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Best Practices of High School Principals for Improving Student Achievement in Urban Schools

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BEST PRACTICES OF HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS FOR IMPROVING
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN URBAN SCHOOLS

by

ANTHONY W. SMITH

(Under the Direction of Walter S. Polka)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the best practices of high school principals for improving student achievement in eight urban high schools in the Metro Atlanta area. Specifically, the best practices of urban Georgia high school principals in the areas of vision, risk-taking, human development, belief in others and integrity were explored through an interview process. Each participant was asked five open-ended questions since these allow for participants to answer questions in a more complete manner. The qualitative, phenomenological research design was employed. Qualitative analysis was used to determine recurring themes related to the research questions.

The recurring emerging themes from the data collection and data analysis were: (1) a strong vision that is clearly and concisely communicated with action, (2) the need for a strong and coordinated curriculum, (3) strong support system for teachers and staff members, (4) a safe and

positive school climate, (5) incorporate teachers as leaders philosophy, (6) collaborative decision-making process, (7) strong relationships with teachers build on trust and belief in others, (8) calculated risk-taking.

INDEX WORDS: Student Achievement, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT), Georgia High School Writing Test (GHS WT), School of Distinction, Qualitative Research

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my eldest and deceased brother, Christopher Rory Smith for instilling in me the value of education and a strong work ethic.

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I would like to thank my wonderful wife, Cynthia, and my two wonderful children, Christopher and Briana, for their unfailing encouragement and understanding during the arduous process of my attending classes and writing a dissertation during a time period that was already full of other demands on hours they would have liked to have spent with me. I would like to thank my mother, Mae Burke for her encouragement and support as well. I would like to thank Nancy Colwell for serving as my mentor, providing me with advice, friendship, and collaboration throughout my educational career. I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Walter Polka, Dr. Linda Arthur, and Dr. Mannie Hall for their dedication, support and consistently timely feedback. I would like to thank the teachers and staff at Georgia Southern University as well as my fellow cohort members, Cynthia Smalls, Jason Moffitt, and Debra Dunn for collectively contributing to my rich and rewarding experiences as a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Introduction to the Problem	1
Statement of the Problem	6
Research Question	11
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	13
Introduction	13
School Leadership	13
Principals as School Leaders	16
Factors Linked to School Leadership	24
Barriers Associated With School Leadership	29
Theoretical Framework	32
Summary and Conclusion	36
3 METHODOLOGY	38
Design of the Study	38
Sample Population	39
Instrumentation	40
Procedures for Data Collection	40
Data Analysis	41
4 FINDINGS	42
Description of the Sample	42

	School Portraits	43
	Findings Related to Research Questions	50
5	SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	68
	Summary	68
	Emerging Themes Related to Each Research Question	68
	Summary of Findings Related to Research Question	72
	Discussion	74
	Conclusions	76
	Implications	77
	Recommendations for Future Research	78
	REFERENCES.....	80
	APPENDICES.....	84
	A IRB APPROVAL LETTER	85
	B INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT	87
	C INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	89

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

According to Lezotte, while schools are improving, students are continuing to do poorly and are not keeping up with current standards (Lezotte, 1991; Sellers, 2002). For example, Lezotte reported that students must read and do math at a 9th grade level or higher, solve semi-structured problems, communicate orally and in writing, work with a diverse population, and use computers for basic processes in order to graduate, work, and pursue a middle class income. However, most students are not achieving these goals since only 10% of high school students meet these standards (Lezotte, 1991; Sellers, 2002).

Minority students tend to be grouped with low-income and limited English-proficient or Spanish-speaking students (Van Hook & Balistreri, 2002). Public school composition includes disproportionately large numbers of students being segregated by income, language, and race/ethnicity (Van Hook & Balistreri, 2002). Reasons for this phenomenon remain unclear and may include the tendency for immigrant children to be unevenly concentrated in certain schools due to geographic location patterns of racial/ethnic groups and poverty (Van Hook & Balistreri, 2002). Despite the reason

for this grouping, according to Lashway (2004) low-performing schools with students who do not meet academic standards tend to be urban and include minority student populations whose test scores fall below white student scores.

Background of the Problem

Urban school districts in America are striving to improve student academic achievement (Wilms, 2003). This effort has included teacher training, reduced class size, lengthening of school days, and increased student testing with teacher salaries tied into test scores. These efforts are viewed by Wilms as politically driven with little impact on classroom outcomes. Reasons for the lack of successful school reform are due to the fact that these political gestures are only symbolic and do not improve teaching quality or learning (Wilms, 2003).

Elmore (2002) reported that school leaders, includes administrators, principals, and teachers, must develop new roles that focus on continuous instructional improvement in the classroom and school to meet new academic standards (Elmore, 2001). Cranston (2000) noted that school leaders must incorporate teachers as leaders for these optimal changes. According to Lezotte, the role of the leader in a school is to manage changes and help others be rid of old

methods that do not serve the academic goals of the school (Sellers, 2002). Strong instructional leadership is found in schools with students that perform at higher levels and according to Lezotte, effective leaders have the ability to put existing pieces together in an instructional program that is effective for the students served (Sellers, 2002).

Lashway (2001) stated that leaders have an important role in the new school system. Strong principals are required to assist in the transformation process by developing and nurturing a vision, promoting a safe and orderly school, sustaining continuous improvement, utilizing data driven plans to improve student performance, using standards-based assessments, monitoring plans, managing resources, and communicating with all involved. Principals in low-achievement schools require training to work with teachers to change and improve school conditions and shape new roles for all involved (Lashway, 2001).

Poor leadership with superficial instructional strategies and an uncoordinated curriculum leads to ineffective practices and low performing students (Lashway, 2004). The strong school leader can transform a low performing school with a focus on intentional instruction, assessment data that guides instruction, and principal support of teachers (Lashway, 2004). The researcher

concluded that the following leadership practices that help transform low-performing schools: high-energy and hands-on principal leadership, planning with clear instructional priorities and benchmarks for improvement, research-based professional development according to instructional needs, monitoring and assessment, flexible instruction grouping based on student needs, and immediate intervention for the struggling student (Lashway, 2004).

Lezotte reported that correlates of an effective school include: safe and positive school climate, strong instructional leadership, effective learning, increased student achievement, and positive home-school relations (Sellers, 2002). Low student achievement and poor student attitudes and behaviors are predicted by factors such as the school environment and parent involvement, which are also influenced by school leadership (Griffith, 2000). He stated that classroom and school climate is associated with school effectiveness (Griffith, 2000). For a school to have a positive climate and high levels of student achievement, high expectations of the students among teachers, students, and parents must be present, class and school environments must be orderly, high morale with positive treatment and active engagement of the students must be present, and positive social relations among

students, teachers, and parents must be found. The school principal must provide leadership in each of these areas.

School leadership is linked to improved parent involvement and school climate (Griffith, 2000; 2001), which are important factors in student success and increased academic achievement. This finding is particularly important in schools with minority and non-English speaking students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds that demonstrate low achievement levels. Parent and student perceptions of the school and their discomfort related to the school climate are also linked to student achievement.

In summary, literature findings are that students in urban schools continue to perform poorly and these schools are attempting to resolve this problem (Sellers, 2002; Wilms, 2003). School leaders include principals and teachers and both must develop new roles to meet the change goals (Cranston, 2000; Elmore, 2002). While these roles remain unclear, Lashway (2001) stated that strong leaders must promote a positive school climate and train with teachers to shape new roles. These roles must lead to strong leadership, positive school climates, effective learning and increased student achievement, and increased parent involvement (Griffith, 2000; 2001; Sellers, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

The findings of educational researchers identify that a new form of school leadership is needed to deal with schools with low student achievement rates, such as are found in urban areas with minority populations. These schools require curriculum change and improvement for students to do better and leadership assists in this transformation (Lashway, 2004; Sellers, 2002). The general problem of concern of this study was that urban education requires new school leadership to transform schools and improve low student achievement scores. However, more information is needed to understand the best practices used by principals in this transformation process. Thus, a study was needed to help understand the specific best practices used by high school principals for improving student achievement in urban schools. According to Lezotte the school leader must manage goals within the school context and effective leadership assists with school transformation since it creates positive school climates, increased parent involvement, effective instruction, and increased student achievement (Griffith, 2001; Lashway, 2004). Thus, these factors require further investigation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the best practices used by selected high school principals for improving student achievement in urban schools. Specifically, the best practices of urban Georgia high school principals in the areas of vision, risk-taking, human development, and belief in others and integrity will be examined with interviews of principals.

Theoretical Orientation

Four theoretical frames of reference will be used to explain the orientation of this study and findings. These four frames include the following: the structural frame, the human resource frame, the political frame, and the symbolic frame (Rice & Harris, 2003). Each of the different frames of reference has different assumptions about the organization and strategies and solutions related to the organization. Thus, each frame provides unique insights into the dynamics of the organization and its leadership needs. Researchers conclude that leaders must use a multi-frame perspective to be successful (Rice & Harris, 2003).

The structural frame has a focus on the organization as a formal unit with official goals and structure. Leaders and other organizational participants have formal

roles within this frame of reference and these roles are assumed to help the organization function optimally. The human resource frame is focused on the relationship between the leaders/members and the organization. This frame of reference is more concerned with motivation and morale of those involved than formal roles. For this frame, it is assumed that the need between organizations and people is reciprocal (Rice & Harris, 2003).

The political frame of reference has a focus on the power relationships that are found within an organization. This frame also includes an analysis of the ways that resources (time and money) and their lack affect the dynamics of the organization and its relationships. Within this frame, organizational members form coalitions or interest groups, with formal divisions within the organization and external allies. These interest groups form to negotiate for additional resources. Within this frame it is assumed that conflict is an inevitable and a necessary part of relationships since groups have competing goals and interests. The symbolic frame of reference is focused on the meanings and values found within an organization or the organizational culture. This culture includes norms that inform organizational members regarding how to act and symbols (artifacts, rituals, ceremonies)

that communicate meanings and values. Within this frame of reference, it is assumed that these meanings are more important than an actual event or situation and occasions that allow for the sharing or making of meaning are an important part of organizational cohesion (Rice & Harris, 2003).

Each of these frames of reference was used by this researcher to understand leadership roles and solutions. For example, if a leader uses restructuring to solve a problem, the structural frame would be used to explain this solution strategy. If the leader were more focused on morale and motivation of the members, the human resource frame would explain this tendency. When a leader seeks to build collaborative relationships or use power to achieve a purpose, the political frame of reference explained this tendency. If a leader attempts to resolve an issue by managing the meaning of a problem, the symbolic frame was used to explain this goal. The multi-frame approach has been shown to yield the most optimal results (Rice & Harris, 2003).

In the study of a community school, the multi-frame approach was used to assist with school transformation. This school initiative was a reaction to a natural disaster in 1997 in which most of the city's buildings were

destroyed (Grand Forks, North Dakota). Six elementary schools were the most affected by the flood and school leaders sought to effect changes. Data presented findings related to frames noted above. For example, work on less complex projects allowed leaders to form relationships and develop trust in each other, which exemplified the human resource and structural frames. Leaders formed a team to facilitate changes making contacts with those best qualified to plan changes, which exemplified the structural and political frames. Leaders reported that relationships were critical to the project's success (human resource frame). Goals of the organizations supported pride in the community and influenced leader commitments and budget cuts, exemplifying the symbolic frame of reference. The authors concluded that all frames of reference were included and led to successful changes in the schools (Rice & Harris, 2003).

Significance of the Study

Urban schools throughout the entire nation are in crisis. For 40 years, the Federal, State, and Municipal levels of government have meddled continuously in the educational process. As noted by Wilms (2003), these interventions have been primarily politically, and not pedagogically, driven. If the crisis is to be finally

resolved, then the politics must be stripped from the process and the pedagogy served. Recent studies indicate that there is a primary role in this cause for leadership at the principal level. Several generations of urban students have already been lost to political gamesmanship, we cannot afford to lose yet another.

This research is of value to principals, vice-principals, superintendents, and other school administrators in identifying both effective leadership programs that enhance the educational opportunities for students as well as ineffective directions that detract from those opportunities. Findings also help guide future educational research. But, as noted above, is of most value to the ultimate consumers of the educational establishment - the students.

Research Question

The research question for this study was:

What are the best practices of urban Georgia high school principals in the areas of vision, risk-taking, human development, and belief in others and integrity?

Limitations of the Study

- The sample selected for this study was from an available volunteer population of high school principals who have made progress by improving student

achievement; therefore, results of this research may not be generalizable to individuals in other geographical locations.

- Since this is a qualitative study, there was a small sample size.
- Since variables was not directly manipulated, findings will be descriptive in nature.

Study Organization

Interview research was used to examine the best practices of urban Georgia high school principals in the areas of vision, risk-taking, human development, and belief in others and integrity. Specifically, a group of 6 high school principals who have a proven record of producing high levels of student achievement was interviewed to examine their perspectives. Since literature findings support the conclusion that principals are important school leaders, they were interviewed for this study.

As noted above, the primary methodology for this study was the interview research model. High school principals were the sample for this study. The researcher interviewed subjects. Subjects were recruited on a volunteer basis only. No psychological, social, or physical impact due to participation in the study occurred, so it was a low risk study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The following presents a literature review about: "Best practices of high school principals for improving student achievement in urban schools." Topics of school leadership, principals as leaders, teachers as leaders, factors associated with school leadership, barriers linked with school leadership, and theoretical framework are examined. This is followed by a summary and conclusion.

School Leadership

Urban school districts in America are striving to improve student academic achievement (Wilms, 2003). This effort has included teacher training, reduced class size, lengthening of school days, and increased student testing with teacher salaries tied into test scores. However, Wilms views these practices as politically driven with little impact on classroom outcomes. According to Wilms, reasons for the lack of successful school reform are due to the fact that these political gestures are only symbolic and do not improve teaching quality or learning (Wilms, 2003).

According to Lezotte, while some schools are improving, many students are continuing to do poorly and

are not keeping up with current standards (Sellers, 2002). For example, Lezotte reported that students must read and do math at a 9th grade level or higher, solve semi-structured problems, communicate orally and in writing, work with a diverse population, and use computers for basic processes in order to graduate, work, and pursue a middle class income. However, most students are not achieving these goals since only 10% of high school students meet these standards (Sellers, 2002).

Despite efforts of urban school districts to transform and improve student success, minority students continue to do poorly and tend to be grouped with low-income and limited English-proficient or Spanish-speaking students (Van Hook & Balistreri, 2002). School composition includes disproportionately large numbers of students being segregated by income, language, and race/ethnicity (Van Hook & Balistreri, 2002). Reasons for this phenomenon remain unclear and may include the tendency for immigrant children to be unevenly concentrated in certain schools due to geographic location patterns of racial/ethnic groups and poverty (Van Hook & Balistreri, 2002).

Desimone (2002) reports that early efforts for school reforms in the 1980s focused on changing teaching practices. Since the need for effective schools that was

not being filled, these efforts were followed by a new wave of reform, the comprehensive school-wide reform (CSR). This movement resulted in the development of literature that identified characteristics linked to successful schools such as positive school climate, articulated curriculum and organizational structure, school-wide staff development, parental involvement, and most importantly, school-level management with strong district and principal leadership and support. Lezotte reported further that correlates of an effective school include the following: safe and positive school climate, strong instructional leadership, effective learning, increased student achievement, and positive home-school relations (Sellers, 2002). School leadership influences positive and negative outcomes such as poor school environment and low parent involvement, which in turn influences low student achievement and poor student attitudes and behaviors (Griffith, 2000). Elmore (2002) reports that school leaders, including principals and teachers, must develop new roles that focus on continuous instructional improvement in the classroom and school to meet new academic standards (Elmore, 2001).

Principals as School Leaders

Quality and learned supervisors are needed in today's schools to monitor instruction and improve curriculum (Becerra-Fernandez & Martin, 2001; Ediger, 2002). Malone and Caddell (2000) reported that there is a crisis in leadership in today's schools. These authors stated that regardless of what leadership model is used in schools, there are some fundamental concepts that all models have in common. The effective leader must have a shared vision of a positive future, enlist others in the vision, and appeal to the values, interests, hopes, and dreams of others in the process.

Lashway (2001) states that principals as school leaders have an important role in the new school system. Strong principals are required to assist in the transformation process by developing and nurturing a vision, promoting a safe and orderly school, sustaining continuous improvement, utilizing data driven plans to improve student performance, using standards-based assessments, monitoring plans, managing resources, and communicating with all involved. Principals in low-achievement schools require training to work with teachers to change and improve school conditions and shape new roles for all involved (Lashway, 2001). Lashway concluded the following

leadership practices that help transform low-performing schools: high-energy and hands-on principal leadership, planning with clear instructional priorities and benchmarks for improvement, research-based professional development according to instructional needs, monitoring and assessment, flexible instruction grouping based on student needs, and immediate intervention for the struggling student (Lashway, 2004).

According to Malone and Caddell (2002), the principalship has gone through five evolutionary stages so far and these include the one teacher in a one-room school, the head teacher, the teaching principal, the school principal, and the supervising principal. At this point in time the principalship is currently in a sixth stage, which is the principal as a change agent. Malone and Caddell stated that today the effective school leader or the principal acting as a change agent must take place within the six standards that were formulated by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) (Council of Chief State School Officers 1996). To act within these standards and promote the success of all students, principals must:

1. Facilitate the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community;
2. Advocate, nurture, and sustain a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;
3. Ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment;
4. Collaborate with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources;
5. Act with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and
6. Understand, respond to, and influence the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Malone and Caddell (2000) reported further that the principal is expected to initiate programs, solve problems, evaluate staff members, and coordinate and implement responsibilities. Rafoth and Foriska (2006) stated that this administrator must be able to promote effective problem-solving teams. Thus, to adequately prepare principals today, programs need to be redirected to become leadership development programs that create future leaders

who are able to focus on and promote teaching and learning as the core activity of the school, demonstrate their commitment to educational values, manage change within the school, work effectively with a wide variety of groups, and become familiar with new teaching techniques (Malone & Caddell, 2000).

Brown (2006) reported that today's principal faces extreme pressures resulting from legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act and resulting standards and needs for accountability. Brown, herself a principal, speaks from personal experience. This principal stated that, "If administrators are going to perform effectively in today's school environment, she argues, the programs that prepare them will have to undergo significant reform" (p. 525). Brown stated further that the job of principal is even more "challenging" and "daunting" due to "requirements to achieve academic gains on a yearly basis and to provide all children with the opportunity to obtain a high-quality education" (p. 525). This has resulted in new demands for increased principal preparation. According to Brown, this means that to better prepare principals, universities must raise admissions requirements, change required coursework, establish appropriate standards for preparation programs, and broaden the learning experience for leaders. Brown

stated that today's principals must be prepared to be leaders.

Eckman (2004) further explored the voice of today's principal to determine if there were gender differences in reports. Eckman conducted a quantitative and qualitative study to explore the experiences of female and male high school principals in three Midwestern states. Quantitative survey items assessed male and female high school principals' levels of role conflict, role commitment, and job satisfaction. In addition, surveys assessed demographic information (age, ethnicity, marital status, presence of children at home, career paths, and aspirations). For the qualitative phase of the study, high school principals who responded to the survey, which comprised 60% of the 564 principals surveyed were selected and interviewed. Eight women and eight men participated in this portion of the study. Each was interviewed to determine their perspectives regarding role conflict and commitment, and job satisfaction. These participants were also asked to describe their careers and aspirations and to discuss their styles of leadership. Findings were that all teachers began their careers as teachers and most of the males planned their career to move from teaching to administration while the females did not plan on becoming

principals. Only two females had role models of other female principals. All described the enormous time demands they faced and the pressures of conflicts between the demands for time from personal and professional roles. There was no gender difference with regard to job satisfaction and most reported that experience increased satisfaction levels. Student interaction and working with teachers were sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Females used different leadership styles, leading with instruction and curriculum and interpersonal interactions. Males lead more as managers. Eckman concluded that females and males presented similar experiences as principals with regard to facing pressures and conflicts, but they differed in their perceived leadership styles.

Cranston (2000) notes that school leaders must incorporate teachers as leaders for these optimal changes. Schools are implementing school-based management organizational reforms with new roles for teachers as leaders. The importance of teacher leadership is becoming more of a focus such as found in school-based management. School-based management enhances the school community decision-making capacity and increases accountability at the school level. Expectations of principals and teachers to deliver changes that improve the school and student

learning are increasing and this demands increased reliance on and cooperation between all school leaders. Teachers are now forced to demonstrate leadership abilities while they accept more responsibility for changing schools and improving learning. Cranston (2000) notes that teaching excellence is not enough; classroom teachers must now perform a leadership role in the design of curriculum and its implementation. Emphasis is on closing the gulf between existing and required teacher capacities for leadership.

Cranston (2000) reports findings from a study of the impact of reforms on principals. Principals were interviewed for 18 months during which an expanding agenda of activities and responsibilities were taken over by teachers as well as principals (detailed methodology information was not provided). Principals reported rapid and significant changes in their roles and responsibilities with less engagement in the day-to-day curriculum issues but more time spend on educational and curriculum leadership and managerial and accountability demands.

Teachers found themselves not only in the classrooms but being responsible to improve the school. Teachers are more involved in improving the whole school and being part of the learning community. Curriculum changes take place

school-wide rather than classroom wide. Partnerships with community members were formed to increase resources for the teaching-learning processes. Professional networks to include electronic and global networks as well a local networks, were established by teachers and principals. Thus, according to Cranston, school leaders today include teachers and principals with new and changed roles and the input of the teacher is as important as that of the principal.

Kelly, Thornton, and Daugherty (2005) reported that leadership is related to school climate and effective schools and related views may differ between principals and teachers. These authors sought to further study dimensions of leadership as they relate to school climate. For this study, 31 elementary schools were included. Principal (n = 31) and teacher (n = 155) perceptions of principal leadership styles were compared. Findings showed that teachers reported the effectiveness of principal leadership to be related to school climate; when principals were perceived as flexible and changing in their leadership style, this was negatively related to school climate. Principals' ratings were not related to teachers' ratings of effectiveness and flexibility. Thus, what was deemed important differed for the two groups. Kelly et al.

concluded that while principals have the authority to impact school climate, and they may be very skilled, they might lack feedback to improve. Effective communication with the school principal is important to improve school climate (Halawah, 2005).

Factors Linked to School Leadership

Perceptions of Positive School Leadership. Taylor and Strickland (2002) report that an important factor linked to effective school leadership is the need for educators to perceive the school leadership as ethical in order to maintain a positive school climate. These authors reported perceptions of ethical leadership in today's schools, using data from a 2000 survey of 214 educators in Florida and Georgia. Findings were that elementary, middle, and high school faculty and principals as well as school district leaders reported the most important personal attributes ascribed to an ethical leader to be: honesty, fairness, reliability, competence, and integrity. The most valuable leader characteristics were: using rational persuasion, leading by example, being honest and trustworthy, having integrity, being competent, being fair, and accepting responsibility for personal actions.

Barth (2002) reports that leadership is important in the development of a positive school climate that welcomes

parents and students. The school's climate influences students and this climate is dependent on leadership functions and goals. The school leader must determine the school's climate and what factors are related to this climate. Barth stated that every school has a climate, whether hospitable or toxic. An instructional leader must change the negative climate to a positive one. Berg stated that when studying the relationship of principal leadership to school climate the following dimensions must be considered: individualism and its relationship to cooperation; present versus long-term planning; and rigidity versus flexibility. For example, Berg stated that if the principal's policy is aimed at increasing cooperation, long-term planning, and flexibility within the school, but changes are pursued with an authoritarian manner, the school climate might be less than optimal. When the principal acts as a rigid policy-maker, teachers may need to determine whether they are for or against the principal and cooperation in this situation would include partial participation and with some teachers pursuing project activities among themselves. Splitting and disorganization would take place hampering long-term planning. Thus, the principal and faculty must work cooperatively to create a positive school climate.

Effective Instruction Strategies. Watkins (2000) presents findings of a meta-analysis of research studies about school leadership and presented cross-cultural perspectives. The author analyzed data from over 20 studies conducted by the writer and collaborators and included Western and non-Western countries. Watkins found that school leadership that sanctioned higher quality learning strategies (supportive teachers, involved students, fair workloads, and multiple assessment modalities) resulted in higher levels of student self esteem and internal locus of control. Chinese leaders valued creativity and understanding with repetition and effort, and Western leaders valued memorization and on-task behaviors.

Pattnaik (2003) reports on multicultural education and noted that effective instruction must include an action-oriented curriculum that helps minority children reflect on what they are learning. Pattnaik stated that multicultural education must provide an intercultural understanding among children; children must learn about the other, including among their own group.

Pattnaik further stated that to help African American and minority students learn, an issue-based curriculum must be designed that engages the children. Children's literature

can be used to introduce issues to young children. However, children in upper elementary and middle school grades require a curriculum that helps them engage in critical reflections over issues faced by minorities. Once children learn of the issues, they must be involved in activities that can change undesirable practices.

Parent Involvement. Griffith (1998; 2000; 2001) conducted multiple studies of factors related to effective school leadership. For example, Griffith found that school leadership predicts school environment and parent involvement, which predicts student achievement and student attitudes and behaviors. For these studies, Griffith included a sample of 122 public elementary schools that served 130,000 students. Griffith found that classroom and school climate were related to school effectiveness and school leadership was an important factor in school climate.

The principal must help the school administrators and educators maintain high student expectations, orderly classes, high morale, and positive treatment of students, parents, and others. It is the leadership of the principal that affects these issues. Griffith (1998) found that parents were more involved when they viewed the school as more positive and when they felt empowered and that their

student was recognized. This parent involvement is an important factor in student success and increased academic achievement. Griffith pointed out that the school leader is in a position to influence and transform school success.

School Climate. Pashiardis (2000) notes that since school climate is identified as a critical factor related to school effectiveness and success, it is important to understand related attitudes and views of principals and teachers. This author presented findings from a group evaluation of school climate. Pashiardis also noted that it is important to identify areas that need improvement and to explore the differences or similarities between teachers and principal. Elementary and secondary school principals and teachers were assessed for this study to determine school climate parameters of communication, collaboration, organizational structure, and teachers and principals treatment of students.

Pashiardis (2000) found that both groups indicated that their school climate was satisfactory. Lowest scores were related to organizational structure, higher scores were related to students, and the highest score was related to collaboration. Teachers wanted clearly defined supervisor-expectations regarding standards and goals and collaboration among all colleagues with opportunities to

present and share ideas. Teachers reported dissatisfaction with teacher supervision systems and support for educational aims due to problems in the physical environment (heating, acoustics, ventilation, educational spaces). Males reported lower scores regarding school climate, compared to females and teacher-experience was a factor related to scores on organizational structure and student factors. Pashiardis concluded that communication, collaboration, organizational structure, and the students all contribute to school climate.

Barriers Associated With School Leadership

Cultural Diversity. United States schools are becoming increasingly diverse and it is estimated that by the year 2050 the culturally and linguistically diverse groups will become the majority. The minority population of students has a high representation of special needs students. The quest for cultural diversity can be a barrier for minority students. Cultural diversity serves as a barrier to minority students (Asimeng-Boahene & Klein, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001; Trotman, 2001).

Trotman (2001) points out that African American children are failing school at higher rates compared to other students and factors linked to this problem include

poor communication between home and school with resulting low rates of parental involvement. Trotman stated further that views regarding what constitutes parental involvement vary even within the same culture. School leaders must help educators consider the perceptions of parents regarding participation or barriers when attempting to get them involved.

Geenen et al. (2001) reports that different perspectives of parent involvement in school might serve as a barrier to effective leadership. A study survey of 308 African-American, Hispanic-American, Native-American, and European-American parents and 52 school professionals revealed that diverse parents are active in their participation in school transition processes and this involvement surpassed that of the European-American parents. However, the findings from professionals were the opposite and served as barriers to soliciting parent involvement.

Asimeng-Boahene and Klein (2004) also report on the diversity issue in academia. Since cultural diversity in the U.S. is increasing, educators must understand diverging values and traditions of the learners as well as the different learning styles of minority and other students. These authors stated that problems faced by today's

educators include a lack of societal or genuine educational support (lack of adequate resources for minority students), a lack of teacher knowledge, parental disapproval, and a lack of materials.

Darling-Hammond (2000) further notes that that the school experience of African American and other minority students is unequal since minority students face different learning opportunities, different class sizes and curriculum, and different teacher qualifications.

Darling-Hammond stated that up to two-thirds of minority students attend predominantly minority schools with a lack of high-quality materials and equipment or laboratories, and a lack of qualified teachers. New standards demand that students engage in independent analysis and problem solving, that they use new technologies, and that they engage in extensive research and writing and yet these activities are not commonplace in minority classrooms. Darling-Hammond stated that since the minority student is behind the white student in achievement, teachers must find ways to overcome cultural barriers, close the achievement gap, and help minority students learn.

Theoretical Framework

Rice and Harris (2003) present a frame analysis to understand leadership in schools. According to Rice and Harris, to transform a school to a well-performing community school there must be changes in organizations that collaborate with the schools. A review of organizational theory research resulted in findings that different perspectives could be organized within four frames. Rice and Harris stated that there are four theoretical frames associated with school organization, strategies, and solutions for positive school change and increased student achievement. These four frames include the following: the structural frame, the human resource frame, the political frame, and the symbolic frame (Rice & Harris, 2003).

The structural frame presents a focus on the formal organization with official goals of this organization. The organization is structured in a formal manner and this can be illustrated with an organizational chart. The chart provides descriptions of the formal roles of participants of the organization. It is assumed within the structural frame that the naturally designed organization will work the best (Rice & Harris, 2003).

The human resource frame provides a focus on the relationship between the members of an organization and the organization itself. Attention is paid to motivation and morale of the organizational members. Within this perspective, it is assumed that organizations need people and these people need the organization (Rice & Harris, 2003). For the political frame, there is a focus on power relationships within the organization. This frame also provides a focus on the manner in which scarce resources influence the dynamics of the organization. The members within the organization form coalitions and groups of interest and external allies are formed across the formal organization divisions to help negotiate resources. Conflict is a part of the organizational process and along with coalitions, it necessary to influence members with competing goals (Rice & Harris, 2003).

The symbolic frame provides a focus on the meanings and values of the organizational life. For this view, there is an organizational culture that includes norms that inform members about how they are to act and behavior. These norms are abided by within the organization and meanings and values are communicated with ceremonies, cultural artifacts, rituals, and other symbolic ways. For this frame, it is assumed that the meaning that members of

an organization ascribe to an event is the most important aspect of the event and it the shared occasions for making meaning out of events is the key to holding organizational members and the organization itself, together (Rice & Harris, 2003). Each of the different frames of reference has different assumptions about the organization and strategies and solutions related to the organization. Thus, each frame provides unique insights into the dynamics of the organization and its leadership needs. The researchers conclude that leaders must use a multi-frame perspective to be successful (Rice & Harris, 2003).

Rice and Harris (2003) report findings from a school that served as a center of community project in Grand Forks, North Dakota. This school served as a laboratory to study organizational change with the frames approach. This project was a result of a natural disaster in which a flood damaged and destroyed most city buildings. A service delivery model involved six Grand Forks elementary schools affected by the flood.

The project also included leaders from the management team included principals, teachers, and more. Findings from the project were that leaders viewed relationship to each other as key to project success. Project leaders worked as a team to facilitate a network. Goal convergence

strengthened the organization and influenced leader commitment and motivation. Support from the organization was important and maintained by project leaders. External support assisted leaders in mobilization of internal support. The community served a very important tool for success. Professional development activities helped professionals understand roles and tasks. Leaders were flexible regarding details and worked to develop common visions. Data and project evaluation were important to direct project leaders. National networks served as inspiration to project leaders.

Rice and Harris concluded that interview data supported the finding that the structural frame was most frequently used and this was followed by the human resource and the political frame. The symbolic frame was used the least. Practical implications of findings are that leaders need to pay attention to organizational frames used and those that were neglected, to avoid missing important aspects of transformation and change. For example, leaders may tend to employ structural and human relations frames in early stages of change due to the need to focus on organizational development, role definitions, communication patterns, and relationships among members.

However, since trust and relationship issues are key in collaboration processes, as time goes on the focus must include political and symbolic concerns. These frames will be used to analyze findings from the current study in an effort to fully understand how school leadership influences school transformation.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, strong school leadership is needed to help schools develop positive school climates and increased parent involvement, which results in more positive student outcomes and assists with school transformation. An effective leader is an ethical leader that is aware of the diversity of student and parent views of what constitutes parent involvement. The school leader must lead school transformation by developing and maintaining a positive school climate with increased parent involvement, in accordance with these diverse views. The researcher have pointed out that despite an understanding of factors that are related to student achievement, students are continuing to fail. Since school leaders are in a position to view and experience factors related to student success and school transformation, it is important to determine their best practices. This supports the need for a study to further examine the best practices of urban Georgia high

school principals in the areas of vision, risk-taking, human development, and belief in others and integrity.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to determine the best practices of high school principals for improving student achievement in urban high schools. Specifically, the best practices of urban Georgia high school principals in the areas of vision, risk-taking, human development, belief in others and integrity was explained. This chapter presents a detailed description of the methodology and procedures used for this study.

Design of the Study

Interview research was used for this study. Interview research does not allow for the control over variables and threats to validity, but it does yield empirical results (McBurney, 1994; Wiersma, 2000). Interview research was used to examine the best practices of urban Georgia high school principals in the areas of vision, risk-taking, human development, belief in others and integrity. Since the researcher support the conclusion that principals are important school leaders, they will be interviewed for this study. Interviews specifically assessed perspectives related to best practices of urban Georgia high school principals in the areas of vision, risk-taking, human development, and belief in others and integrity.

For this study an interview protocol was used to determine principals' reports of their best practices. Open-ended questions was used for the interviews since these allow for participants to answer questions in a more complete manner, and have the potential to reveal additional information that may not have been anticipated by the researcher.

Sample Population

Participants will be 6 high school principals with a proven record of producing high levels of student achievement by making AYP, having high graduation rates and high SAT scores with a large population of minority students. The participants were chosen from volunteer population of Georgia high school principals and qualify as a Georgia certified principal and reside within the Metro Atlanta area.

The principals selected have at least a 30% population of minority students. They have demonstrated high levels of student achievement by making AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) within the most recent school year. They also have graduation rates above the state average of 69%. These schools have also produced passing rates on the GHSGT (Georgia High School Graduation Test) in all academics areas above the state level.

Instrumentation

Interview Protocol

The School Leadership Best Practices interview protocol, constructed by the investigator, consists of two parts. Part I included demographic questions regarding gender, age, number of years as a principal, and number of years in present position. Part II contained qualitative question items related to the study research question. (See Appendix C)

Procedures for Data Collection

Subjects were recruited on a volunteer basis only. No psychological, social, or physical impact due to participation in the study was anticipated, so it is a low risk study. Following approval by the Institutional Review Board of the University, interview participants were selected from metro Atlanta urban high schools in a Georgia school district. Participants were chosen to participate in the study based on their principal status in an urban high school and producing high levels of student achievement, by making AYP, achieving high graduation rates and high SAT scores.

Participants received a packet containing a letter of introduction, a letter of consent, and the research protocol. The researcher contacted the participant by

phone to set up a time for the interview at the school of the principal. The researcher audio-taped the interview, transcribed the results, and analyzed the content for themes.

Participants were informed that their participation is voluntary, they may ask questions at any time, they may withdraw from the study at any time, and that confidentiality regarding the participant will be maintained with the use of (pseudonym) in place of real names.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis was used to determine recurring themes related to the research questions. The findings were shared with the participants for verification of reliability and validity. Following the procedures, the researcher drew conclusions related to results.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to determine the best practices of urban high school principals within the Metro Atlanta area for improving student achievement in urban high schools. Specifically, the best practices of urban Georgia high school principals in the areas of vision, risk-taking, human development, belief in others, and integrity were determined. An interview with six high school principals was conducted and findings were analyzed. This chapter describes the research findings of the study as follows: the general description of the sample followed by the results of the data relating to the research question.

The researcher collected and analyzed data using transcriptions of principal interviews for this qualitative study. The names of schools and principals were coded alphabetically (A - F) and a fictitious (pseudonym) name was assigned to each school and principal to protect the privacy of the participants of this study. The findings stem from the study's research questions:

Description of the Sample

The following presents a description of the sample. The sample consisted of six male high school principals

that work in a school district within the Metro Atlanta area.

School Portraits

School A

Riverview High School (pseudonym) is located in a district on the west side of Metro Atlanta and is one of four high schools. It serves the traditional 9th through 12th grade levels, with an enrollment over 2000 students. The demographic profile of the student population is over 50% White, approximately 45% African American, and approximately 3% Hispanic. The principal has noted a steady increase in the Hispanic population of students over the past five years. Approximately 18% of the student population is identified as students with disabilities. Approximately 60% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Approximately 2% of the students are identified as Limited English Proficient.

The school has a staff that consists of 5 administrators, 7 support staff members, and over 100 certified staff members. The school has a student to teacher ratio of 20:1.

School B

Southlake High School (pseudonym) is located in a district on the southwest side of Metro Atlanta and is one

five high schools. It serves the traditional 9th through 12th grade levels, with a enrollment over 1300 students. The demographic profile of the student population is approximately 35% White, over 50% African American, and approximately 5% Hispanic. The principal has noted a steady increase in the Hispanic population of students over the past few years. Approximately 12% of the student population is identified as students with disabilities. Approximately 50% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Approximately 3% of the students are identified as Limited English Proficient.

The school has a staff that consist of 6 administrators, 7 support staff members, and nearly 100 certified staff members. The school has a student to teacher ratio of 17:1.

School C

West Springs High School (pseudonym) is located in a district on the west side of Metro Atlanta and is one four high schools. It serves the traditional 9th through 12th grade levels, with a enrollment over 1600 students. The demographic profile of the student population is Just under 40% White, over 50% African American, and approximately 5% Hispanic. The principal has noted a steady increase in the Hispanic population of students over the past few years.

Approximately 12% of the student population is identified as students with disabilities. Approximately 50% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Approximately 2% of the students are identified as Limited English Proficient.

The school has a staff that consist of 7 administrators, 7 support staff members, and over 100 certified staff members. The school has a student to teacher ratio of 16:1.

School D

Eastlake High School (pseudonym) is located in a district that borders the east side of Metro Atlanta and is one twelve high schools. It serves the traditional 9th through 12th grade levels, with an enrollment over 1200 students. The demographic profile of the student population is less than 1% White, over 90% African American, and approximately 2% Hispanic, and approximately 2% Asian. The principal has noted a steady increase in the Asian and Hispanic population of students over the past few years. Approximately 12% of the student population are identified as students with disabilities. Approximately 80% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Approximately 3% of the students are identified as Limited English Proficient.

The school has a staff that consist of 4 administrators, 5 support staff members, and 70 certified staff members. The school has a student to teacher ratio of 18:1.

School E

South Valley High School (pseudonym) is located in a district on the south side of Metro Atlanta and is one eight high schools. It serves the traditional 9th through 12th grade levels, with a enrollment over 800 students. The demographic profile of the student population is less than 50% White, approximately 40% African American, and approximately 10% Hispanic. The principal has noted a steady increase in the Hispanic population of students over the past few years. Approximately 10% of the student population is identified as students with disabilities. Approximately 50% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Approximately 6% of the students are identified as Limited English Proficient.

The school has a staff that consist of 5 administrators, 5 support staff members, and 61 certified staff members. The school has a student to teacher ratio of 19:1.

School F

South Mountain High School (pseudonym) is located in a district that is south of Metro Atlanta and is one of eight high schools. It serves the traditional 9th through 12th grade levels, with an enrollment over 1600 students. The demographic profile of the student population is approximately 30% White, over 50% African American, and approximately 3% Hispanic. The principal has noted a steady increase in the Hispanic population of students over the past few years. Approximately 11% of the student population is identified as students with disabilities. Approximately 60% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Approximately 1% of the students are identified as Limited English Proficient.

The school has a staff that consists of 5 administrators, 6 support staff members, and 85 certified staff members. The school has a student to teacher ratio of 19:1

Principal A. The first interview was with a male principal, Dr. Jim Williams (pseudonym) who holds a Georgia administrative certificate and his school is within the Metro Atlanta area. Dr. Williams deals with a large population of African American students and has been successful with a population of special needs students that

make up 18% of the total student population. Dr. Williams has used numerous programs to impact the minority and special needs students by evidence of the school having a minority graduation rate above the state average. The minority graduation rate has been 81% for the past two years. The special needs students have graduated above the state average for special needs students, but below the state rate of 69% for all students.

Principal B. The second interview was with a male principal, Mr. Ed Harris (pseudonym) who holds a Georgia administrative certificate and his school is within the Metro Atlanta area. This principal has a 60% student population of African American students. The school demonstrates high levels of student achievement as compared to schools with similar demographics. The school is listed as a state school of "Distinction" by having made AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) for three consecutive years. More than 80% of the school's African American students scored at or above the enhanced mark of 511 on the English/Language Arts section of the GHSAT and at or above the enhanced mark of 516 on the Math section of the GHSAT.

Principal C. The third interview was with a male principal, Dr. Thomas Edwards who holds a Georgia administrative certificate and his school is within the

Metro Atlanta area. This principal demonstrated a high degree of student progression and student achievement. This principal also has over a 50% population of African American students. This principal has seen dramatic growth in the math area with his African American students. The school had over 70% of its African American students scored at or above the enhanced score of 516 on the math portion of the GHSGT.

Principal D. The fourth interview was with a male principal, Dr. Sam Whitfield who holds a Georgia administrative certificate and his school is within the Metro Atlanta area. This principal has a 95% population of African American students with a most of them receiving free or reduced lunch. Nearly 100% of the schools African American students passed the GHSWT (Georgia High School Writing Test) no the first attempt.

Principal E. The fifth interview was with a male principal, Mr. Joe Ready (pseudonym) who holds a Georgia administrative certificate and his school is within the Metro Atlanta area. This principal has a 40% population of African American students. This principal also has a 10% population of ELL (English Language Learner) students. This school showed tremendous gains in the math and English/Language Arts portions of the GHSGT.

Principal F. The sixth interview was with a male principal, Mr. Mike Holman who holds a Georgia administrative certificate and his school is within the Metro Atlanta area. This principal has a 67% population of African American students. This school has demonstrated high levels of student achievement by making AYP for the past four years. This school has been labeled a state school of "Distinction."

Findings Related to Research Questions

What are the best practices of urban Georgia high school principals within the Metro Atlanta area in the areas of vision, risk-taking, human development, and belief in others and integrity? To address this research question, each of the principal participants were asked a specific questions regarding five areas that relate to leadership and improving student achievement at a high school. These five areas included vision, risk taking, human development, belief in others, and integrity.

Vision. Each principal participant was asked to describe best practices related to having a vision as a leader.

Principal A. Principal A responded by stating that the first thing to consider regarding vision as a leader is the

need to: "bring about a realization for your staff of what your vision is. I think that's an ongoing process." He stated:

"I think you have to continuously keep your standards and your beliefs and your vision out in the open. A principal needs to be transparent, open, accessible, and visible for your staff. I don't mean through documents, emails, and correspondences. I mean through your actions and how you lead."

This principal found that it was important to be, "honest about what our problems are. Be strategic about what we were going to do to influence positive change. Be specific about what we are going to do for students at varying levels. In addition, Dr. Williams (pseudonym) noted the importance of being aware of what resources are in place and developing a think tank. He also stated: "every time you're speaking with your staff you got to draw their attention back to the important issues. We need to have a focus on what are we doing to fulfill the mission and vision of the school. You can't just spend your time focusing of external factors we have no control over."

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: know your vision, communicate your vision with actions; be honest about problems; be specific about

solutions; be aware of your resources; develop a think tank; and attend to all students.

Principal B. Principal B responded by stating that the first thing to consider regarding vision as a leader is the need to let it be known: "all my teachers, students, and parents know our vision. Because it is communicated often." They are often asked to describe the vision. This principal stated that; we work extremely hard to provide a safe learning environment where everyone can maximize their potential for success." This principal noted that this vision must be communicated with daily action, "what we do every day is we try to stress with the students is that choices matter. Whatever type choice you make, there's going to be a consequence . . . good or bad." This principal stated that it is important to, strive for success by modeling success all of the time. Our teachers instill in our students a strong work ethic and thereby having the students more motivated to work harder and to be successful. Even the custodians model success. Everything revolves and evolves around success. Parents support this effort by supporting this philosophy the same way. A triangle of success is what we call it.

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: know your vision, communicate your vision with

actions; focus on success for everyone; instill a strong work ethic in the students, and focus on successful choices.

Principal C. Principal C responded by stating that the first thing to consider regarding vision as a leader is the need to have a strong vision: "any principal worth his or her salt will tell you that they want their school to be the best school anywhere . . .you want to meet the needs of those kids." This principal also noted the importance of making sure the vision is relevant for the student and the community. "I think that part of that is important is to provide a relevant education for them," and thoroughly communicating the vision. "I try to tell my teachers to always try to make a direct connection with real life applications." To enhance this vision this principal noted the importance of community support, stating: "you've got to have support of your community. Education is a team effort." This principal also stated it is important to help students by talking to them about many things, bringing in outsiders such as colleges, businesses, community leaders, and political leaders to talk to them, and helping them by providing support to help ensure their success.

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: know your vision, communicate your vision with actions; focus on relevant and real life educational needs; ensure a team effort with community support; help students by talking to them (bring in college, business, and political speakers); and helping them get support to ensure their success.

Principal D. Principal D responded by stating his vision: "our vision is that we want to become the top performing high school in the nation." This principal also stated the importance of focusing on the curriculum, stating, "one of the first things we did, we focused on the curriculum here." This principal stated that courses must be applicable to real life needs, "provide courses that they're going to need in order to be successful and competitive in a global society." This principal also noted the importance of making sure that teachers are prepared and classes are engaging, stating, "we want to make classes more engaging." "We try to impress upon our teachers how to better prepare themselves as it relates to their instructional planning." Two other points made by this principal were the need to maintain high expectations and the need to gather data to drive decision-making, "we're going to review a lot of data. " "We're trying to

examine students work for the highest level of quality.”

“We look at the teachers assessments and the results from those assessments.” “We try to raise the expectations for the students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community stakeholders.” He noted further the importance of telling stakeholders that their help is needed through innovative methods such as sending out flyers, presenting talent shows, community forums, and fine arts performances.

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: know your vision, communicate your vision; focus on curriculum and relevant and real life educational needs; engage students; prepare teachers; raise expectations for all stakeholders; and inform stakeholders their help is needed.

Principal E. Principal E responded by stating the need to ensure that students are successful (his vision): “provide struggling students with a safety net.” “provide the students with interventions to help meet the standards and meet the goals that we set for them.” This principal also noted the importance of helping students that have not been successful in the past (at-risk students), stating, “providing that safety net for those kids who are not as successful out of the chute.”

This principal stated the need to use multiple methods to reach all students, "there are many ways besides just the traditional methods." The principal noted the importance of keeping parents informed of the success of their child and the school in general, since they inform others, and can be a positive mouth piece for the school. The principal spoke to the need to constantly evaluate and re-evaluate student needs and adjusting according to findings to provide multiple opportunities for student individual success. He stated the need to, "constantly measure and adjust, constantly measure and adjust . . . our goal is to create an atmosphere in which students have multiple opportunities to be successful . . . allow our kids to the opportunity to show themselves as individuals."

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: know your vision, communicate your vision; focus on providing a safety net for all students; use of multiple ways to provide successful opportunities; keep parents informed since they can be a mouth piece for others; and constantly evaluate and re-evaluate to adjust methods.

Principal F. Principal F responded by stating the need to ensure that all students graduate and go to the next level (his vision): "our vision is that everybody graduate from high school and be prepared to go to the next

level whether it post-secondary education, military, or the work force." This principal also stated the importance of helping students reach skill levels needed for success, "we can give our students those skills that are needed to do well in the work place as well as in college to ensure success." This principal stated the need to include tutorial and remediation programs or what ever is needed to ensure that these skills are reached, as measured by standardized tests, "we fixed our schedule so that we could employ a 30 minute tutorial program every day to help our students who struggle in various academic areas . . . we noticed from standardized test that our students were not performing well in math. We addressed this deficit with extra tutorial sessions." The principal also noted the importance of equipping parents with the skills to ensure that their students remain in school and are academically successful.

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: know your vision, communicate your vision; help parents so that students can continue to go to school and be successful; focus on graduation and beyond; ensure skill development; and use tutorials and remediation sessions to ensure skill development as assessed with standardized tests.

Risk Taking. Each principal participant was asked to describe best practices related to taking risks.

Principal A. Principal A responded by stating the importance of identifying areas in need of attention and using strategies to minimize problems: "identify those areas that need attention . . . you can't do that without taking risks . . . strategies that I think allows you to take risks and not have them create other problem." This principal noted the importance of spending time "one-on-one" with teachers and administrators to guard against unnecessary risks and the need to do "your research before finalizing a decision."

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: identify problems; create solutions with minimum risk; know those you work with; and do your research.

Principal B. Principal B responded by stating that the need to be a "conservative risk taker." This principal also noted the importance of maintaining support from stakeholders and preparing others for change: "I always have support from the majority of my faculty." "I consult with them and allow input from them."

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: be conservative; maintain support; and prepare others for change.

Principal C. Principal C responded by stating the need to make calculated risks: "if you are going to be a good one leader."

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: importance of making calculated risks to avoid unwanted consequences.

Principal D. Principal D responded by stating that he was a calculated risk taker and ensured that all stakeholders gave input: "yes, I am a risk taker." I try to make sure it's calculated. I try to make sure all the teachers, parents, and students have some say." This principal stated that he routinely utilized surveys with his stakeholders. He also stated that the school would hold focus groups and included parents and students when permissible.

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: make risks; calculate risks; and include stakeholder input.

Principal E. Principal E responded by stating that he was a risk taker: "I'm a risk taker in the fact that I'm going to try something new, but, I'm real good about letting people know my intentions." However, don't be too easily dissuaded. This principal also noted the need to try

something innovative" while continuing to let teachers know that you care about their input and opinion."

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: take risks; do not be too easily dissuaded to seek the new and better way; and let teachers know you care about their input and opinion.

Principal F. Principal F responded by stating that he was a risk taker that could not be dissuaded: "for years, and years, and years I've wanted to go to block schedule and everybody fought me on it." This new way of doing things have yielded significant levels of student achievement. This principal also noted the need for risk taking to get things accomplished and make things better.

In summary, themes included: be a risk taker; do not be dissuaded; and take risks to make things better.

Human Development. Each principal participant was asked to talk about best practices related to human development.

Principal A. Principal A responded by stating that human development is an individualized process: "Faculty development I believe is a one-on-one process." This principal noted the need to identify the strengths and weaknesses of others, the need to do background work, and the need to let teachers know they are cared for: "They got

to know you care about them." "Because of the scope of work assistant principals do, I spend more time helping develop them."

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: human development is individualized; identify strengths and weaknesses; and let teachers know they are cared for; assistant principals are the most time consuming group to develop.

Principal B. Principal B responded by stating the need to make teachers happy to come to work and help them to feel as if they are their own bosses in order to bond with staff and assist human development processes: "I try to make my teachers happy that they're coming to work in a wonderful environment." "I try to make them feel that they are leaders within their classrooms." This principal pointed out the need to provide staff with his support to enable them to grow and develop: "my teachers know that they have my support 100 percent unless they do something immoral or unethical to a child or to the profession." "The teachers know that they can go out on a limb every once in a while to try something new to help their kids be more successful."

Another important point made by this principal was the need to provide teachers with ongoing training: "I pay for

that out of my principal's fund just to enable them to become a better teacher." This principal stated that "training and developing assistant principals was more challenging, because his goal is to provide his assistant principals with the skills necessary to go the principalship one day.

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: make teachers happy; distribute authority; support teachers; provide ongoing training; prepare assistant principals for the principalship.

Principal C. Principal C responded by stating the need to ensure a developed faculty by making them collaborative decision makers and using the open door policy: "I would probably be characterized as a collaborative decision maker." "I think the open door policy will help developed a more positive relationship. I encourage my teachers to become more data driven leaders."

This principal also noted the importance of listening to others and providing support and praise: "I sit back and get comfortable and just listen. I give them the support and praise to help them develop to be the best possible educator. I admonish my staff privately." I structure my assistant principals to be mini principals in their respective areas. I give full authority to enact progress.

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: use collaborative decision making; use the open door policy to developed a more positive relatinship; listen to others, support and praise others, admonish in private; give assistant principals full authority.

Principal D. Principal D responded by stating that the need to constantly provide professional development with faculty and staff: "I try to ensure my teachers are exposed to the cutting edge strategies, through professional development of all of my faculty and staff members." "This principal also noted the importance of "nurturing" the democratic environment." Because assistant principals have more interaction with stakeholders, they need more of my attention and time.

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: train staff through cutting edge professional development; promote democracy; give time and attention to assistant principals.

Principal E. Principal E responded by stating the need to provide staff with the tools necessary to deal with the children of today. "If I equip them with the necessary skills to be successful, I would have developed a very capable educator. This principal stated that he was not

good at developing assistant principals: "I can tell them anything they want to know."

In summary, themes resulting from this interview included: equip teachers with the most updated methods and skills; provide information.

Principal F. Principal F responded by stating the need to provide support but freedom to teach without constant supervision: "I think my biggest attribute is allowing my people to have the freedom to teach without me constantly looking over their shoulders. The same thing goes for my assistant principals and counselors." "Actually, everybody that works for me including my classified personnel."

In summary, themes included: give freedom to others to grow without constant supervision.

Belief in Others and Integrity. Each principal participant was asked to discuss best practices related to belief in others and integrity.

Principal A. Principal A responded by stating relationship building was linked to "trust" in faculty members and distribution of authority and this is related to integrity. He stated: "a principal having a relationship of trust with the faculty makes for the best possible

environment and speak to my belief in my staff and my integrity and trust."

In summary, themes included: trust in staff members, distribution of authority.

Principal B. Principal B responded by stating that without integrity there is no leader and principals need to be able to trust their teachers: "I believe the most important group that I deal with everyday are my teachers. That is the foundation of a good school." This principal also stated that, "as a principal you have to walk the walk." "I try to be consistent in my daily actions." This principal also allows his teachers to rate him using a leadership practice inventory." He stated that, "on a scale of 1 through 10, his ranking has never been less than 8.3." This is confirmation to him that he is a leader with integrity.

In summary, themes included: integrity defines a real leader, teachers are the foundation of the school, walk the walk as a principal, frequent leadership assessment from staff.

Principal C. Principal C responded by stating that a principal needs a leadership team that can be trusted and principals must have "personal and professional integrity." This principal also stated; "It is required that you

delegate." "Also, take responsibility for negative outcomes." This principal also stated; "Keep your reputation in tact, by doing the rights things all the time."

In summary, themes included: establishing trustworthy leadership teams, displaying personal and professional integrity, keep a solid reputation.

Principal D. Principal D responded by stating that the principal must be "perfectly honest." This principal also stated the need to involve staff in decision making as much as possible. This principal also stated the need to give credit and praise to the staff.

In summary, themes included: being honesty, decision making involvement of staff, give credit and praise.

Principal E. Principal E responded by stating the need to "do what's right for that school as a whole." Make conscious decision with student at the forefront. This principal also stated that he always stood behind his staff when times were rough. This principal also discuss the need to be totally involved in the community. This principal stated, "that he live, work, play and worship in one community."

In summary, themes included: do what's right for the school as a whole, make conscious decisions with student at

the forefront, and stand behind your staff during rough times.

Principal F. Principal F responded by stating the need to hire people that can be trusted to help "run this school" and the need to be a "man of my word." This principal also stated that, he felt strongly about holding your ground when decisions are made.

In summary, themes included: trust and integrity are needed for relationships, principals must be honest and stand by their word, and they must hire people they can trust, and holding your ground when decisions are made.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This section presents a summary of findings related to best practices of urban Georgia high school principals in the areas of vision, risk-taking, human development, belief in others, and integrity. The discussion explains the significance of the findings and their relevance to previous research as well as study limitations. The conclusion addresses implications of the results and recommendations for future studies.

Emerging Themes Related to Each Research Question

Vision

Principal A. Themes resulting from this interview included: know your vision, communicate your vision with actions; be honest about problems; be specific about solutions; be aware of your resources; develop a think tank; and attend to all students.

Principal B. Themes resulting from this interview included: know your vision, communicate your vision with actions; focus on success for everyone; instill a strong work ethic in the students, and focus on successful choices.

Principal C. Themes resulting from this interview included: know your vision, communicate your vision with actions; focus on relevant and real life educational needs; ensure a team effort with community support; help students by talking to them (bring in college, business, and political speakers); and helping them get support to ensure their success.

Principal D. Themes resulting from this interview included: know your vision, communicate your vision; focus on curriculum and relevant and real life educational needs; engage students; prepare teachers; raise expectations for all stakeholders; and inform stakeholders their help is needed.

Principal E. Themes resulting from this interview included: know your vision, communicate your vision; focus on providing a safety net for all students; use of multiple ways to provide successful opportunities; keep parents informed since they can be a mouth piece for others; and constantly evaluate and re-evaluate to adjust methods.

Principal F. Themes resulting from this interview included: know your vision, communicate your vision; help parents so that students can continue to go to school and be successful; focus on graduation and beyond; ensure skill development; and use tutorials and remediation sessions to

ensure skill development as assessed with standardized tests.

Risk-Taking

Principal A. Themes resulting from this interview included: identify problems; create solutions with minimum risk; know those you work with; and do your research.

Principal B. Themes resulting from this interview included: be conservative; maintain support; and prepare others for change.

Principal C. Themes resulting from this interview included: importance of making calculated risks to avoid unwanted consequences.

Principal D. Themes resulting from this interview included: make risks; calculate risks; and include stakeholder input.

Principal E. Themes resulting from this interview included: take risks; do not be too easily dissuaded to seek the new and better way; and let teachers know you care about their input and opinion.

Principal F. Themes included: be a risk taker; do not be dissuaded; and take risks to make things better.

Human Development

Principal A. Themes resulting from this interview included: human development is individualized; identify strengths and weaknesses; and let teachers know they are cared for;

assistant principals are the most time consuming group to develop.

Principal B. Themes resulting from this interview included: make teachers happy; distribute authority; support teachers; provide ongoing training; prepare assistant principals for the principalship.

Principal C. Themes resulting from this interview included: use collaborative decision making; use the open door policy to developed a more positive relationship; listen to others, support and praise others, admonish in private; give assistant principals full authority.

Principal D. Themes resulting from this interview included: train staff through cutting edge professional development; promote democracy; give time and attention to assistant principals.

Principal E. Themes resulting from this interview included: equip teachers with the most updated methods and skills; provide information.

Principal F. Themes included: give freedom to others to grow without constant supervision.

Belief In Others and Integrity

Principal A. Themes included: trust in staff members, distribution of authority.

Principal B. Themes included: integrity defines a real leader, teachers are the foundation of the school, walk the walk as a principal, frequent leadership assessment from staff.

Principal C. Themes included: establishing trustworthy leadership teams, displaying personal and professional integrity, keep a solid reputation.

Principal D. Themes included: being honesty, decision making involvement of staff, give credit and praise.

Principal E. Themes included: do what's right for the school as a whole, make conscious decisions with student at the forefront, and stand behind your staff during rough times.

Principal F. Themes included: trust and integrity are needed for relationships, principals must be honest and stand by their word, and they must hire people they can trust, and holding your ground when decisions are made.

Summary of Findings Related to Research Question
Research Question. *What are the best practices of urban Georgia high school principals in the areas of vision, risk-taking, human development, and belief in others and integrity? The interviews discussed topics of vision, risk-taking, human development, belief in others, and integrity.*

In summary, findings regarding vision were: know your vision, communicate your vision with actions; be honest about problems; be specific about solutions to include tutorials; attend to all students; focus on relevant and real life educational curriculum; ensure a team effort with community and parent support; use relevant and real life curriculum; use available resources and develop a think tank; engage students; prepare teachers; raise expectations for all and focus on graduation and beyond; focus on providing a safety net for all students; use evaluation and re-evaluation to revise methods; and ensure skill development.

In summary, findings regarding risk-taking were: identify problems; create solutions with minimum risk (be conservative); know those you work with; do your research; maintain support; prepare others for change; take calculated risks; include stakeholder input; do not be dissuaded; seek the new and better way; and let teachers know you care about them.

In summary, findings regarding human development were: human development is individualized; identify strengths and weaknesses; let teachers know they are cared for; make teachers happy; distribute authority; support teachers; provide ongoing training; use collaborative decision

making; use the open door policy to gather data; listen to others, support and praise others; promote a democratic environment; provide information; and give freedom to others to grow without constant supervision.

In summary, findings regarding belief in others and integrity were: trust and integrity are needed for relationships, principals must be honest and stand by their word, and they must hire people they can trust.

Discussion

Significance of Findings

The findings that most of the participants in this study reported not only the need for a strong vision and communication of this vision, but also the need to communicate the vision with action. The finding that a strong and coordinated curriculum that meets real life needs of students is needed to ensure student success is consistent with findings reported by Lashway (2004) and Watkins (2000). Lashway stated that an uncoordinated curriculum leads to ineffective practices and low student performance. This study's finding that principals must support teachers to ensure student success was also consistent with findings from Lashway (2004). The need for a vision that includes a safe and positive school climate, as noted by one principal in this study was consistent with

beliefs of Lezotte. Lezotte reported that a safe and positive school climate with effective leadership increases student achievement (Sellers, 2002).

Findings that teacher training and a relevant curriculum are important to ensure student success were consistent with researchers such as Wilms (2003) and Desimone (2002). The findings that principals must incorporate teachers as leaders and use collaborative decision-making practices in a democratic environment are consistent with results reported by Cranston (2000). Findings that parents are an important component in student success and principal leadership were consistent with those reported by Barth (2002) and Griffith (1998; 2000; 2001).

Findings from this study were that principals rely on relationships with others to include teachers and administrators. These relationships must include trust and beliefs in others in order for them to be effective. This finding was consistent with the human resource structural frame of reference used as a theoretical construct for this study. As noted by Rice and Harris (2003), the human resource frame focuses on the relationship between the leaders and the members of the organization and it is this frame that serves to help the organization function optimally. As one principal noted, it is important to hire

people that you can trust and work with and as another principal noted, it is important to rely on the human resources you have and build on their skills to develop a think tank to continue to explore new ideas.

Limitations

Study limitations regard the sample. Since the sample selected for this study was from an available volunteer population of only 6 high school principals from one geographic location. The results of this research may not be generalizable to non-volunteer individuals. The study is further limited by the use of a small number of high school principals, which may not represent all principals, limiting generalizability to additional geographic locations. The study is limited by its design. Since the study variables were not directly manipulated, results are observed from existing groups, and findings are descriptive. The study is limited by the choice of instrument. The use of one interview protocol may limit findings.

Conclusions

Conclusions for the study are as follows: visions must be known and communicated honestly and must contain specific solutions; visions must provide success for everyone based on real life needs and skills; visions must

include a relevant curriculum and a team effort (with parent and community support) and provide for teacher preparation; one must use available resources and develop a think tank to continue to explore better and more effective ideas; visions require constant re-evaluation.

Risk-taking is necessary but must be calculated and supported; others must be prepared for change; teachers know they are cared for.

Human development is individualized and is based on individuals strengths and weaknesses; support, training and more relevant professional development, freedom, and collaborative decision making facilitate growth.

Belief in others and integrity require trust. Integrity is needed for leadership and relationships; principals must be honest and stand by their word, and they must hire people they can trust.

Implications

Implications of findings are that principals believe in the need for a strong vision to be adequately communicated with actions as well as words and this vision must serve the students, teachers, and community. Risk taking is needed for leadership and change but it must be calculated to minimize risk. Human development requires freedom, support, and training and human resources are

important for optimal principal functioning. Effective leaders must have integrity and trust those they work with. Principals must develop a think tank and help teachers to become leaders. While this study presents with limitations, it provided important information regarding best practices for successful leadership.

Recommendations for Future Research

Since there are study limitations due to the sample, it is recommended that it be replicated in a future study that includes a larger sample, randomly selected from multiple geographic locations. Since the study is limited by its design, it is recommended that a future study explore multiple variables. For example, additional factors that are related to leadership from the perspective those being led (teachers) would have been helpful.

Since the study is limited by the choice of the interview and one brief interview protocol, it is recommended that a future study include the use of multiple instruments to assess multiple aspects of the issue. For example, instruments can be used to assess principal and teacher perspectives of the best practices related to leadership and compare findings.

This study provided important and useful information regarding best practices of principals related to vision,

risk taking, human development, belief in others, and integrity, a more comprehensive understanding of the topic would be even more beneficial. It is therefore recommended that a future study further investigate the variables and findings from this study. For example, a study is needed to explore whether teachers perceive the vision of the principal accurately and whether they feel the principal communicates the vision in a motivating manner with actions and words. This would support conclusions related to perceptions of best practices.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs Institutional Review Board (IRB)		
Phone: 912-681-0843	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Veazey Hall 2021 P.O. Box 8005 Statesboro, GA 30460
Fax: 912-681-0719		

To: Anthony W. Smith
190 Canal Place
Fayetteville, GA 30215

Walter Polka
P.O. Box 8131

CC: Charles E. Patterson *CP*
Associate Vice President for Research

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

Date: January 24, 2008

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

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: H08122, and titled "Best Practices of High School Principals for Improving Student Achievement in Urban Schools", 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,

Eleanor Haynes

Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT

INFORMED CONSENT

As a part of the requirements of the doctoral program in Educational Leadership at Georgia Southern University. I am conducting a qualitative study for the purpose of examining the best practices of urban high school principals for improving student achievement. The strategies and practice of the role of the leader will be the focus of this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study at anytime without penalty or consequence of any kind.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a one hour interview focusing on: (1) vision, (2) risk-taking, (3) human development, and (4) belief in others and integrity. Your comments will be recorded on audiotape to accurately document your response for this research. After the interview has been completed, the audio tapes will be stored for one year. January 2008 - January 2009. All audio tapes will be destroyed after one year.

Although studies have some degree of risk, there is no foreseeable risk in this study beyond those experienced in everyday living. All information is confidential. There will be no indication of names or schools to protect the identity of the participants. You may ask questions about the research. The principal investigator or the faculty advisor will answer any questions related to this study. Contact Anthony W. Smith at 770-652-7722 with additional questions. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or the process of IRB approval, contact the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-486-7758.

The results of this study may be of value to principals, vice-principals, superintendents, and other school administrators in identifying both effective leadership programs that will enhance the educational opportunities for students as well as ineffective directions that can detract from those opportunities.

A copy of the results of this research may be obtained by contacting the investigator. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Title of Project: BEST PRACTICES OF HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS FOR IMPROVING STUDENT ACHEIVEMENT IN URBAN SCHOOLS.

Principal Investigator: Anthony W. Smith, 190 Canal Place, Fayetteville, Georgia 30215

770-652-7722, Anthony.Smith@georgiasouthern.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Walter Polka, Department of Leadership, Technology and Human Development

P.O. Box 8131, Statesboro, GA 30460-8131,
wpolka@georgiasouthern.edu

Participant Signature

Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

Investigator Signature

Date

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

VISION questions:

Ideally, most Principals have a vision to provide world class educational opportunities for their students, whereas the student's high school experience will prepare them for higher education and/or a productive work life. Describe the vision you employ at your high school that helps students obtain world class educational opportunities, which in-turn prepares them for higher education, future workforce opportunities, and indispensable life skills. How do you get teachers, parents, the community, colleges, and business/industry to buy-in, support, and help you implement your vision?

RISK TASKING questions:

A Principal often serves as the fulcrum or pivot point for change at their school, keeping a delicate balance between the often conflicting pressures coming from teachers, the community, their school district, and state/federal agencies. When necessary, the principal introduces a blueprint for change, (then) adapts it continually in response to those who will have to live with it, embrace it, fight it, etc. In many instances, calculated risk taking must be tried in order to move forward and obtain desired outcomes. Are you a risk taker? If so, describe those risk taking strategies and decisions you orchestrated or avoided, which resulted in successes and/or failures. In the end, is it wise, dangerous, and/or necessary for a Principal to be a risk taker?

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT questions:

Normally, Principals struggle with how to reconcile strong leadership with the participatory decision-making that forms the bedrock of any sustained change effort. Successful principals understand the necessity to develop and foster a faculty capable of marshaling itself, while at the same time proactively helping the Principal realize his/her vision and ensure student success. Describe how you develop your faculty to be committed to your vision, dedicated to the school's mission, and focused on student success, while also having the flexibility to embrace and implement change that succinctly benefits students/families.

Which is more complex, developing Assistant Principals, faculty members, or support staff? Describe the human and professional development strategies you use to develop each group.

BELIEF IN OTHERS - questions:

On a daily basis, Principals emphasize the need to distribute authority, to trust their faculty members/staffs to use it well, and to facilitate the conflicts that arise when decisions are shared. Believing in others (i.e., administration, Asst. Principals, faculty members, students, parents, and the community) is essential to becoming a successful Principal and creating a healthy school environment capable of succeeding at all facets. Describe how the concept of "belief in others" has helped you and hurt you on your journey to become a successful Principal.

From a Principal's perspective, list and rate (in order) the various stakeholders who you value and believe in, which in-turn have been indispensable in helping you to create a successful high school.

INTEGRITY - questions:

As a Principal, how does personal and profession integrity apply to the following governance principals:

1. You must participate in decisions that affect you.
2. You can't make decisions that affect someone else without involving them.
3. Everyone who participates in a decision lives with it until the decision is reversed together.
4. You are responsible for the effects of your decision.