together and then griping about the principal or the school. We're past that. When our teachers get together on Thursday morning, they're doing work. And they're doing work, because they are grateful to have that time to work together as teachers. So that is a routine that is really important. All three of those items, the T3, enrichment and advisory are embedded into the schedule. So you never have to change the schedule to make it happen. They are a part of our routine. And those are things that are important in our instructional program. I'll tell you what was neat: We had a visit from these people, American Youth Policy Forum. They came through Georgia and came to our school back in the fall. They were riding on the bus from Atlanta. They had a meeting with the Governor and then came here for lunch in between. So we did a video for them, and they wanted to know about particular things. And so we did a video for them, and I wasn't on it. Four years ago, I would have been in the video. But probably one of the top ten thrills I've had is not being on the video, because I didn't have to be, because everybody else can tell the story. The students know the story too, and that's just very gratifying, and more than that, it makes you know that this can work. The principal has so many things to be in charge of; if he tries to be in charge of everything, he'll blow up. So many people in our school are involved in leadership in one way or the other. Whether they're a department head, or whether they're in charge of the IB program or in charge of the after school program, there's a point where if everybody's in leadership, nobody would ever complain about leadership, because it's them! We have intentionally spread that around and gotten our teachers involved in decisions, setting policy, hiring people, you know. And ultimately the principal's got to put the stamp on everything because people don't want a committee, they want a person,

but they like to be a part of it. Finding that balance is not like finding the Coke formula

like you figure it out, where you write it down; it's something different every day.

You've got to keep trying to figure out that balance. I'm really happy were it's going,

because we are at a good balance now.

<p align="center">Elementary School Focus Group Interview</p>

1. What type of incentives do you offer staff and students in making AYP?

  Parent of Elementary

Well, there's a lot of preparation throughout the school year in achieving that

goal…AYP. Certainly there's a lot of celebration going on here when that announcement

is made. We're honored with a celebratory dinner at our school by our administrative

staff upon returning to school the next school year. And prior to making AYP, we

emphasized the importance, to the students, about being at school every day. We have

recognitions for perfect attendance. For CRCT, we have a "Prep Rally" that's a school-

wide celebration. We have an ice-cream social at the end of CRCT testing week.

  Teacher of Elementary

For the students who maintain great testing, use good testing strategies and have good

behavior during the week of testing; those students have the opportunity to have their

name on a ticket, and we have prices such as three bikes, DVD's, and radios, that those

students have an opportunity to win on the last day of testing.

2. What instructional practices are emphasized in your school?

  Assistant Principal of Elementary

We use Best Practices. And of course we are going with the Georgia Standards, which

guides our entire curriculum. We're a lot more hands on with student involvement,

where the students are active learners and participants of their learning. We are moving

toward assessment for learning, so we are now looking at what they know; assessing that

with diagnostic, and instructing based on their needs; doing pre-tests at the end; and just

using just whatever Best Practices there are.

Teacher of Elementary

Our EIP teachers have been trained in the "Hands-on Math Investigations," so we use

that with our EIP students. Our DEES teachers have been trained also with the "Direct

Instruction for Reading" that teaches the children on their ability level.

Assistant Principal of Elementary

I want to add one more thing: With reading, we're using what we call the "EDNA"

reading program. Our students are taught at their instructional reading levels, they're

pulled out for one 45 minute block of the day, and they merge back into their class for

on--grade level reading in the second block of the day. We also have two math blocks,

one that is instructional, and one that is grade level appropriate, as well.

Teacher of Elementary

We also have a writing block that incorporates the grammar and mechanics. It also

incorporates writing across the curriculum.

Parent of Elementary

With parent involvement, we also promote family literacy school events, such as books

and breakfast once a month, and our reading rodeo. And it promotes home as being the

first place of learning, and the importance of family literacy and having fun with reading

as a family.

3. What practices do you do that you feel are the most important in making AYP?

Assistant Principal of Elementary

I think as instructional coach that once we were trained on the Georgia standards, and once we were actually teaching by the standards, and sticking with our curriculum, and meeting our student with where they are and moving them forward… once we were actually trying to bridge those gaps, then we were able to move forward. We were then meeting and accelerating.

Teacher of Elementary

I think that one of the most importance things we have done is incorporating the data into our instructional-preparation planning. And also making the school-improvement plan a working document, rather than just shelving it.

4. What communication practices do you use to facilitate the instructional practices in the school?

Teacher of Elementary

And just that… what you just said. It's clearly communicated to us from all areas of leadership, that through our school improvement plan… everything that we do is in the plan. We work the plan. The plan is being constantly revisited and revised if needed. The plan is clear, and it's also monitored. Our principal's and administrator's are in and out of our classrooms daily. I don't feel that is an intrusion, but just their… you see them, everywhere, every day. And so, I think that matters.

Teacher of Elementary

Sometimes we joke around here too, that the principal uses the phrase, "The expectation is," and it means, "The requirement is." But it is very clear what the expectations are.

She does that verbally and in writing, but I think more importantly she models that for us. She doesn't ask us to do anything that we don't see her doing as well.

5. Are there any routines that you use daily that affect the instructional practice used in the classroom?

Teacher of Elementary

One of the things we've starting doing is handling the daily morning chat journals across the board. Every classroom has a writing journal.

Teacher of Elementary

To add to that, the words of the day are a school wide program. The math problem of the day… all students are involved in solving the math. Every child goes to reading two times a day, and I think that's important… and math. Those are non-negotiable unless something comes up.

Teacher of Elementary

We also have daily silent reading, which is called our "Bear Time," where every child in the building with the exception of…we're all doing it with the exception of 4th grade at 2:45. 4th grade gets it earlier than we do, because of scheduling conflicts. Everybody uses EDD Math and EDD Language Arts every day.

Teacher of Elementary

We do essential math, and we do essential questions with every lesson, and the students are also asked to respond to those questions through various ways…ticket in the door, ticket out of the door, three two one summaries…talk to a partner where one of the kids are more working in cooperative groups with one another. I know that's something that's in every classroom.

Assistant Principal of Elementary

We are still following the Learning Focus model closely here at MES. I would probably say that we are one of the schools that actually is sticking with it, and that those things are really important. And administrators look for those in their walkthroughs. They're still looking for those essential questions where the kids can summarize, where the kids can answer the questions. We're still using those lesson plan formats.

Teacher of Elementary

I think that helps us with having those blocks of scheduling. When you walk down my hallway, you know everyone is teaching math at that time. Or, the classroom is engaged in writing at that time. It really causes the teachers to stay on track with the timing and curriculum management. It also gives the student that kind of structure, that they know that this is really important to us.

Teacher of Elementary

We use our data from benchmark tests to see what areas the kids are weak in. And we plan our curriculum and instruction from that. So, they're data-driven. What does the data say? We don't have to guess at where our kids are. We do reading tests every nine weeks. We give the Star test, a diagnostic test, so we know where our kids are in math and reading every nine week, and we use that for instructional purposes.

Teacher of Elementary

We have tutoring that's offered. We do after school tutoring. We do after school programs. We have intercessions that are offered to every child. Students with disabilities we have 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade.

Teacher of Elementary

We also have our para-pro people to help with instructional needs of students with disabilities. We have collaborative classrooms where our students with disabilities are in the classroom. Everything I mentioned to you is written in our school improvement plan. We follow it to the T. It is a living document.

Parent of Elementary

One of the things that does link in with our instruction is our family events we have here. We promote family and the important of parents knowing what's going on in the classroom. And at our family events, there's always a handout in relation to the topic of that family night, math mania, family fitness, family science, I mean it all focuses around things… the children are learning in the classroom and our parents stay abreast of what's going on.

Teacher of Elementary

I don't really know if this answers your question per se, but I think it's really important in achieving AYP is to have that sense of ownership, because our children teach other children, our teachers teach other teachers. The teachers teach other teacher's children. Everybody has a stake in it. Everybody has bought into doing whatever it takes to be successful.

Parent of Elementary

And we have a very strong "Partners in Education" program. Numerous business and service clubs in our community support our school through monetary donations, volunteer hours, teacher appreciation efforts, sponsorship of family events… that sort of thing. Local businesses are behind us on this as well.

Middle School Focus Group Interview

1. What type of incentives do you offer staff and students in making AYP?

> *Teacher of Middle School*

I don't know that there are necessarily any quantitative kinds of incentives; it's more of an internal...like bragging rights, and the expectation of community pride. And not just in our community, but within our world community. Our website has been cited several times by people moving into the community. "We looked at your scores, we looked at your web site, and we've decided that this is where we wanted to move because of that." So it's really kind of an issue of personal pride, and get the feel-good aspect of it, that we have done our best.

> *Teacher of Middle School*

I would agree with Susan in that we don't... that there's no tangible incentive that we get, or that's offered to us. But from the aspect of internally how we feel when we walk into the building, and you see the banner hanging in the hallway or you look at your scores from the data team the previous year, and you see that your subject really did well. So I think it's just like she said, a community pride thing. We have families that have moved from all parts of the world that have looked at the best school district that they could find, and they decided to come here.

> *Teacher of Middle School*

As far as incentives, what we'll do is...everyday we will have an extra learning time period, so according to how well they do, and how focused they stay focused, we'll offer them some type of reward, like a free basketball period or a free period where they can choose the type of sport to play.

2. What instructional practices are emphasized in your school?

Teacher of Middle School

It's called ELT. It stands for "Extended Learning Time. We have it every for

approximately 35 minutes in the morning and every teacher has to do it. We started the

first nine weeks with Language Arts, and then the second and third nine weeks we had

Mathematics, and the fourth nine weeks, we're going back to Language Arts again.

Teacher of Middle School

Personally, I think that one instructional practice is just the follow-through that we have

with using vocabulary on a daily basis. In any classroom that you walk into, the

vocabulary that follows the unit that we're discussing...the topic...the theme is always

constantly used throughout the lesson, throughout the entire week. And I think that is a

big part, and it plays a big part when CRCT comes around, that the kids have been given

that vocabulary so much that it's a part of their own daily vocabulary.

Teacher of Middle School

Our school-improvement plan only had two goals, and that was to increase the percentage

of students in level three, in reading, language arts, and math, and to decrease numbers in

level one. Hence, our strategies were such that all of our strategies were linked to that

which plays a big part in AYP. The vocabulary is huge, and that's a research-based

strategy...that vocabulary instruction increases test scores. We use word walls to reinforce

the vocabulary. Vocabulary is done both within the context of the unit, and with our

Gifted kids, we also do the "Worldly Wise" program, which is an external list of words

that are typically vocabulary words that you would find on SAT forms. So the

vocabulary is huge. The other strategies that I think really impact our scores are constant

cyclical reviews. That we are constantly going back to review, and implementing and expecting kids to apply that knowledge in the new or the current situation, or another content area. We also use activating strategies, which that term is just a Learning Focus term, but every day there's some kind of starter activity that leads into either the content of the day, or at the beginning of the unit. And there's also summarizing activities, whether it be daily or at the end of the unit. For example, the 6th grade, in their social studies classes, they'll have a Latin America day, which they'll have Latin American foods, they'll watch a Latin American film, they'll have Latin American activities, and it's the whole team and all the teachers involved in that. And that's a middle school philosophy thing, those interdisciplinary units. And all of those things play a part for kids to see learning as a whole, and it's not just isolated in each class.

3. What practices do you do that you feel are the most important in making AYP?

> *Teacher of Middle School*

One more thing is that demographics play a huge role. We have, you know, a relative high mean income in this county. The expectation of parents is that they value education. Most of our households have at least one parent with an advanced degree, meaning a college degree...if not two. So the expectation for world class education is here. One other thing that we do to help children that are not successful... and I think it's important that we have two opportunities for extended learning time. One that is built into the school day, which is instructional extension, and it is catered and individualized. There are computer-based strategies that go on there. The teacher really knows those students' areas of weakness, and she targets those areas and reinforces those in both math and English language arts. And we also have an opportunity for anybody that is in level one,

or who is in the lowest quartile on ITBS or who's recommended by a teacher, can come to after school instructional extension. But after school, two days a week, usually beginning in late January or early February, and leading up to CRCT, just to get them again reviewing that vocabulary, reviewing test taking strategies. They make it fun. There's a snack provided. It's a lot more laid back than the normal classroom atmosphere, and that really reinforces learning for those kids that are at risk.

Teacher of Middle School

I actually taught the extended-instruction time after school for our math program, and I would agree with Susan, that just the opportunity to be in that different environment is enough support into those math concepts. I just felt like…I teach those students, just not math during the regular day. And to just see the difference in a regular day and after school, one-on-one or small group time is extremely important to them in making them feel successful. And just giving them confidence to do better, and to try as hard as they can on the CRCT. It's morale boosting, as well.

Parent of Middle School

It's a 10 week…once a week for 10 weeks. And it is one hour and a half each week. And we have it for reading and math. Some students do both days, and some students just go to one or the other.

Teacher of Middle School

This is just my first year here. I taught seven years prior to this, so I really like the ELT area, because I think it's really important to kids, especially when we do Language Arts and reading that they read. I don't think you can ever read enough. And especially being a student, and kids, I think that the more they read, the better off in the long run they're

going to be down the road as far as anything that they do. So I like the reading aspect

and the Language Arts aspect that we concentrate on as a school-wide program. We have

mostly, we kind of have, I don't want to say we have free rain of what we do, but it

seems like everybody, as far as grade-level, works the same on the same task. For

example, I have 8th grade kids so the 8th grade teachers came to me and said, "This is

what we're doing," if your interested you can do this. I thought it would be very

beneficial to me to kind of do what everybody else was doing. You know, just do what

the rest of the team was doing, which is more beneficial for the kids, instead of a teacher

going off and doing what they'd like to do, and have a teacher do something completely

different. I think if everybody stays focused on the same task, it's more effective.

4. What communication practices do you use to facilitate the instructional practices in

the school?

   Teacher of Middle School

A lot of these issues we discuss as a faculty at our faculty meetings. We do have, I guess

you could say, specific teams within the school that work on these things. We have a

school data team. The actually analyze all the data from last years CRCT scores. They

arrange them in spreadsheets so that the teachers could recognize where the weaknesses

were, so they could strategize and plan for improvement.

   Teacher of Middle School

We use e-mail a lot, which I love because it's very quick and easy. Sometimes it's tough

to get in to see Mr. O, or Dr. W, so you can shoot them an e-mail, and can usually get

back to you quickly. Within our school we also have teams, like the data teams. And

I'm a part of our SACS team, which is our leadership team. We have representatives on

that team from each grade level, and from the Connections area, and from Special Ed and from Gifted. So we share in a lot of the decision-making. Mr. O doesn't make all the decisions. He oftentimes brings it to the leadership team and/or other little units of faculty, and to me that's probably the most empowering thing that is done in this building…is the fact that we have a voice in almost every thing that is done. He respects and trusts that I'm going to do a great job in my classroom. Therefore I in turn put forth my best effort, because I know that he is trusting me to do that. In fact one of the strategies that he had us doing this year was walkthroughs, and observing each other in five minute by five minute…five times five minutes, three times a year. And the faculty as a whole had expressed to people on the leadership team that they really didn't like that strategy as well as he liked it. So at the leadership team meeting, when he said we were going to do it again next year, we felt very comfortable saying that the faculty isn't as happy about it as you are. And we worked out a compromise, and the compromise was that he would go back and re-visit his concept of the walkthroughs, and bring a plan to the leadership then that we would then take back to the faculty and decide how we were going to do walkthroughs next year. He's open to hearing what we say, and to me that's very empowering, and this is not the only place I've worked and it's not always that way.

Teacher of Middle School

Well, every week we do have a grade level meeting, so in the grade level meeting for example, Dr. H will meet with the Connections teachers. That's the department that I'm in, Connections. It consists of P.E., Art, Music, Computers, Business, and as a whole we discuss what we're doing, and how we can actually try to increase our students', as far as looking at different scores, how we were going to try and raise those scores.

5. Are there any routines that you use daily that affect the instructional practices used in the classroom?

Teacher of Middle School

I definitely use… well, every day I feel is a routine, and fell like that is beneficial to my students because, just from that experience, my kids get very upset if we are out of our routine. And they know when they come in what the expectations are, and they like them to remain the same. I mean we do fluctuate and do different things, but when they come in, and it varies throughout the school year, but every day I do a warm up, where it's just a settling activity for them to get started on. It's either a review of the previous day's concepts and a broad range question or it could be practice CRCT questions or things that we had done way back at the beginning of the year. But, I always do that warm-up practice time. Whether it's connecting to a previous day, a previous lesson or just preparing them for test-taking skills. And I also use vocabulary every day. That's an instruction practice that is used continuously, all year long. Either on the word wall, or used verbally within the lesson.

Teacher of Middle School

I would ditto exactly what Jennifer said. And then I would also add two things to it: One of the things I noticed is that practically everybody in this building has knowledge of the middle school learner. And so when you go into a classroom, you're going to see activities changing every 15 minutes. And that's important with this aged kid because of their attention-span. So in a 70 minutes block, you're going to see three or four things going on to keep the pace of the class moving, and you see that most places and the most effective classrooms are the ones you see maintaining for 20 minutes and then moving

on. Another strategy that is not academic at all and has a huge impact on the classroom is

the fact that Mr. Odom allows us to have a five minute kind of recess break after lunch.

Middle school kids need…and the state doesn't recognize this, but they need to go run

around, and we use this as incentive time. And then we have a discipline plan that uses

incentive time on Friday for a 20 to 25 minute break outside to run around. And if they

don't get that break because it's raining or something like that, we see a huge difference

in their behavior in the classroom, and how effective you can be with instruction. They

need to go be kids, and the state doesn't allow that, but we have a little flexibility, and he

recognizes that this is important.

   Teacher of Middle School

Friday is incentive time. We have a discipline plan that involves a punch card, and it

differs from 6th grade to 7th grade to 8th grade. The 8th grade card is divided into four

quadrants, and our four 8th grade rules are in each quadrant. Be prepared for class;

respect others; follow instructions; and follow all school rules. So if a child leaves a

book in their locker, then you use a hole punch, and we each have a different shape, and

we punch in the quadrant where the infraction was. And then there are increments on the

back, and if a child has five punches wherever on the card, then they get out of Friday

incentive time for that week, and they do not like that because there's a good game of

football going on at Friday incentive time. It's effective for most kids, there are a few

that we have to look at an alternative plan for, which we handle individually. There are

increments: At 10 you sit out and serve after school. At 15 punches there's an office

referral. So it's very incremental. It gives middle school kids some wiggle room to mess

up a couple of times without having a huge consequence. There's an immediate consequence, and an extended consequence. And that helps them understand that.

Teacher of Middle School

At the end of nine weeks, we switch the punch card out and they get a new license. And then there's an incentive called "Big Blast." So it's one class of extended outside time that we do once. And those kids who have had infractions throughout, we set up a scale, and if they fall within a certain amount, they have to miss a certain increment of that "Big Blast" time. And we also reward them with the "Good Citizens" award at the end of those marking periods, and the bumper stickers for cars, and there can be candy bars and whatever. We just try and make it a big deal. We will announce it at lunch time, and we do a bulletin board and that type of thing.

Teacher of Middle School

Yes, we actually have…I'm not sure if she's a teacher or a specialist at our school, but what she does, everyday she comes up with a daily vocabulary word, and we use that word in several different situations. As like in a sentence, we define the word, we talk about the origin of the word. We do that everyday. And as the kids are exposed to new words, they might tend to use those words, as opposed to if they only see it once in a while. So everyday we start our extended learning time with a daily vocabulary   work, and we also have like a CRCT type…I want to call it…it's not the daily sentence, but it might just be a sentence, whereas something might be wrong with the sentence as far as punctuation or capitalization, and as a class, we discuss that and work toward the right answer. So we do that every single day that we teach our ELT.

High School Focus Group Interview

1. What type of incentives do you offer staff and students in making AYP?

Administrator of High School

I think the incentives many times…of course, your incentive as an administrator is NCLB. And you need to pass, and the pressure is put on by the community. The incentives…we're led by Dr. W… as a staff and as a student body… there's a lot of motivational things we do. Incentives… it's hard to describe. It's hard to explain, Sean; we do things all the time; good dog deeds for students. We do incentive trips for things that…for good works that students are doing. They're rewarded and teachers are rewarded. And if I may say, Dr. W does things for teachers, and there's an upbeat type of mentality that…I don't know, kind of motivates you to be successful. And hopefully the staff passes that down.

Teacher of High School

I agree. I think it's more than climate. It's positive environment. We specify that…there are goals set at the beginning of the year: x number of students will pass, or x number of students will pass the graduation test, etc. But I think it's more the climate and environment of the school that is goal-oriented. And incentives go along with that theme to that positive environment. I don't think we put a label on an award for making AYP.

Parent of High School

It's like the student body and faculty/staff encourage each other. They seem to care. It seems to be very much like a family. It may sound a little hokey, but we really do care about one another. And you develop a rapport, and certain rapport with certain kids,

depending upon your interests, or what have you, and you really feel like they're an

extension of you, and you want them to be successful. It's just a good feeling.

Teacher of High School

I think the programs that we have, Sean…they've created an environment of interaction

with students and teachers many times, because of the urgency or the heartfelt reason to

make

everyone successful, or to try to make everyone successful. And we try to reach every

child. And when you try to reach ever child, there's a lot of faculty/student interaction.

2. What instructional practices are emphasized in your school?

Teacher of High School

Just like Kenny was talking about, there's not one method that reaches everybody, so we

have to dive in and do discussion. We have to do discovery. We have to do modeling.

We have to do group discussions. We have to do individual discussions. We have to

have one on one. You name it, we do it.

Teacher of High School

I would say the instructional practices… Dr. W leads by example. And one of the things

he says on the announcements every day is "be good, be nice to each other, and do well

in school." And he says that over and over again. And it's again, something that you

feed into. There's a lot of discussion, there's a lot of talk. As Mr. Argo said, we're not

afraid to try new things. If new things aren't working, they'll try something else, go back

to the drawing board. It seems that our discussion and input is valued. But again, leading

by example, not afraid to try, not afraid to say we want everyone to succeed. Not just

saying that, but taking steps to make that happen.

Teacher of High School

I think we tailor instruction for every student. If something doesn't work with this particular student, we're willing to try something new or put that student in another spot. We do that for every student. Most of our kids are on track, and follow what's normal. But if a student starts to slip, we have five or six fail-safes for that particular student.

Teacher of High School

Middle College… if a student is behind and lacking credits by the time they're a junior, we move them into what is called Middle College. They're able catch up using Plato, a computer-based program. They're also able to dual-enroll with Dekalb Tech.

Administrator of High School

It's just credit recovery. That's what it is for the students that are lagging behind. And the thing that's encouraged around here is individuality…teachers and students, almost to a fault sometimes. We're given space to try and improvise, and to see what works, which is good. Everyone should have the capacity to create situations that are successful for different ones.

Parent of High School

And I would add… Coach M was talking about credit recovery, but also on the other end, doing innovative things with technology, such as Rosetta Stone, which is a language program. So if it's language that's not offered here, we can order the package, and it's an emersion-type program. And say for instance, if a child wants to take Chinese, we can have that available to them. Also, virtual school is another online type of curriculum. So there's a lot of innovative things that are available to meet the needs of all our students. I feel like, if you're serious and if you're in this environment, and you and your parents are

serious about your education, you can have an education that is 2nd to none. You can get

a lot out of this environment.

Teacher of High School

The READ program that Kenny has helped bring in is an after-school program primary

for athletes. And he searches for kids that might need a little extra push. R-E-A-D,

Rigorously Educating Athletes Daily. And then most of us are here for quite a while

after school, for anybody that wants help. We try to be proactive.

Teacher of High School

The homework helper…there's instruction from 3:30 to 5:00.

Administrator of High School

As far as the READ program, the finances are available to me. I'm able to employ up to

four teachers daily to instruct student athletes in areas of need. And many times, the

faculty goes beyond that. There are many of them that aren't getting paid. Like Mark

spoke of, he might be in his room until 4:00. And many times a student athlete is in

there. He'll stay till 4:00 or 4:30. I mean, he's here all the time. Much of our faculty is.

3. What practices do you do that you feel are the most important in making AYP?

Teacher of High School

I think we try to meet the need of every student. We don't group them into a category.

We say, "What does this child need to make it to the end?"

Teacher of High School

I can speak to the math scores we just had come in; the particular group we had this year

as juniors, were very unsuccessful as 9th graders, very unsuccessful as 9th graders, and

didn't do very much as 10th graders…and now as 11th graders, we have the majority pass

pluses on math. So the interventions have obviously worked. Sweat and blood has gone into that group, and it really, really did pay off.

Teacher of High School

I had just another thought. We also offer the Advisory Advising program where each student is given an advisor. They come out about 15 to 20 per advisement, so that's another way that a student has to connect with a faculty member. That's another fail-safe there for that faculty member to be sure that the 15 or 20 students are where they need to be.

Parent of High School

Expounding on what Steve said… Dr. W also believes that for every child to be successful, they have to have positive connections to school. So the students are encouraged to be involved in clubs. We have club days about two times a month, I believe. And we have a whole range of clubs that students can be involved in. We even have a skateboarding club that was established about two years ago. We have a teacher that used to be a skateboarder, and that might… that's a very non-traditional club as it goes, but again that is another opportunity for the kids to make a connection, and feel like that's a place where they want to be, and to learn. And that's been a very positive-type experience for the kids to be involved in.

Administrator of High School

To try and sum up everything… if there's any child here who chooses to fail, they can, but it's not because every life raft has not been thrown their way for them to be successful. That's pretty plain and simple. You have to try to fail here because of the avenues our school gives you to be successful.

4. What communication practices do you use to facilitate the instructional practices in the school?

    Teacher of High School

We just did this yesterday; I think it was Kenny, so I'll just rattle off… we have T3. Every Thursday morning we meet at 7:30 at a faculty. It's Thursday Teacher Times or something like that. All entire faculty is available at 7:30 in the morning, as opposed to an afternoon meeting, where a lot might be tied up. We meet at 7:30. We come in for one hour and 15 minutes. Is that right? Until 8:45. Break-out sessions or whole faculty meetings or whatever. A lot of information gets disseminated that way. Certainly e-mail, and one of the biggest things we use is our catalog that I think you were looking through. That's a huge way of sending information to students and parents.

    Teacher of High School

He also uses department heads extensively. He is not one that wants to be out in front. He is anyway because he's the principal, but he has no need to be out in front of it all. So he shares as much of the leadership as he can. He sends a lot of instructional information through department heads. He says, "Here's what we want. Y'all decide how to do it."

    Teacher of High School

We also have the traditional announcements each day, where he's… actually Dr. W and a couple of students. You feel like he's very connected to what's going on.

    Administrator of High School

And it's televised.

Teacher of High School

Yes. It's televised so we can see him live and in person interacting with the kids, and telling us what's going on. We also have…there's a little e-mail, just a daily MCHS that one of the teachers puts together, just things that are going on. And you can see what's going on: football games or testing or various activities. And that kind of keeps us in the know. And that's a valuable tool.

5. Are there any routines that you use daily that affect the instructional practices used in the classroom?

Administrator of High School

We're just… we're doing so many things. We are comprehensive in every aspect of our school life, whether it be academics, or the arts, or whether it be athletics. There's diversity… and to say that we are regimented in any way or say that we do the same things every day, I don't know that I can attest to that personally. They're certain things that academically that you have to do that makes you structure yourself for learning. I mean there's a certain amount of that, but as far as a routine, I'm really not familiar.

Teacher of High School

The closest thing we've got is enrichment time. Each grade level does it a little differently. I can speak for 10th grade. We rotate every class period three times. Every third week we see every class. Like tomorrow we'll have 5th and 6th for 45 minutes with no set agenda at all, other than what I need to do with them. Every time I have enrichment, it's different because every class is different. So that is an instructional tool that is embedded into the schedule.

Teacher of High School

Every grade level does different things. 9th grade is a little bit more regimented than that.

They have special-type groups that there trying to focus on. 11th grade may be

graduation test practice or SAT preparation. The senior class may be SAT preparation

and writing college letters, or looking into college placement.

Teacher of High School

And I would add to that, the advisory sessions, which are coordinated through the

counselor's office…it's a little more regimented. They will have certain specific topics

that they deal with. Some may have the focus on grades. The different grade levels, as

Mark alluded to…the 9th & 10th grade may be career exploration, and the 11th grade has

had colleges. A group from the University of Georgia came in and talked to the juniors,

and the senior are more focused on their senior year and what happens after MCHS. So

those sessions are more regimented. But it might be even something like a school spirit

activity, or it might be… I know we had one, "How to Write a Thank-You Note." It was

in conjunction with after the holidays, and you make assumptions that the kids know how

to do certain things, and maybe they don't because they haven't been exposed to that. So

little things like that, and they seem to be pretty successful in trying to reach smaller

groups of kids and give them particular skills that they might not have otherwise.

<div align="center">Responses to Research Questions</div>

In completion of this study one overarching question and two research questions were

utilized to guide this study. The overarching question was derived to examine Georgia

principal's leadership practices that made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in Northeast

Georgia. The first research question sought to determine how leadership practices used

by the principal depend upon the level of the school? The second research question

sought to determine how do principals' beliefs and other school and community leaders'

beliefs relate to each other regarding practices that contribute to AYP? The overarching

question and the two research questions were answered with an analysis of the findings

by the researcher for each specific question.

Overarching question:

> *What leadership practices characterize Georgia principals that made Adequate*
> *Yearly Progress in North East Georgia RESA?*

According to the responses from the participants, Georgia principals' leadership

practices were established to ensure student achievement was impacted and were

considered a vital part of the success of the school meeting AYP. Their responses

indicated how these practices supported the overall goal of meeting AYP and student

achievement. These responses included focusing on the students, visible, focused on

improvement, and see challenges as an opportunity. The principals also discussed how

they see their position as someone who supports the teachers, involves the teacher, staff ,

parents and community in planning for improvement, and how they have to stand alone

even when there are those individuals question the focus. The principals discussed the

importance of establishing school wide instructional practices and how it impacts the way

their schools address student's deficiencies. They specifically created a framework that

was effective for student achievement. The principals also discussed the impact of

organizing the school to support students who are struggling and the support the teachers

have for students when this organization is in place. The principals realized that student

achievement improves when there is a relationship curriculum and instructional practices.

They created a supportive atmosphere using their influence to motivate their staff and students. The leadership practices of elementary principals seem to be more exclusive to instructional practices more so that middle and high school principals participating in the study.

Do leadership practices used by the principal very by the level of the school?

Elementary, Middle and High School principal's leadership practices were similar in the area of communicating to their staff the expectations by involving the teachers in the decision making process. This was often done by principals creating leadership teams which included teachers from each grade level, team leaders, or department heads. The principals felt that this was important to ensure that expectations for student learning and achievement were being met. One elementary principal explained that in her leadership meeting she communicates very clear expectations which are then followed up by her walking through the building. A middle school principal described how important it was to create a culture that allowed teachers to be risk takers. Another leadership practice that was similar among the different levels of the schools was providing incentives to for meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). These incentives varied from intrinsically being motivated to do their best to providing students and teachers an opportunity to be rewarded for making AYP. When principals at all levels were discussing the practice that was most important in making AYP they all indicated a type of organizational practice that was used through out their school to address students that were not being successful academically. These practices were described as extended learning time, pass plus intervention, and extra academic blocks. The leadership practice that the researcher found to be different among the elementary level and the secondary level was the

leadership's practice in controlling the instructional program in the school. The elementary principals seemed to specifically identify the types of instructional practices that were being used to improve student achievement where as this leadership practice for secondary principals was absent (Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger, 2003) suggesting that secondary school leaders may have less opportunity to directly affect student outcomes than elementary school leaders.

How do principals beliefs and other school and community leaders beliefs relate to each other regarding practices that contribute to AYP?

Most of school and community leader's beliefs related to the principals practices that contributed to AYP. The high school principal emphasized how important it is to have input from all stake holders so school improvement can be made. There knowledge was mainly based on experience that had come from being involved with the school. Some of these experiences included establishing parent and community outreach and involvement programs, shared leadership and decision making, and collaboration and communication among faculty, staff and community. The common element that was discussed when interviewing the school and community leaders was high expectations for learning for all students. For one parent supporting seeing the continuous improvement from the students supported why it is important for parents to know what was going on in the classroom. Another school leader discussed the importance of having a clear focus and clear learning goals through shared leadership and decision making. Elementary school and community leader's verbal responses were commensurate with the principals in that their responses focused on instructional practices. Middle and high school and community leader's responses focused on the instructional practices. However, this

differs from the responses of the middle and high school principals their focus was primarily on organization and management. The researcher found this level of understanding by the school and community leaders to be surprisingly knowledgeable about the instructional practices that improve student achievement.

Summary

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgia Southern University gave clearance for the research at which the researcher began scheduling interviews with five Georgia principals from Northeast Georgia Regional Educational Service Agency that were randomly chosen to include one high school, two middle schools and two elementary schools that have met Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) in Georgia. In addition to the 5 principals a focus group in the same school was interviewed to corroborate what the principal has said in the interview. The demographic profile for the study represented a wide range of diversity, experience, and educational background. The sample consisted of 5 principals which was appropriate for the study because it represented a manageable number of participants from the total population and also allowed the researcher to complete the study in a timely manner. The interviews were scheduled with participants at their respective schools at a time suited for them after school. The interviews were done in the confines of the school conference rooms whereby the five interview questions related to principals practices that improve student achievement. The research design was qualitative in nature.

The role of the researcher in the described study included: determining which Georgia school principals were selected for the study whose schools made AYP, having the principals select the focus group to be interviewed and gathering their consent to

participate in the study, interviewing the principals and the focus groups as it related to practices that improved student achievement, creating a portraitures of each school, conducting an analysis of the responses to the interview questions and relating them to the literature that was reviewed, and finally presenting the data in this chapter of the dissertation.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter is a summary of the study, analysis of the research findings,

and discussion of the research findings, conclusions based on the findings, implications

and recommendations based on the analysis of the data gathered in the study.

The purpose of this study was to examine Georgia school principals from Northeast

Georgia Regional Educational Service Agency (NEGRESA). Five Georgia principals

were randomly chosen to include one high school, two middle schools and two

elementary schools that have met Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) in Georgia. In

addition to the 5 principals a focus group in the same school was interviewed to

corroborate what the principal has said in the interview. The research questions include:

(1) What leadership practices characterize Georgia principals that made AYP in

Northeast Georgia? (2) Do leadership practices used by the principal very by the level of

the school? (3) How do principals' beliefs and other school and community leaders'

beliefs relate to each other regarding practices that contribute to AYP?

The study was completed through structured interviews which allowed the researcher

to gather and analyze information about the practices each principal used to impact

student achievement before it was reported. Anonymity of the participants was

maintained by coding with pseudonyms throughout the study. The interviews were taped

recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The structured interviews allowed the

researcher to capture richer qualitative data as apposed to capturing random information

of everyone's thoughts and beliefs. The demographic profile for the study represented a

wide range of diversity, experience, and educational background. The research design was qualitative which permitted the researcher to collect and gather data that cannot be simply obtained from observation, (Gay and Airasian, 2000).

There are several findings that emerged from the study: (1) Principals discussed the impact of organizing the school to support students who are struggling. (2) Principals discussed communicating expectations by involving the teachers in the decision making process. (3) Principals at the elementary level were more exclusive to the instructional practices and controlled the instructional program more so than the middle and high school principals. (4) Elementary school and community leader's verbal responses were commensurate with the principals in that their responses focused on instructional practices. (5) Middle and high school level, school and community leader's responses focused on what they thought was instructional practices but instead were organizational and programmatic structures.

The researcher will communicate these findings to school leaders, instructional leaders, post secondary administration programs, parents and community stakeholder would be interested in the results of this research. The researcher will communicate the findings through presentations, publications, articles, professional development and educational conferences and other educational venues.

<div align="center">Findings</div>

The researcher summarized three major findings that became apparent from the structured interviews conducted with Georgia principals and focus groups from NEGRESA. Their responses would provide insight on the numerous practices that principals use to improve student achievement. The following is a discussion of how the

principals and the focus groups insights correlate with the interview questions.

The primary finding which was derived by the overarching question what leadership practices characterize Georgia principals that made Adequate Yearly Progress in Northeast Georgia RESA? The elementary and middle school principals discussed the importance of establishing school wide instructional practices and how it impacts the way their schools address student's deficiencies. The practice that was discussed among these principals that contributed to impacting student learning was organizing the school to support students who are struggling and the support the teachers have for students when this organization is in place. **(Primary Finding)** This is consistent with the literature and research question number two and three which examines practices that are emphasized and most important in making Adequate Yearly Progress. School leadership impacts student achievement when practices identify a framework and redesigning the organization which benefits student achievement (Leithwood and Reihl, 2003). Principal of Main Street Elementary stated, "I think it is so important when we have those two blocks of reading and those two blocks of math" (Chapter IV, p. 58). Principal of Britton-Hugh-Leans Middle stated, "we organize our school day in that the first 15 minutes are designated as extended learning time/study skills, and the rest of the day is on a 90 minute block. The ELT rotates every nine weeks (Chapter IV, p. 74). The leadership practices of elementary and middle school principals seem to be more exclusive to instructional practices more so than the high school principal.

The second finding which was derived from research question leadership practices used by the principal depend upon the level of the school? **(Finding 2)** Principal's leadership practices at all three levels were similar in the area of

communicating to their staff the expectations by involving the teachers in the decision

making process. This was often done by principals creating leadership teams which

included teachers from each grade level, team leaders, or department heads. The

principals felt that this was important to ensure that expectations for student learning and

achievement were being met. This finding is consistent with the research that creating a

supportive environment, supporting school leadership, and showing respect of ideas of

others (Geijsel, Sleegers and Berg, 1998 and Hoerr, 2005). Principal of Mason High

school stated, "what really does make a big part of difference in our instruction, is on

Thursday mornings, our students have a late arrival at 8:45 and our teachers come at

7:30. We have every teacher on campus. They all come together and we're able to

divide… we can put all our 9th grade teachers together, and let them work together. We

can put our math teachers together.   We can put the teachers who teach IB together. And

we change the configuration of who meets each Thursday.   And we sit down and plan it

out with the teachers in for the semester in January and June, and we come up with what

our schedule's going to be" (Chapter IV, p. 95). **(Finding 3)** The leadership practice that

the researcher found to be different among the elementary and middle school level and

the secondary level was the leadership's practice in controlling the instructional program

in the school. They suggested that secondary school leaders may have less of opportunity

to directly affect student outcomes than primary school leaders. Principal's practices are

different at the elementary level from principal's practices at the secondary level (Cotton,

2003) due to the fact that secondary principals have less of an opportunity to directly

affect student outcomes (Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger, 2003). The principal of Mason

High School stated, "a great deal of why we've been successful is our teachers really feel that they're treated professionally here, they have autonomy (Chapter IV, p. 92). School and community leader's beliefs related to each other regarding practices that contribute to meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). **(Finding 4)** This finding illustrates that school and community leader's beliefs related to the principal's practices that contributed to AYP. Elementary school and community leader's verbal responses were commensurate with the principals in that their responses focused on instructional practices. This finding is also consistent with the relationship between principal's practices and student achievement, as stated by Cotton (2003), interactions and relationships that include parent outreach and involvement shows to improve student achievement.   An elementary parent stated, "One of the things that does link in with our instruction is our family events we have here. We promote family and the importance of parents knowing what's going on in the classroom. It all focuses around things… the children are learning in the classroom and our parent's stay abreast of what's going on" (Chapter IV, p 102). **(Finding 5)** This finding illustrates that middle and high school and community leader's responses focused on what they thought was instructional practices but rather were programmatic structures. A high school parent stated, "Dr. W also believes that for every child to be successful, they have to have positive connections to school. So the students are encouraged to be involved in clubs" (Chapter IV, p. 118).

<div align="center">Recommendations</div>

This study adds to the limited amount of research that exists on principals' practices that impact student achievement. The findings suggest that practices utilized by principals can impact the potential for a school making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

The findings suggest that the following recommendations be revealed to other

educational leaders at the school and central office level and post secondary leadership

education faculty. This study revealed that participating principals at the elementary and

middle school levels were more proficient than the high school principal in making

references to specific goals and instructional practices that could be assessed for

effectiveness in the classroom. The high school principal did not discuss these practices,

focusing primarily on the overall managerial and organizational make-up of the school.

This may suggest that the preparation of school leaders in secondary leadership programs

has not kept pace with the demand for instructional understanding required in today's

schools.

In order to address the specialized needs of existing administrative leaders,

professional development in local school districts should be targeted towards the specific

practices of school leadership and the implications for improving student achievement. A

recommendation is made to implement more required courses related to instructional

practices that improve student achievement.

Further research should be conducted and should include both quantitative and

qualitative studies involving principals, teachers, and other school leaders. This would

support the findings of this study and permit other perspectives, leading to a better

understanding of how principals' practices impact student achievement as well as a

clearer definition of those specific practices.

<center>Implications</center>

Improving student performance with the current accountability system mandated

through <u>No Child Left Behind</u> has forced a fundamental change of principals' practices.

One implication for this study is the continued educational research needed to expand the understanding of the specific practices that principals need to use in their schools in order to create environments in which students can achieve higher levels of learning. This research will help guide those that are currently in leadership positions and those who will be entering a school as a principal.

Another implication of this research is educational practice. Among the practices that have been identified in this research: (1) organization of the school to support students who are struggling academically, (2) communication of expectations by involving the teachers in the decision making process, thus building the relationship between the principal, these practices, and student achievement. It is also important to do further research to substantiate these practices and identify other effective practices.

With the pressure for improving student performance, it is the researcher's hope that principals who are currently assigned to a school and future principals will have the critical understanding and knowledge needed to establish the practices necessary for improved achievement with all students. Throughout this study, the literature identifies the principal as being the greatest influence on student performance and school improvement. This research suggests specific practice which principals can use to effectively build a climate which fosters student learning.

<div align="center">Conclusions</div>

In conclusion, the research clearly suggests that practices of principals do impact student achievement. As indicated by the findings by Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), the impact of leadership can play a highly significant role on improving student achievement. The researcher's findings do suggest that

organizing the school to support students who are struggling can improve student learning. The principals that were interviewed felt that organizing a school for learning is much different than organizing a school to the ease of the teachers. As a principal, this finding was one that seems simple to understand but difficult to implement. This finding implies change and stability. Instructional practices have to be evaluated for effectiveness, and sometimes changed. The overall organization of the school likewise must be scrutinized for its support of these practices. Once the necessary changes are put in place, stability must be maintained to support the adaptation of the practices. This can often times be difficult due to the fact it requires leadership at the administrative level and the teacher level to truly evaluate and agree upon what is being done instructionally. The researcher found it noteworthy that all the schools that were interviewed had initiated improvements that were enhanced by an organizational structure to support student learning.

The findings also suggest that by communicating with teachers and involving them in on the decision making process, instructional practices can be discussed and expectations can be made so school wide capacity for student achievement can be accomplished. It is the researcher's observation that there is a fine balance between expectations and accountability. The expectations have to be supported and understood first by the principal before holding teachers accountable for student learning. As the findings suggest, the elementary and middle school principals had a better command of the understanding of the instructional practices that were expected than did the high school principal. If schools are to improve principals have to have a better understanding of the right thing to do as it relates to school improvement.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What type of incentives do you offer staff and students in making AYP?

1. What instructional practices are emphasized in your school?

2. What practices do you do that you feel are the most importance in making AYP?

3. What communication practices do you use to facilitate the instructional practices in the school?

4. Are there any routines that you use daily that affect the instructional practices used in the classroom?

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

February 28, 2007

Dear Principal,

My name is Sean M. Callahan, and I am a doctoral student currently enrolled at Georgia Southern University. I am also the Principal of Carver Middle School in the Walton County School System. In completing my dissertation, I am conducting interviews to study Northeast Georgia school principals' practices that are used to impact student learning. My desire is that through the collection of this information I may be able to gather valuable insight in practices that improve student achievement.

This letter is requesting your assistance in gathering this data through the form of a structured interview that I will administer to you in regards to practices that impact student learning. If you agree to participate in the study, the researcher will tape record and transcribe the information after the interview. This data will later be compared and contrasted with other principals like you in summary form. I will ensure that your responses will remain confidential. You do have the right to refuse to answer any question during the interview, may terminate the interview at any time or choose to have any or all of your responses deleted from those analyzed. Once all the participants have completed the interview the data gathered from the study will be included in my dissertation which will be on public file.

If you have any questions or concerns about this proposed research project please contact me at 770 780-6626 or 770 267-6000. You may also contact me via email at scallahan@walton.k12.ga.us. You may also contact my academic advisor Dr. Linda Arthur via email larthur@georgasouthern.edu . Please feel free to contact the IRB coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs as (912) 681-5465 for any other questions.

Let me thank you in advance for your assistance with this study. I do realize that your time is very important, however this interview should be brief and concise. I am sure that the results of this study will be valuable to educational leaders throughout Georgia.

Sincerely,

Sean M. Callahan
Principal, Carver Middle School

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">Georgia Southern University
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs
Institutional Review Board (IRB)</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Phone: 912-681-5465</td><td></td><td>Administrative Annex
P.O. Box 8005</td></tr>
<tr><td>Fax: 912-681-0719</td><td>Ovrsight@GeorgiaSouthern.edu</td><td>Statesboro, GA 30460</td></tr>
</table>

To: Sean M. Callahan
4020 Braswell Church
Road Good Hope, GA-30641

CC: Dr. Linda M. Arthur
P.O. Box 8131

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

Date: March 9, 2007

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

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: **H07175**, and titled **"Leadership Characteristics of Georgia Principals that Impact Adequate Yearly Progress of No Child Left Behind** it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

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

Sincerely,

N. Scott Pierce
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

APPENDIX D

LITERATURE MATRIX

ARTICLE	**PURPOSE**	**PARTICIPANTS**	**DESIGN/DATA COLLECTION**	**OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS**
Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger, 2003	Examining what extent principals leadership affects student outcomes	Principals	Quantitative Meta-analysis	Leadership does affect students outcomes
Elmore, 2004	Examine how school reform is impacting the way schools think about instructional practices	Selected schools	Qualitative	In order for student achievement to occur, instructional practices have to change
Elmore, 2003	How schools are responding to the new accountability system	Selected four states and two high schools in each of the states	Qualitative	External Accountability systems vary from state to state and attention is paid to test scores
Hess and Kelly, 2005	Examining what gets taught in preparation programs	56 College and University Programs	Qualitative and Quantitative	Candidates for leadership roles are not equipping principals for their new role.
Cotton, 2003	Principals and student achievement	Conducted a summary of the research conducted from the 1970's to the present	Qualitative	26 principal behaviors that contributed to student achievement
Hopkins, 2001	Three broad categories that a leader must do in order to improve student outcomes	Principals	Qualitative	Identifies six propositions for school improvement

Leithwood and Reihl, 2003	Six claims on leadership	Principals	Qualitative	Leadership effect s are primarily indirect, primary leadership are principals and teachers, leadership practices identify most beneficial to student achievement, redesigning the organization, more accountable, and promote appropriate forms of teaching and learning
Geijsel, Sleegers, and Berg, (1998)	Relationship at the primary and secondary levels	Principals of primary and secondary schools	Qualitative	Impact of leadership can play a highly significant role on improving student learning
Young and King, 2004	Relationship of capacity to instructional quality and student achievement	Principals	Multi-year qualitative study	Leadership affects student achievement indirectly

APPENDIX E

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW ITEM ANALYSIS

Interview Question	Research	Research Question
1.	Hopkins, 2001	1
2.	Leithwood and Reihl, 2003 Elmore, 2004	1
3.	Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger, 2003	2
4.	Youngs and King, 2002	3
5.	Cotton, 2003	3

APPENDIX F

SCHEDULE OF INTERVIEWS

Name of School	Day	Time
Mason High School	May 1, 2007	3:00 p.m.- 5:00 p.m.
Miller Middle	May 2, 2007	8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.
Britton-Hugh-Leans	April 18, 2007	3:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Main Street Elementary	April 23, 2006	3:00 p.m.- 4:30 p.m.
Willow Road Elementary	April 25, 2006	3:00 p.m.- 5:00 p.m.