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# The Relationship Between Principal Leadership and Improving Achievement Status in Secondary Schools: A Multiple-Site Case Study

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The Relationship Between Principal Leadership and Improving Achieving Status in  
Secondary Schools: A Multiple Site Case Study

The Relationship Between Principal Leadership and Improving Achievement Status in  
Secondary Schools: A Multiple Site Case Study

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

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## **ABSTRACT**

For all that is revealed in the research literature identifying and describing traits and behaviors exhibited by principals who make a positive difference in student learning, many schools are still failing. With all we know, how does this continue to happen? The goal of this study was to develop theory to expand and enrich the existing research by defining and describing what three successful principals - a middle school and two junior high schools - did to turn their failing schools around and positively influence the levels of student achievement in their respective schools.

The significant contribution this study adds to the field of educational research is its identification of five themes or categories of leadership implemented by the principal in each of the schools studied that were credited by the participants as causes for their schools' successful turnarounds. These five categories – expectations and accountability, leadership, responding to student needs, climate and culture, and instruction – and their indicators were consistently identified by the participants in all schools as reasons why their schools were successful in improving student performance levels and each school's achievement status. Clearly, the five categories were interrelated and interdependent upon each other and thus, equally critical to the success the schools experienced.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## ABSTRACT

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Organization of the Chapter .....	1
Background and Context for the Study .....	1
Statement of Problem .....	6
Purpose of the Study .....	7
Significance of the Study .....	7
Research Questions .....	7
Theoretical Framework.....	8
Definitions of Terms .....	9
Researcher Assumptions.....	10
Limitations of the Study.....	10
Delimitation of the Study .....	11
Summary of Chapter One .....	11
Organization of the Dissertation .....	12
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	14
Organization of the Chapter .....	14
Selecting and Evaluating Research for Review .....	14
Historical Perspective for Current Standards-Based Accountability .....	15
The Need for Leadership and a Principal .....	22
The Relationship of the Principal to Student Achievement .....	23
What Effective Leaders Do.....	25
Jackson, Logsdon, and Taylor .....	26
Andrews, Soder, and Jacoby.....	26
Smith and Andrews.....	27
Brice.....	28
Heck and Marcoulides .....	28
Foriska.....	29
Haberman.....	29
Kouzes and Posner.....	30
Drago-Severson.....	30
Yukl.....	30
Cotton.....	34
Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Walstrom .....	38
Waters, Marzano, and McNulty.....	47
Gilmore .....	55
Reeves .....	56
The Wallace Foundation .....	57
Additional Studies.....	58
Summary.....	67

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	69
Organization of the Chapter .....	69
Purpose of the Study .....	69
Research Questions .....	71
Research Methodology .....	71
Researcher as Instrument .....	73
Theoretical sensitivity .....	74
Site and Sample Selection .....	76
Researcher Ethics .....	77
Instrumentation and Methods for Data Collection .....	77
Personnel interviews .....	79
Principal interviews .....	80
Instructional staff interviews .....	80
Observations .....	81
Collection of documents and artifacts .....	82
Data Analysis .....	83
Methods of analysis .....	85
Verification .....	86
Triangulation .....	88
Development of a rich, thick description .....	89
Acknowledgement of bias .....	89
Member checking .....	90
External audits and an audit trail .....	91
Trustworthiness .....	91
Limitations of the Study .....	92
Summary .....	92
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS .....	94
Post-Proposal Adjustment in Rationale for Selection of Participating Schools .....	95
Audience .....	98
Transcribed Interviews .....	98
Audit Trail Notations .....	99
The Data Analysis Process .....	100
THE CASE OF SCHOOL A .....	
The School .....	101
Selection of the Site .....	101
Researcher's Prior Employment at the School .....	103
The Principal .....	104
Collection of Data .....	104
Principal A Interview and Conversations .....	104
Focus Group A Interview and Conversations .....	105
Documents and Observations .....	105
Presentation of the Data .....	106
Presentation of Axial Codes (Major Themes) .....	106
The Themes .....	108

Data as Driver .....	108
Leadership.....	113
Expectations and Accountability .....	119
Instruction .....	123
Teacher Quality.....	129
Responding to Student and Parent Needs .....	134
<b>THE CASE OF SCHOOL B</b>	
The School .....	136
Selection of the Site .....	137
The Principals .....	139
Collection of Data.....	140
Principal B1 and B2 Interviews and Conversations .....	140
Focus Group B Interviews and Conversations.....	141
Observations and Documents .....	142
Presentation of the Data.....	142
Presentation of Axial Codes (Major Themes) .....	142
The Themes.....	144
Climate and Culture .....	144
Expectations and Accountability .....	150
Instruction .....	155
Responding to Student Needs .....	162
Interacting with Parents and Community .....	164
<b>THE CASE OF SCHOOL C</b>	
The School .....	165
Selection of the Site .....	166
The Principals .....	168
Collection of Data.....	170
Principal C1 and C2 Interviews and Conversations .....	170
Staff Interviews and Conversations .....	172
Observations and Documents .....	173
Presentation of the Data.....	173
Presentation of Axial Codes (Major Themes) .....	173
The Themes.....	175
Expectations and Accountability .....	175
Leadership and Support of Instruction.....	188
Responding to Student Needs .....	195
<b>CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS OF THREE SCHOOLS</b>	
Method for Cross-case Analysis .....	203
Presentation of Cross-case Findings (Selective Codes).....	205
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS.....</b>	
Grounded Theory .....	213
Theory One: Expectations and Accountability .....	215

Theory Two: Leadership.....	219
Theory Three: Responding to Student Needs .....	223
Theory Four: Climate and Culture.....	227
Theory Five: Instruction .....	230
Summary of Findings.....	234
Interpretation of the Data .....	235
Recommendations to the Field.....	235
Principals.....	236
Superintendents.....	238
Assistant Superintendents and Curriculum Directors .....	239
Higher Education .....	239
Recommendations for Futher Research .....	240
Conclusion .....	241
Study's Contribution to the Field of Education .....	242
 REFERENCES .....	 244
 APPENDICES .....	 261
Appendix A IRB Letter of Approval .....	261
Appendix B Letter to Superintendent. ....	262
Appendix C Letter to Principal.....	263
Appendix D Principal Interview Questions .....	264
Appendix E Focus Group Interview Questions .....	266
Appendix F Sage Publishing Permission to Use Materials for Table 2.1.....	268
Appendix G ASCD Permission to Use Materials for Table 2.2 .....	269
Appendix H Statement of Permission for Materials Used in Table 2.3.....	270
Appendix I McREL Permission to Use Materials for Tables 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6 .....	271
Appendix J Sage Publishing Permission to Use Materials for Table 2.7 .....	272



## LIST OF TABLES

2.1 Yukl’s Hierarchical Taxonomy of Leader Behavior .....	33
2.2 Cotton’s Leadership Areas and Behavior Exemplars .....	35
2.3 Leithwood’s Leadership Practices and Tasks .....	40
2.4 McREL’s Leadership Responsibilities and Correlations to Student Academic Achievement.....	48
2.5 McREL’s Characteristics of First and Second Order Changes.....	51
2.6 McREL’s Principal Responsibilities and Their Operational Definitions .....	54
2.7 Valentine’s and Prater’s Nine Factors of Principal Leadership.....	60
4.1 Audit Trail Notation Codes from Participants Included in the Study.....	100
4.2 School A’s Academic Accountability Status for Years 2003-2012.....	103
4.3 Axial Codes and sample Open Codes for School A.....	106
4.4 School B’s Academic Accountability Status for Years 2003-2012.....	139
4.5 Axial Codes and Sample Open Codes for School B.....	143
4.6 School C’s Academic Accountability Status for Years 2003-2012.....	168
4.7 Axial Codes and Sample Open Codes for School B.....	174
4.8 Visual Comparison of Themes by School.....	204
4.9 Cross-case Map of Themes and Sample Indicators for Schools A, B, and C.....	206
5.1 Theory One: Expectations and Accountability.....	216
5.2 Theory Two: Leadership.....	220
5.3 Theory Three: Responding to Student Needs.....	224
5.4 Theory Four: Climate and Culture.....	228
5.5 Theory Five: Instruction.....	231

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### **Organization of the Chapter**

Chapter one first presents a background and context for the study. It describes the accountability programs under which public schools in the country and in Arkansas are expected to perform and how many schools are falling short, particularly those at the secondary level. Literature is cited, suggesting a pattern of common characteristics and practices found in those schools which are performing well. Principal leadership is identified as one of the variables which can influence performance.

Next, a statement of the problem is presented along with the purpose and significance for the study, the research, and the research questions. The following theoretical framework presents literature summaries establishing the correlation between the effects of leadership and productivity in both business and education. It points to the need for additional studies to determine what successful principal leaders have done to improve student performance in their schools.

A section listing my basic assumptions while conducting this study follows. To illustrate my awareness that the study's findings may have been influenced by variables beyond my control, limitations are listed. This also explains why generalizations one may draw from this study are limited. Boundaries I set for the study are listed next in the delimitations section. The final section of this chapter summarizes the organization of this dissertation.

#### **Background and Context for the Study**

Schools have become increasingly aware of the high stakes associated with student achievement since the inception of the Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001(2002)

and the Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability Program Act of 1999 (1999). Most all have responded by taking whatever measures they knew about and could implement to ensure they met their yearly academic benchmarks and made adequate yearly progress (AYP). State, district, and local educational leaders, in collaboration with classroom teachers, have explored the research in best practices and participated in numerous training efforts. With varying levels of effort, what they have learned has been implemented. The resulting outcomes have been mixed. Any school which missed its annual growth targets over a two-year period was designated as a “school in need of improvement.” However, a number of schools formerly added to the “improvement list” were successful in reexamining and adjusting their strategies, found ways to increase student achievement, and escaped school improvement status.

Secondary schools, both middle level and high schools, have found it more difficult to make AYP – to first avoid and then to escape school improvement status. Historically and at present a much larger percentage of schools that fail and are designated as needing improvement are secondary schools. Fewer secondary schools than elementary schools have successfully initiated and implemented the changes necessary to return to making AYP status.

When seeking ways to move from failure to success in an organization, the best place to begin looking for solutions is other organizations with similar variables and circumstances which have achieved success. The question at hand for this study was whether an examination of those rare cases where secondary schools were successful in progressing from school improvement status to meeting standards could give leaders in the failing schools helpful insights and strategies to assist them in leading their own schools to success.

This case study examined three Arkansas secondary schools that successfully escaped school improvement status and began meeting standards. Qualitative research is appropriate for describing little understood phenomena, in recognizing and understanding the differences between what is known about theory and practice, and what is actually implemented (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998). With this in mind, the focus for this study was to identify and describe the responsibilities, behaviors, and processes the principal of each school used to successfully effect academic improvement. Data were collected through a variety of methods including conducting individual and small group interviews, making observations, and examining relevant documents. During the entire study process, safeguards were in place to insure reliability and validity. Once the data were collected, a systematic analysis that consolidated, reduced, and organized it into categories, patterns, and themes was completed. My hope is that what has been revealed through the interpretation of the data collected will be of help to other administrators who are looking for solutions to implement within their own organizations.

At the close of the 2009-2010 school year, nearly 30,000 of the 98,000 public schools in the United States were identified and labeled as being in need of improvement by their state education departments according to the NCLB guidelines (Dillon, 2010). Central to the guidelines of this Act is the requirement for all students to be proficient at their appropriate and current grade level in mathematics and literacy by the end of the 2013-2014 school year.

Those labeled as being in some level of school improvement were categorized as such because too few of their students demonstrated for at least the second year in a row, adequate levels of academic proficiency on the state-wide assessments in math and literacy. Arkansas' annual cycle of assessing and subsequently designating schools as meeting standards or being in school improvement is part of a system which became fully operational at the conclusion of the

2003-2004 school year with the inception of the ACTAAP. ACTAAP was created in response to Arkansas Acts 35 and 1467 of 2003 and is closely linked to NCLB. Parallel to the expectation in NCLB, ACTAAP expects all students in Arkansas public schools will demonstrate proficiency in mathematics and literacy at their age-appropriate grade level by the 2013-2014 school year (Arkansas Comprehensive Testing and Accountability Program, 1999).

Arkansas' plan for reaching 100% proficiency between 2004 and 2014 required the percentage of students who demonstrated proficiency to increase incrementally each year. Every public school was expected to meet the benchmark percentage yearly in order to demonstrate AYP. Safe harbor, an alternate method for demonstrating AYP, was developed for those schools that could demonstrate growth, but in smaller increments and at slower rates than those meeting full AYP requirements (Arkansas Department of Education, 2010, p. 17). To meet safe harbor requirements, a school must have reduced by at least ten percent the number of students not proficient from the year before. Schools designated as meeting safe harbor must also have demonstrated they met state graduation requirement levels and tested 95% or more of their eligible students. To have met standards by either method also stipulated that the required percentage of proficient students was not only attained by the combined population of all students in the school but by various statistically significant sub-groups, as well. The combined population was defined as the aggregate population for all student sub-populations identified in Arkansas. According to NCLB mandates, this included all student categories except limited English-proficient students in the U.S. less than one year and highly mobile students. Student subgroups recognized in Arkansas included: (a) African American, (b) Hispanic, (c) Caucasian, (d) economically disadvantaged, (e) limited English proficient, and (f) students with disabilities (Arkansas Department of Education, 2010, p. 19).

A summary report from the Center on Education Policy (2011) shows state test scores across the United States increased at all school levels between 2002 and 2009. However, high school students exhibited markedly less progress than students at elementary and middle levels. More than three-quarters of the states (from 76% to 84%) made gains at the high school level in mean scores and percentages of students scoring proficient. This trend was evident in both literacy and math. However, compared with grades 4 and 8, a smaller proportion of states had gains at high school and a larger proportion had declines. Achievement gains were smaller, on average, for high school students than for grade 4 and grade 8 students. These statistics illustrate an unacceptable trend. They also give rise to the question about what causes could be at the root of the problem and thus, how outcomes in high schools might be improved. Thus, a look at the practices being implemented in successful high schools was a rational starting point to justify the need for and plan this study.

Studies show secondary schools where students achieve at higher academic levels share some common practices. Having strong principal leadership is one of the most essential (Brown, 2006; Education Trust, 2005; Fullan, 2006; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). According to the Wallace Foundation (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Walstrom, 2004, p. 5), “Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors which contribute to what students learn at school”. At a time when high schools are exhibiting markedly less progress than students at elementary levels, it is essential for more researchers to take a thorough look at identifying which principal practices are being implemented in secondary schools where students perform well.

Effective leadership by the building principal is the most essential element for implementing an effective change process for gaining school improvement and increased

academic achievement within a school organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003). For successful change to occur, principals must become instruments for transforming both the culture and the structure in schools (Hargreaves & Fink, 2000; Fullan, 2003). They are uniquely positioned to provide a climate of high expectations, a clear vision for better teaching and learning, and the means for everyone in the system to realize the vision (Bender-Sebring & Bryk, 2000). As Deal (1990) states, “From someone -- or someplace -- energy needs to be created, released, channeled, or mobilized to get the ball rolling in the right direction” (p. 4).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In Arkansas, at the conclusion of the spring 2010 state testing cycle, 421 of the 1,066 public school campuses in the state met criteria for being labeled in some level of school improvement. An additional 213 schools were in their first year of not making AYP and were classified as being “on alert” (National Office for Research on Measurement and Evaluation Systems, 2012).

In Arkansas, secondary schools appear to miss the mark of meeting AYP most frequently. This supports the view held by many and supported by the numbers showing among all school levels, secondary schools are the least changed among (Siskin & Little, 1995). Of the few high schools that have made substantial changes and notable progress, few have been able to sustain their improvements (Daggett, 2004; Datnow, 2005).

Meeting AYP goals has caused schools across the states, including Arkansas, to take a thorough and critical look at whether their student achievement outcomes are adequate and, if not, how to implement changes and better practices to produce better results. School leaders, especially at the secondary level, must identify and practice responsibilities, behaviors, and

processes that will more effectively lead to significant improvements in academic achievement and meeting the benchmarks of NCLB and ACTAAP.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This multiple case study took a close look at the principal's leadership in three secondary schools in Arkansas. Each of these schools experienced what can be considered a rare phenomenon I believed was worthy of study. All had, at some time since the inception of NCLB, been designated by the Arkansas Department of Education as needing improvement. More recently, however, each experienced changes and improvements adequate for returning to a designation of making AYP and meeting standards. This study identified and described the responsibilities, behaviors, and processes each principal used to successfully effect academic improvements in their school to make gains and meet standards.

### **Significance of the Study**

“The operative assumption today is that someone, somewhere, has a better idea; and the operative compulsion is to find out who has that better idea, learn it, and put it into action – fast” (Welch, as cited in Duggan, 2003, p. xi). One can conclude that in each of the three school organizations included in the study, it is probable that a better idea, possibly worthy of finding, learning, and implementing, existed.

### **Research Questions**

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what leadership responsibilities and behaviors do school principals in three achieving Arkansas secondary schools attribute their success in moving from school improvement status to a school meeting standards?



2. What were the processes these principals implemented within their leadership roles to which they attribute their success?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Decades of research have established the correlation between the effects of leadership and productivity in both business and education (Angelo, 2005). Barnard's *The Function of the Executive* (1938) described the need for an executive within an organization who would treat its workers with respect and competence through the establishment of a system of communication, incentives, and organizational purposes and goals. The responsibility schools in Arkansas have for ensuring their students meet the academic standards falls to many individuals, but nowhere more heavily than on the principal of the school. A growing body of research shows leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that raise student achievement and influence student outcomes (Firestone & Wilson, 1985; Fullan, 2002; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, 2001). Much research has been conducted on the influence of principal leadership on student learning (Dufour, 2002; Glickman 2002). Research reveals there are schools where excellent teaching and learning can and does occur, but not without leadership (Wimpelberg, 1987, p. 100). Marzano, McNulty, and Waters (2005) cited studies showing the average effect size between school leadership and student achievement is .25, which is approximate to a ten percentile point gain in achievement scores.

Numerous experts and researchers have developed lists of characteristics and behaviors correlated with higher performing schools and their effective principals. Many of their summative outcomes recommend additional studies be conducted to identify the specific roles and actions the principals of secondary schools where academic achievement improved significantly be identified and reported to further the research literature (Heckmann, 2011;

Valenti, 2010). The question of what exactly successful principals did to accomplish notable improvement is one that arises often during my conversations with colleagues. It was the goal of this study to answer this question, add its findings to the research, and provide additional strategies to school leaders seeking to improve their student outcomes.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are provided for clarification and uniformity of understanding throughout this study:

*Academic content standards.* A series of documents approved by the Arkansas Department of Education specifying what a student enrolled in an Arkansas Public School should know and be able to do. These Academic Content Standards also provide the foundation for development of the state assessment system (Arkansas Department of Education, 2013).

*Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).* A measure of satisfactory progress by a district or a school toward the goal of proficiency for all students (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002).

*Meets Standards.* A school or district that has met Arkansas accountability standards for at least the last two years (Arkansas Department of Education, 2010, p. 10).

*No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).* This law was enacted in 2001 and is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. NCLB is based on four principles: accountability for results, more choices for parents, greater freedom for states and communities for more local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on using proven education methods based on scientific research (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002).

*Principal.* The chief leader of an Arkansas public school campus, hired by the Board of Directors, and for the purpose of this study, in position for a period of at least three years.

*Safe harbor.* An alternate method of demonstrating AYP under the NCLB Act determined by decreasing the percent of students not performing at the proficient level on the Criterion Referenced Assessments by at least 10%. Safe harbor can only be applied if the school meets the secondary indicator condition and tests 95% or more of eligible students (Arkansas Department of Education, 2010, p. 18).

*School in Need of Improvement.* A school that has not made AYP on the appropriate Arkansas accountability measure for two consecutive years (Arkansas Department of Education, 2010, p. 10).

*School leader.* The principal, assistant principal or administrator of a school.

*Secondary school.* For purpose of this study, this denotes a public school campus which contains any combination of grades 6 through 12.

### **Researcher Assumptions**

The basic assumptions of the study were as follows:

1. The participants were comfortable and at ease during the interview process.
2. The participants willingly participated in being interviewed and having it recorded.
3. The participants understood the questions asked of them and were truthful and forthright in their answers.
4. The participants had sufficient knowledge for answering the questions meaningfully.

### **Limitations**

This case study and any findings reported were limited to three secondary schools in Arkansas. The data were derived from a limited number of voluntary participants who were asked to report their perceptions. Additional data were obtained from my observations of people and their activities occurring in each of the schools.

Because an activity or process initiated by the principal and staff in one school may have been inherently influenced by a number of variables, generalization to other schools were precluded (Southworth, 2002). Therefore, conclusions reached during this study reflect only the conditions in these three schools by these three principals and it may not be possible to generalize the results for use by other principals in other settings. Whether what is learned is appropriate for transfer to and use at other sites is a judgment each reader of the study must make themselves.

Conceivably, the data collected during observations and/or interviews of participants may have been affected and altered by a change from their normal behavior patterns. This may be explained by *The Hawthorne Effect* (Zaleznik, 1984), which showed the tendency for individuals to temporarily alter behavior or improve performance when being observed or studied.

### **Delimitations**

1. The sample of schools, principals, and staff were limited to three high schools in Arkansas classified as having been in school improvement at one time but subsequently met standards for at least the two years required for exiting school improvement status.
2. The principals of each of these schools had been in position for at least three years.
3. Each of the teachers interviewed had been employed as a teacher in that school for at least three years.

### **Summary of Chapter One**

Chapter one establishes the background, context, and need for this study. It shows there are many schools, particularly at the secondary level, in this country and state that are not producing academic results at high enough levels to meet the requirements for meeting accountability standards. There is research to show leadership is correlated to improved

productivity in both business and in education. How this is done is a question worthy of asking so what is learned may be used by others to improve their own individual and school's performance. By looking at the characteristics and practices of three secondary school leaders who have successfully taken their schools from needing improvement to meeting standards, this study's findings add to the literature and are available to benefit school leaders seeking to improve their own practice and school's outcome.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter one introduces the problem this study addresses along with the context, purpose, and rationale for conducting it. The research questions I sought to answer are stated. Assumptions, limitations and delimitations, and definitions of terms are included in this chapter.

Chapter two is a review of the literature that provides a historical perspective of school accountability so the reader may understand how and why this study is relevant and needed for addition to the existing literature. It summarizes the findings of a number of other studies which show the critical implications for good and proper leadership by principals if they hope for successful student academic outcomes. Numerous other studies are summarized listing or defining the characteristics of effective leaders. Some research summaries recommend additional studies be conducted and go beyond listing and defining the traits and behaviors of successful principals. They propose additional studies be conducted focusing on learning what it is successful principals have done to improve their schools. They suggest knowing "how" these principals implemented the changes leading to their success is worthy of study. A number of these recommendations are cited in chapter two.

Chapter three describes the design of the study, including procedures used for collecting and analyzing qualitative data. Information about the study population and sample, instrumentation, and protocols is also included.

Chapter four was completed after data collection and analysis were completed. It includes findings, and a detailed analysis of how the study was conducted.

Chapter five is a summary of the qualitative findings of the study, as well as implications for research and practice in the field.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Organization of the Chapter**

To develop a foundation for completing this study, this literature review sought to summarize the findings of a number of other studies that have examined the significance of the relationship between principal leadership and student achievement. This chapter discusses: (a) the history of current standards-based accountability in public schools; (b) the significance of principal leadership in schools; (c) the relationship between principal leadership and student achievement; and (d) summaries of a number of significant studies which identify the behaviors and characteristics of principals who have successfully influenced student academic outcomes.

#### **Selecting and Evaluating Research for Review**

Prior to conducting the research for this dissertation, a review of literature was conducted to search for information to help define the theoretical basis and nature for this study. The review enabled the researcher to learn from previous theory about the subject, justified the need for the study in the context of existing research, showed how this dissertation study would fit into the existing body of what was already known of the subject, and justified the importance of the work because it would add to the understanding and knowledge in the field.

In preparation for this study, a number of electronic database searches were used to look for relevant literature. These included ProQuest, the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC) database, and Google Scholar and resulted in my finding, studying, and including information from numerous document types such as educational journals, dissertations, and books. Additionally, the Arkansas Department of Education reports and personnel were helpful for providing Arkansas school-specific data and information. Both historical and current studies

establishing a connection between leadership and student performance in public schools were sought. Those previous studies that were peer-reviewed and validated by empirical data were included in the review. The conclusions of a number of these studies are included in this literature review.

### **Historical Perspective for Current Standards-Based Accountability**

Throughout much of our nation's history, the public school has been regarded as the choice means through which both education and society could be improved. With proper education for all citizens viewed as essential to guarding its culture against moral dissolution and economic decline (Tyack & Cuban, 1995), its leaders determined its democracy and economic health were dependent upon the majority of its citizens having access to high-quality and effective education. As a result, compulsory education for all young citizens became an integral part of the county's cultural fabric.

When compulsory participation in education began in our nation, so did the development of a systematized education system. Systematization included a growing understanding and standardization regarding which skills should be taught for fostering the development and maintenance of good citizenship and a successful workforce. Over time, as the political, cultural, and economic world has evolved and changed significantly, so has the expectation that every child up to a certain age be educated so each has a set of skills necessary for maintaining an acceptable standard of living. As expectations for academic outcomes in public schools have changed and increased, so has the need to adapt the educational delivery systems responsible for increasing the achievement of its students. Knowledge of what works in education and how to improve teaching and learning has become a persistent question for both researchers and practitioners. Public awareness and a desire to solve the problems facing our schools through



systematic reform have grown increasingly louder and more insistent over the last half-century (Kozol, 2005).

Just prior to the 1950s the “progressive period” in education began. In describing this period Elmore (1995) states:

What is most interesting about the progressive period, as compared with other periods of educational reform, is that its aims included explicit attempts to change pedagogy, coupled with a relatively strong intellectual and practical base. Noted intellectuals - John Dewey, in particular – developed ideas about how schools might be different. (p. 7)

The progressive reformers believed schools and classrooms could and would be changed because “good ideas would travel of their own volition” (Elmore, 1995, p. 10). Although many models of ideal schools and classrooms were envisioned, Elmore sums up what amounted to a lack of implementation and change during this time as follows:

We can produce many examples of how educational practice could look different, but we can produce few, if any, examples of large numbers of teachers engaging in these practices in large scale institutions designed to deliver education to most children. (p. 11)

In 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the first space satellite, and the Space Age began. This was a signal to many Americans that the United States was in danger of losing its supreme position of power among nations of the world. The space race and the Cold War of the late 1950s and 1960s caused many to question the rigor of the American educational system and brought about national calls for curriculum changes with a focus on mathematics, science, and foreign languages. Unprecedented amounts of federal funding were dispersed into the public schools so they could not only offer the proper courses, but would also have the capacity to change organizational structures to experiment with innovative scheduling and teaching approaches. These efforts, however, resulted in very little true reform (Bernstein, 1971; Goodlad, Klein, & Associates, 1970).

In 1966, *The Equality of Educational Opportunity*, also known as the Coleman Report, was published. In this study, researchers surveyed schools across the United States in an attempt to isolate and measure the impact of various school resources on student achievement as measured by standardized tests. Their findings showed school success was more dependent on family background than any other variable, leading them to conclude that families make the difference in how students perform, while schools do not (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, & Weinfeld, 1966).

After the Coleman Report was published, realizing many schools existed which were exceptions to Coleman's findings, other researchers conducted studies to look more closely at school effectiveness and the variables associated with it. The findings of many of these studies revealed some schools, even when populated with children from underprivileged and inadequate family backgrounds, could and did make a difference (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979). In Michigan, Brookover and Lezotte began their own study verifying this. Michigan was chosen because it was one of the first states to develop and administer statewide, curricular-based, and criterion-referenced assessments of all students in selected grades in all public schools. Some of its high-performing elementary schools with high concentrations of disadvantaged students were chosen for the initial study. In what would become the most enduring product of the findings, a list of characteristics common to these schools, was defined. This list, called "correlates," became the basis for what later developed into the effective schools movement.

Near the same time, in response to the Coleman Report and to Jenck's (1972) book entitled *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America*, a similar study of secondary schools was conducted in England. Results of this study were published in a book entitled *Fifteen Thousand Hours: A Study of Secondary Schools and Their Effects on*

*Student Achievement* (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979). This study reached a conclusion similar to the American study. In spite of their domestic circumstances, students' behavior and attitudes were indeed created and inspired by their experiences at school and particularly by the qualities of the school as a social institution.

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* was published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The report warned "...[T]he educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (p. 3). According to this same report, a large part of the responsibility for America's declining productivity in the face of accelerating foreign competition could be traced to its educational system's poor performance. The report went on to charge that our society and its educational institutions seemed to have lost sight of the basic purpose of schooling and of the high expectations and disciplined effort to attain them.

With this publication, the American public's confidence in the educational system was shaken and calls for change became all the more pervasive and insistent. Insistence grew for national reforms to include more rigorous, measurable standards and higher academic and behavioral expectations.

In the decades since these aforementioned studies and reports were published, a number of school improvement initiatives have been attempted, each with a different focus on some aspect of the educational system. The authors and followers of each rationalized that implementation of their particular approach would lead to increased student achievement.

During the early 1980s, outcomes-based education (OBE) movement shifted the focus of attention to educational outcomes, such as student learning and school performance. The goal of

the movement was to move each student toward pre-determined and specific outcomes rather than attempt to transmit specific content.

The Excellence in Education Movement rose out of the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. Within two years of its publication, more than 300 task forces were formed and went to work around the nation to find solutions for improving education in the United States. This work resulted in little in the way of new ideas but instead, took what existed and extended it to include more of what was already in place – more school days, longer school days, more assessments, more credits for graduation, and more homework. Despite these efforts, studies completed in the early 1990s showed there had been no gains in achievement (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Fiske, 1992).

During this same time the site- or school-based educational movement began. Its primary focus was to decentralize education and, in its place, to develop participatory decision making at each school site, where the school was granted meaningful authority over staffing, school program, and budgeting. This movement in part rose from the research findings within effective schools which consistently found them to be relatively autonomous and driven by the mutual goals and expectations of their professional staffs (Dufour & Eaker, 1992, p. 10).

With the failure of the Excellence Movement, the Restructuring Movement was born in the early 1990s. This movement called for setting national educational goals and standards. Increased accountability for improved achievement began to escalate significantly at the national level when Goals 2000: Education American Act (P.L. 103-227, 1994) was introduced by the Clinton Administration in early 1993. Under this act, the federal government provided model standards against which the states and local school districts were to rate their progress. It also granted resources for local districts to use in reforming and implementing improvement plans. It

called for each state to develop and adopt content and performance standards, along with aligned assessments for administration to students in every school. Schools and districts were held accountable in a variety of ways for their assessment results (Cookson & Schneider, 1995).

Additionally, during the Clinton Administration, the Elementary Secondary Education Act was reauthorized (Improving America's Schools Act, 1994). To insure Title I students or those who fell below the poverty level would be held to as equally high standards as were non-eligible students, it directed they be ensured equal opportunities to achieve. Toward accomplishing this, federal funds and programs were incorporated into state and local reform initiatives. New legislation provided additional Title I resources to schools so assistance could be provided to all struggling learners (Cookson & Schneider, 1995). This boost in resources also carried with it implicit expectations the achievement levels for such students would increase significantly.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, brought the most rigorous, specific, and widespread demand for improved educational outcomes in history (NCLB, 2002). It called for significant changes in academic expectations to be more closely aligned with the needs of our nation's modern, globally-oriented workforce. It also insisted the educational system decrease the disparities among the diverse subgroups represented in the American populous. Rohlen (as cited in Fullen, 2001), in describing the complexity of the change being called for, summed it up this way:

. . . [O]ur schools need to teach learning processes that better fit the way work is evolving. Above all, this means teaching the skills and habits of mind that are essential to problem-solving, especially where many minds need to interact. (p. 70)

Under this legislation, the onus for increased academic achievement is laid squarely at the feet of principals as reflected in the following statement from the National Association of Elementary and Secondary Principals:

No Child Left Behind is now asking the principal to weave together the needs and demands of all the stakeholders. These needs and demands create an environment where principals are accountable to these stakeholders in ways they may never have been before. For No Child Left Behind not only spells out that the school is accountable for children's academic progress, it also specifies the areas of schooling to which the principal must attend to ensure this progress; the manner in which the progress will be measured; and how indicator data such as test scores will be analyzed, disaggregated and publicized. (NAESP, 2003, p. 3)

In recent years, national, state, and local leaders have significantly directed their attention on the needs of students in schools failing to meet standards. Concern for what it means for those students who will not be prepared to succeed and contribute to their own personal success or the good of their communities and country has lead the Obama administration to call upon the country to turn around 5,000 of its poorest-performing schools. Education Secretary Arne Duncan said, "As a country, we need to get into the turnaround business" (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). To help with this endeavor, nearly \$10 billion U.S. was pledged to engage state and local officials in the effort.

Three of the four options available to those states applying for these funds required districts to replace leadership in persistently low-achieving schools (Kutash et al., 2010). Additionally, many states' accountability programs require schools that are persistently low-achieving and failing replace their leaders. The administration's willingness to demand this and commit significant resources to it are presumably based on the cross-sector research supporting the notion that as many as 70 percent of the successful turnarounds in organizations begin with a change in leadership (Hoffman, 1989). Leaders which are successful in turnaround situations in

both schools and other organizations possess a different set of competencies than do those who are not successful (Kowal & Hassel, 2011).

From a global perspective, national test scores have not shown adequate improvement and a large number of schools have not reached the prescribed AYP (Packer & Kaufman, 2005). Because a school's failure to show AYP can have negative consequences for both the school and its leaders, it is advantageous for educational practitioners to take a look at what the research shows in regard to what principals do to gain and maintain academic success.

### **The Need for Leadership and a Principal**

Rarely can a group of individuals who are acting together within an organization accomplish their intended purpose without having a source of leadership and guidance. Bennis (1994) states, "...[W]e need anchors in our lives...a guiding purpose. Leaders fill that need" (p. 15). Guskin (1996) describes a leader as a visionary, a person with both strong personal and professional beliefs, who is skilled at articulating his vision to others to inspire them to embark on the change process.

Simply introducing an innovation and expecting change has not proven effective in schools (Glattner, 1987). Decades of research and educational literature show when left to their own devices, most schools will not grow into places where excellent teaching and learning occur (Wimpelberg, 1987). Instead, a leader is needed for keeping a school organization focused on making progress toward its goals. "Nothing will happen without leadership. From someone -- or someplace -- energy needs to be created, released, channeled, or mobilized to get the ball rolling in the right direction" (Deal, 1990, p. 4). Schlechty (2002) states similarly:

The primary function of a leader is to inspire others to do the things they might not otherwise do and encourage others to go in directions they might not otherwise pursue. Certainly, great leaders must respond to the needs, interests, and concerns of those they

hope will follow them, but make no mistake about it, one of the obligations of the leader is to lead. (p. xx)

Adding justification to the importance of the principal's roll, Reeves (2000) wrote:

[A] number of people who have spent much of their professional lives around schools, confirm this fundamental truth: even when budgets, faculty, and students are the same, a change in a single person – the principal – can have a profound impact on the morale, enthusiasm, and educational environment of a school. (p. 57)

Fullan (2001) wrote, “I know of no improving school that doesn't have a principal that is good at leading improvement” (p. 141). In a major review of school effectiveness, Sammons (1999, as cited in Fullan, 2001) found, “Almost every single study of school effectiveness has shown both primary and secondary leadership to be a key factor” (p. 141). Dufour and Eaker (1998) concur with this and assert, “The general agreement in educational research has been that the best hope for school improvement is to be found in the principal's office” (p. 182).

### **The Relationship of the Principal to Student Achievement**

Multiple studies reveal there is a direct relationship between school climate and student achievement (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979). There are corresponding indications confirming the principalship as the most influential position from which to shape the very learning environment which makes student learning possible (Bulach, Lunenberg, & Potter, 2011; Edmonds, 1979; Sergiovanni, 1991). Studies conducted by Pankake and Burnett (1990) found “there are two major categories of factors for improving schools, climate and leadership” (p. 37). Bookbinder (1992) too, emphasized the relationship between these two elements and affirmed leadership and school climate are unavoidably intertwined.

In a study of secondary schools by Heck and Marcoulides (1993), which looked at the effects of principal behaviors and school achievement, they concluded:



. . . [T]eacher and principal perceptions about how the principal governed the school are strongly related to the manner in which the principal is perceived to organize the school's program (.85) and to the principal's role in guiding productive school climate (.35). (p. 23)

They also maintained as separate entities, climate and instructional organization have minimal impact on school achievement, but when managed effectively and combined they can have significant influence. As a result, the principal can significantly impact school achievement by "manipulating a series of variables at the school level" (p. 25). By choosing appropriate approaches and behaviors, the effect can be positive and quite meaningful for increased achievement.

In another study, Lietner (1994) found no statistically significant correlation between the instructional management activities of the principal and academic achievement by students. However, he did find schools which had a principal who ranked high on promoting a positive school climate were significantly correlated to higher student achievement. This paralleled the findings of numerous other researchers whose results indicated principals did not directly impact student achievement. They could influence it indirectly, however, by how they led and interacted with other people, events, and organizational factors such as teacher commitment, instructional practices, or school culture (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, 1994). This conceptualization proposed leaders achieve their results through "activities that coordinate, monitor, and enable teachers to work more effectively with students" (Heck, 1993, p. 160).

Later studies conducted by Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom (2004) concluded the size of a school may be a determining factor in whether the influence of the principal is direct or indirect. More direct causality was seen between leadership behaviors and levels of achievement in small schools than was seen in larger schools where the influence of leadership more often came about through a series of indirect linkages.

More recently, multiple quantitative studies (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; University of Oregon, 2003) have indicated leadership's direct effect on student achievement is small and ranges only from a three to five percent difference in outcomes. This is still educationally significant, amounting to one quarter of the total effects of all factors measured by the study. The effects for leadership were second only to the effects of the quality of curriculum and teachers' instructions.

Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) reported in *Review of the Research: How Leadership Influences Student Learning* an estimated correlation range of .17 and .22 was found to exist between levels of student achievement and leadership (as cited in Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005). A narrative approach, defined by Marzano et al. as a researcher's attempt to "logically summarize the findings from a collection of studies on a topic by looking for patterns in those studies" (p. 9), was used to complete this study. Leithwood et al. revealed "successful leadership can play a highly significant – and frequently underestimated – role in improving student learning" (p. 5). Additionally, they concluded "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 5) and "leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are most needed" (p. 5).

### **What Effective Leaders Do**

With the expectations set by NCLB (2002), much is at stake for principals. Their role is critical in implementing effective school reform and in sustaining its effects. Researchers have long struggled to identify and describe what it is effective principals do to cause them to be successful. Numerous sources substantiate the importance of principal leadership in effective schools (Reeves, 2009; Fullan, 2005; Nelson & Sassi, 2005; Portin, 2004, Sergiovanni, 1984).

Additionally, the behaviors, traits, and responsibilities correlated with strong leadership are defined in many of these studies. Learning what constitutes effective principals and the work they do is crucial for those who are attempting to lead their own reforms for improvement (Whitaker, 2003). The following section of the research review includes summaries of some of these studies.

**Jackson, Logsdon, and Taylor (1983).** In an early study conducted by Jackson, Logsdon, and Taylor (1983), four low-income, urban, instructionally ineffective schools were compared to four other schools which were demographically similar but instructionally effective. Unlike the principals of the ineffective schools, the principals of the effective schools led by maintaining firm and centralized control with a strong focus on academics. Expectations for behavior were clear and robust. Discipline was consistently enforced. Systems for frequent monitoring of academic achievement were in place. Teachers and students were supported and rewarded for accomplishments. To use Edmond's (1979) analogy, the expectations of principals of the successful schools could be described as "tyrannical." They insisted on "achievement regardless of student background" (p. 70) so every student met at least minimum basic skill levels.

**Andrews, Soder, and Jacoby (1986).** In 1986, Andrews, Soder, and Jacoby compared the perceived performances of 33 elementary school principals as instructional leaders and the average gains of their students on their state-mandated test. Their findings concluded there were significantly higher scores in reading and mathematics in the schools where principals received the highest ratings for instructional leadership. They describe these leaders as principals who kept abreast of what was going on in the classrooms in their schools, thus enabling them to better provide resources and materials supporting teachers' instructional efforts. Andrews et al.

referred to this as “mobilizing resources” (p. 2) and described it as their ability to bring together staff, school, district, and community resources, material, and information in support of student achievement. Their study also concluded (especially in schools with populations of students that are African American, historically low achieving, and from low income backgrounds) having the teachers perceive the principal as a strong instructional leader was essential to higher levels of achievement (Andrews & Soder, 1987).

**Smith and Andrews (1989).** Four areas of instructional leadership were identified by Smith and Andrews (1989) as being instrumental to increasing student achievement in schools. To increase teacher effectiveness, and thus improve academic outcomes, principals have to first be resource providers. This includes their showing respect for and valuing teachers they supervise by recognizing exemplary teaching. Being a resource provider also means (a) principals set an expectation for teachers’ classroom instruction to be of high quality, using proven methods; (b) they provide consistent feedback to teachers about their instruction so that they may reflect upon their practices, adjust as needed, and grow professionally; and (c) they enable a structure within the school so collegiality and collaboration can exist. Extensive research conducted by Eaker, Dufour, and Dufour (2002) some years later, validated the necessity of having an instructional leader who will observe and provide feedback to teachers. Eaker et al. also cautioned that while doing this, principals and teachers must not just look for good instruction but even more so, must consider and assess levels of student learning.

A successful principal is a skillful communicator who is especially effective in keeping the school’s mission, goals, and beliefs alive within the organization (McEwan, 2003; Smith & Andrews, 1989). This includes communicating through word and action the following four beliefs which appear to be essential for instructional improvement:

- all children can learn and be successful;
- success breeds more success;
- schools can and do influence academic achievement; and
- instructional programs and decisions can only succeed if learner outcomes are clearly defined (Smith & Andrews, 1989).

The most effective principals are highly visible in the day-to-day activities of their schools and are seen by stakeholders as providing a living model which reflects the school's vision, goals, and beliefs.

**Brice (1992).** Brice (1992) conducted an analysis of the literature that addressed the link between principals' practices and school effectiveness, similar to an earlier study conducted by Hallinger and Murphy (1985). Principals' behaviors as they related to instructional outcomes in schools of differing socio-economic categories were examined. Similar to earlier findings by Jackson et al. (1983) and Edmonds (1979), Brice found the principals in low socio-economic, high-achieving schools were stronger and more directive in setting high standards and expectations for both their teachers and their students. They were also more apt to shelter their schools from outside influences which might dilute school effectiveness. In schools with higher socio-economic status, principals tended to focus less on instructional issues and more on building and maintaining community relationships.

**Heck and Marcoulides (1991).** Heck and Marcoulides (1991) studied the correlation between certain aspects of school demography and various school processes, including socioeconomic status, climate and culture, to determine their effect on levels of academic improvement. In this study of both high and low performing elementary and secondary schools they sought specifically to determine whether the principal's different instructional leadership

exchanges with teachers were predictive of school achievement levels. Using discriminant analyses, they were able to accurately predict the schools' achievement classifications 90% of the time, thus affirming the notion that a principal's instructional leadership practices do influence school effectiveness. Heck and Marcoulides (1992, 1993) found effective principals set clear goals and objectives for their schools, monitor how well those are being met, and report these results regularly. They provide their teaching staff with needed instructional resources and directly supervise how instructional strategies are implemented in classrooms. This requires them to be knowledgeable about effective classroom instruction and teaching strategies and have a system for observing, conferencing, and providing feedback to teachers. This principal is also seen by his staff as providing protection by buffering from outside interferences which may come from central office and the community.

**Foriska (1994).** Foriska (1994) found leadership by the principal of a school to be "critical to the development and maintenance of an effective school" (p. 33). He stated that principals must find ways to create and maintain focus and to supply the resources needed to support effective instruction. Similar to findings in another study by Smith and Andrews (1989), Foriska found these resources included providing professional development opportunities and reflective discussions around current educational practices and methods. The results of doing so would encourage reflection and professional dialogue between peers and thus the development of more innovative ideas and practices.

**Haberman (1999).** Haberman (1999) found principals of successful urban schools have particular qualities that increase their effectiveness. Of these qualities, he stressed the critical importance of principals having knowledge about proven, research-based instructional practices so they are in a position to provide assistance and direction to classroom teachers. In turn,

principals who have limited instructional expertise can do little to improve teaching and learning in their schools.

**Kouzes and Posner (2002).** Research by Kouzes and Posner (2002) identified practices which were essential for exemplary educational leadership. They found effective leaders tend to be pioneers and are willing to take risks to bring about change. They also motivate others to share a vision through shared leadership, model the behavior they require of others, and encourage the spirits of their constituents.

**Drago-Severson (2004).** Drago-Severson (2004), in a research study of 25 schools, concluded that the most effective principals act as instructional leaders and adult educators in support of teacher learning, an initiative which is directly connected to improving the quality of teaching and promoting children's growth and achievement. This includes their working extensively on professional development that consists of "teaming or partnering with colleagues, placing teachers in leadership roles, engaging in collegial discourse and reflective practice, and mentoring" (p. 17).

**Yukl (1989).** Yukl has spent the last four decades studying management and effective leadership in business, the military, and public schools. Much of his earliest work was spent analyzing the studies already been conducted by others. From his analysis came the realization that not only had a multitude of effective leadership theories arisen from these studies but so too had a lack of agreement among them about which behaviors were germane or important to effective leadership (Bass, 1990; Yukl, Gordon, & Tabor, 2002). As early as 1982, believing it would be of benefit to "contribute to cross-fertilization of ideas and knowledge between management and educational administration on the subject of leadership effectiveness" (1982, p. 1), Yukl began the development of a taxonomy for classifying important leader behaviors. In his

initial work, five decades of research were integrated into a manageable and meaningful conceptual framework that resulted in a hierarchical taxonomy of three metacategories (1989). All effective leadership behaviors he found could be classified into one of the three: relationship-oriented behavior, task-oriented behavior, and change-oriented behavior.

In a second study, in an attempt to validate this taxonomy, Yukl developed and administered a behavior description questionnaire to 318 managers responsible for 48 organizational units of different sizes in 15 public and private organizations. His survey included items from the Managerial Practices Survey, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, and newly written items specific to change-oriented behavior which weren't included in the other questionnaires. An exploratory factor analysis supported Yukl's construct of factoring leadership behaviors into task-oriented, relationship-oriented, and change-oriented metacategories (Yukl, Gordon, & Taber, 2002).

Although these two studies supported the three metacategories conceptualization, they did not identify clear component behaviors that matched each of the three. As a follow up, scales were created using the best items from Yukl's factor analysis. An index of behaviors was created that correlated to each of the three categories.

To be included in the behaviors components selected for each metacategory in the hierarchical taxonomy, each of the following criteria were met:

- The behavior must be directly observable;
- It must have potential to be applicable to all leaders in any organization;
- It must be chiefly relevant for one of the categories, although it might have some relevance in another; and
- The behavior must be established in earlier theory and research into effective leadership. (Yukl, Gordon, Tabor, 2002, p. 17)



Table 2.1 illustrates *Yukl's Hierarchical Taxonomy of Leader Behavior*, expands the taxonomy by identifying component behaviors correlated to each of the three categories, and describes each of the component behaviors.

Table 2.1

*Yukl's Hierarchical Taxonomy of Leadership Behavior*

Task behavior	Defining the behavior
a. Plan short-term activities	Determining how to use personnel and resources to accomplish a task efficiently and determining how to schedule and coordinate unit activities efficiently.
b. Clarify task objectives and role expectations	Assigning tasks and explaining job responsibilities, task objectives, and performance expectations.
c. Monitor operations and performance	Checking on the progress and quality of the work, and evaluating individual and unit performance.
Relations behavior	Defining the behavior
a. Provide support and encouragement	Acting considerate, showing sympathy and support when someone is upset or anxious, and providing encouragement and support when there is a difficult, stressful task
b. Provide recognition for achievements and contributions	Providing praise and recognition for effective performance, significant achievements, special contributions, and performance improvements
c. Develop member skill and confidence	Providing coaching and advice, providing opportunities for skill development, and helping people learn how to improve their skills
d. Consult with members when making decisions	Checking with people before making decisions that affect them, encouraging participation in decision making, and using the ideas and suggestions of others
e. Empower members to take initiative in problem solving	Allowing substantial responsibility and discretion in work activities, and trusting people to solve problems and make decisions without getting prior approval
Change behavior	Defining the behavior
a. Monitor the external environment	Analyzing information about events, trends, and changes in the external environment to identify threats and opportunities for the organizational unit
b. Propose an innovative strategy or new vision	Presenting an appealing description of desirable outcomes that can be achieved by the unit, describing a proposed change with great enthusiasm and conviction
c. Encourage innovative thinking	Challenging people to question their assumptions about the work and consider better ways to do it

d. Take risks to promote necessary change	Taking personal risks and making sacrifices to encourage and promote desirable change in the organization
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Adapted from: Yukl, G., Gordon, A., & Taber, T. (2002). A Hierarchical Taxonomy of Leadership Behavior: Integrating a Half Century of Behavior Research. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 9(1), 15-32.

**Cotton (2003).** In 2003 Cotton completed an analysis of 81 studies dealing with the effects of leadership on student achievement. Of the 81 reports considered, only 56 applied to leadership behaviors that influenced student achievement. Nine studies focused on secondary schools and 27 involved the school principal. In each of these schools, principal behavior was examined. In the high-achieving schools, 25 areas were identified as contributing to principal effectiveness. For each of these 25 areas, examples of behaviors were also identified. Although Cotton's narrative research did not include quantitative data, it did help to identify particular principal behaviors shown to improve student achievement. Table 2.2 lists the 25 leadership areas identified in Cotton's study along with behavior exemplars that further define and describe each area.

Table 2.2

*Cotton's Leadership Areas and Behavior Exemplars*

Leadership area	Behavior exemplar
1. Safe and orderly school environment	Set standards for student behavior. Communicate high expectations for student behavior. Apply rules consistently.
2. Vision and goals focused on high levels of student learning	Establish vision of the ideal school. Establish clear goals related to the vision. Emphasize academic goals and the importance of learning.
3. High expectations for student achievement	Expect all students to reach their learning potential. Establish a belief in the students' abilities.
4. Self-confidence, responsibility, and perseverance	Hold themselves responsible for the schools' success. Are persistent in pursuit of goals despite difficult obstacles.
5. Visibility and accessibility	Are visible to all stakeholders in communication. Build positive relationships.
6. Positive and supportive school climate	Communicator of school-wide interests. Set caring environment on campus.
7. Communication and interaction	Good communicator that solicits information from all stakeholders. Involves all stakeholders in communication. Build positive relationships.
8. Emotional/interpersonal support	Capable and caring communicators. Support staff/students personal needs.
9. Parent/community outreach and involvement	Conducts vigorous outreach to parents and community. Engages with traditionally under-represented groups.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 10. Rituals, ceremonies, and other symbolic actions         | Use of ceremonies and rituals to honor traditions.<br>Instills pride, recognizes excellence, and strengthens affiliation with the school.                   |
| 11. Shared leadership/decision making and staff empowerment | Engage staff and constituents in decision making.<br>Involve everyone in training and provides information needed for productivity.                         |
| 12. Collaboration   | Activities are routinely collaborative.<br>Staffs learn, plan, and work together to improve the school.   |
| 13. Importance of instructional leadership                  | Actively involved in curriculum and instruction.  |
| 14. High levels of student learning                         | Make decisions in light of impact on student learning.  |
| 15. Norm of continuous improvement                          | Continually push for improvement.<br>Improvement process is permanent part of school life.  |
| 16. Discussion of instructional issues                      | Facilitate staff discussion of curriculum and instruction.<br>Participate in discussions of curriculum and instruction.                                     |
| 17. Classroom observation and feedback to teachers          | Visit classrooms frequently.<br>Observe and provide feedback to teachers regularly.   |
| 18. Teacher autonomy  | Respect teachers' judgment and skills.<br>Allow autonomy in organizing and managing their rooms.<br>Limit excessive intrusions to the learning environment. |
| 19. Support risk taking                                     | Take calculated risks to improve learning.<br>Encourage teachers to be innovative and experiment in the classroom.  |

20. Professional development opportunities and resources	Offer more and varied professional development. Are creative in securing resources needed to improve schools.
21. Instructional time	Value instructional time by limiting interruptions. Arrange for additional learning time outside the traditional school day.
22. Monitoring student progress and sharing findings	Ensure there is a systematic procedure for monitoring student progress. Use and disaggregate data. Communicate data to stakeholders.
23. Use of data for program improvement	Know how to interpret data. Use data to plan curricular and instructional improvement.
24. Recognition of student and staff achievement	Make a point of recognizing achievements of students and staff.
25. Role modeling	Exemplify the outlook and behavior they expect from others. Work as a part of the school community.

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Adapted from: Cotton, K., (2003). *Principals and Student Achievement: What the Research Says*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA.

Cotton (2003) also recognized specific challenges that may impede leadership in secondary schools. While she determined strong secondary principals are more focused on instructional leadership, she also found as a whole, secondary principals spend less time involved with key instructional leadership responsibilities than do elementary principals. This, she noted, might be explained by other variables that effect the secondary principal's time and opportunities to be in classrooms – school size, community demands, and the typically wider scope of operations in secondary schools. The wider range of content and curriculum areas at the secondary school level may partially explain the difficulty secondary principals have in implementing as many instructional leadership practices as do elementary principals.

**Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004).** An extensive review of a broad range of both empirical research and related literature was completed by Leithwood et al. (2004) for the Learning from Leadership Project. The findings were summarized and published in a report entitled *Review of Research: How Leadership Influences Student Learning*. Their study was organized around a framework that includes 10 interdependent variables (Rowan, 1996). It assumed variations in teacher performance are a function of their instructional skills, motivation and commitment, the characteristics of the workplace, and their external political environment. An additional assumption the study made was leaders play a crucial role in (a) recognizing and supporting learning; (b) influencing the structure of the school's culture and climate; and (c) mediating the demands that arise from external sources.

Using this framework for analysis, this study considered evidence from three sources. One source was multiple qualitative studies that were previously completed and of these, most were case studies of exceptional schools. All schools chosen were considered statistical outliers because they were performing significantly below or above what were considered normal. Because there are limitations of validity and generalization in so many of the small qualitative case studies included, Leithwood et al. (2004) sought to minimize this shortcoming. This was accomplished by drawing on a large number of cases of effective leadership, using cross-case analyses, and subjecting much of the qualitative outcomes to further quantitative tests.

Approximately 50 large-scale quantitative studies completed between 1980 and 1998 were used as the second source for completing the Leithwood et al. (2004) review. This segment of the analysis looked at leadership effects on student outcomes and resulted in confirming the effects were small but educationally significant. Classroom instruction was shown to be only a

slightly more significant variable in learning than is a leader who exhibits effective leadership behaviors.

The third type of research studies included for analysis in the Leithwood et al. (2004) study were large-scale quantitative inquiries previously completed by other researchers in which the effectiveness of particular leadership practices was the focus. Of particular interest in this study was the meta-analysis conducted by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003), which identified 21 leadership behaviors and statistically calculated the average correlation between each behavior and students' academic assessments.

Upon completion of their analysis of the existing research, Leithwood et al. (2004) sorted out 15 core practices associated with effective school-level leaders. Additionally, they concluded, each of these practices could be classified into at least one of four categories: (a) setting directions; (b) developing people; (c) redesigning the organization; and (d) managing the instructional program. Table 2.3 shows these four categories of practice and expands to list and sort the 15 core practices associated with each of the four categories.



Table 2.3

*Leithwood's Leadership Practices and Tasks*

Practices	Tasks
Setting Directions (Motivation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Identifying and articulating a vision</li> <li>b. Fostering the acceptance of group goals</li> <li>c. High performance expectations</li> <li>d. Promoting effective communication</li> </ul>
Developing People (Ability)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Intellectual stimulation</li> <li>b. Individualized support</li> <li>c. Modeling appropriate values and practices</li> </ul>
Redesigning the Organization (Setting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Building a collaborative culture</li> <li>b. Structuring the organization to facilitate work</li> <li>c. Creating productive relations with families and communities</li> <li>d. Connecting the school to its wider environment</li> </ul>
Managing the Instructional Program (Stability)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Staffing the instructional program</li> <li>b. Monitoring the progress of students and the school's improvement strategies</li> <li>c. Buffering staff from unproductive external demands for attention</li> <li>d. Allocating resources to foster the school's improvement efforts</li> </ul>

Adapted from: Leithwood, K., and Riehl, C. (2003). *What We Know About Successful School Leadership*. Philadelphia, PA: Laboratory for Student Success, Temple University.

**Category I: Setting Directions (Motivation).** Effective leaders visualize and believe in the attainability of what could be (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Successful leaders clearly, confidently, and passionately visualize the results they intend to achieve before they attempt to lead others forward. “A good vision establishes a beacon of light that both the leader and the followers can latch onto and use to guide them from the day-to-day minutia that potentially can sidetrack even the most pure of heart” (Richter, 2003, p. 343). Beard et al. (2010) refers to this as “academic optimism”. “Schools and teachers with strong academic optimism have students who are highly motivated because of challenging goals, strong effort, persistence, resilience, and

constructive feedback” (Beard et al., 2010, p. 1143). Day et al. (2011) found these qualities are also characteristics of the work of successful principals who develop academic optimism among their staff by cultivating a culture that enables and encourages problem solving, rather than punishing their staff for failures.

Nanus (as referenced in Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1993) presented the following five characteristics as necessary for visions that are more likely to lead to success:

- attracts commitment and energizes people;
- creates meaning in workers' lives;
- establishes a standard of excellence;
- bridges the present to the future; and
- transcends the status quo. (p. 11)

Student achievement can be significantly influenced when a school’s principal (a) creates a vision which establishes high expectations for student learning; (b) ensures attainable and measureable common goals that will facilitate attainment of the vision are set; and (c) makes certain all of the work taking place within the organization has as its focus and purpose the attainment of the vision and goals (Johnson, 2008; Smith, 2008; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008; Williams, 2009). A clearly articulated vision has been shown to correlate with increased “job satisfaction, motivation, commitment, loyalty, clarity about the organization’s values, pride in the organization, and organizational productivity” (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 124).

***Category II: Developing People (Ability).*** Most of what individual schools are is directly related to the work of its people. Effective leaders assume this and strive to develop the human resources in their schools. Intellectual stimulation, individualized support, and modeling appropriate values and practices are the three tasks Leithwood et al. (2004) associates with this category of effective leadership practices.

Marzano et al. (2005) defines intellectual stimulation as “the extent to which the school leader ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices regarding effective schools and makes discussions of those theories and practices a regular aspect of the school’s culture” (p. 52). In their 2005 meta-analysis defining effective leadership behaviors, Marzano et al. (2005) noted the following behaviors as components of intellectual stimulation:

- Continually exposing staff to cutting-edge research and theory on effective schooling;
- Keeping informed about current research and theory on effective schooling; and
- Fostering systematic discussion regarding current research and theory on effective schooling. (p. 52)

Finding ways to ensure the people within the organization have a strong base of knowledge and skills matched to the job they are expected to perform is an essential task for the effective leader. Building capacity in an organization’s people not only includes increasing their knowledge and skills but also includes nurturing their ability to apply those skills in new and challenging circumstances. Socio-psychology theories (Bandura, 1986) maintain that individuals can be motivated to pursue completion of tasks and goals which are compelling and challenging but only when they believe themselves capable of attaining them. Believing themselves skilled and capable is essential to the development of both individual and group efficacy. Individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy regard challenges as tasks to be mastered are usually more deeply interested in and committed to the activities in which they participate, and persist through and recover when setbacks and disappointments occur. Those with less developed self-efficacy are more likely to avoid tasks which are challenging and beyond their capabilities. They dwell more on personal feelings and negative outcomes and quickly lose confidence in their personal abilities when challenged.

***Category III: Redesigning the Organization (Setting).*** “All organizations are perfectly designed to achieve the results they are getting ... True organizational change begins by looking

within and being open to the possibility of changing how we see ourselves, our working relationships, and the world in which we operate” (Senske, as quoted in Ruebling, 2007, p. 90). If a leader expects his organization to produce acceptable results, he must take a thorough and critical look at the design of the organization for which he is responsible and make structural changes which will maximize the environment and its workings to ensure the motivation and skills of his workers are maximized. In Leithwood et al.’s (2004) effective school leadership model this meant building a collaborative work culture, creating organizational structures that support the work, forming relationships with the families of students and the community at large, and connecting the school with its wider environment.

Ineffective schools that do not function properly are often characterized by isolation, privacy, resistance to new ideas, commitment to established routines, and low expectations (Duke, 2010, p. 94). In most cases, a critical component for changing a dysfunctional school is the creation of a collaborative culture which supports the development of a student-centered learning community among its staff (Louis & Kruse, 1995). Studies indicate changing the culture within a school to one that is collaboratively student-achievement oriented is more powerful than making structural changes (West, Ainscow, & Stanford, 2005). Most vital to creating the right cultural change is making sure it focuses on the improvement of teaching practices (Orr, Byrne-Jimenez, MacFarlane, & Brown, 2005), takes into account the diverse perspectives of the community (Kennedy & Barker, 2008), and can motivate all students’ learning (Harris, 2002; Harris, 2003; Lambert, 2006).

The family and home environment of students is arguably the most powerful influence on how well children and adolescents achieve both academically and socially. In an analysis of 40 studies that examined the importance of family to the academic success of their children,

Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) found family work habits, academic guidance and support provided to the children, stimulation to think about issues in the larger environment, provision of adequate health and nutritional conditions, and physical settings in the home conducive to academic work were of significant influence.

Recognizing this, effective school leaders create and support efforts which build relationships with families and encourage collaboration between homes and the school (Goldring & Rallis, 1993). Although active parent and school connections have been shown to have a positive effect on student outcomes, there is evidence to support the notion that parental involvement in their child's school is not as likely to result in improved student performance as is parental engagement in students' learning (Harris, Andrew-Powell & Goodall, 2009).

Successful school leaders strive to increase levels of social support for students and adults both inside and outside the school. Yukl (1994) found such networking to be one of 11 critical management practices, describing it as "socializing informally, developing contacts with people who are a source of information and support, and maintaining contacts through periodic interacting, including visits, telephone calls, correspondence, and attendance at meetings and social events" (p. 69). This practice of networking and collaboration with others outside of their own school was shown to be especially helpful to secondary school professionals (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010). This is applicable to secondary students, as well. When younger, students are more likely to draw most of their support from parents and family. As they reach adolescence and beyond, their network expands to include more relationships with teachers, peers, and other adults. Strengthening and expanding social relationships increase both students' and adults' motivation to learn and perform well by increasing trust, confidence, and psychological safety (Weiner, 1985; Coleman, 1988; Bennis & Schein, 1965). Effective leaders

find avenues to facilitate and support connections between staff, students, families, and resources from the community.

***Category IV: Managing the Instructional Program (Stability)***. Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) identified a fourth category in which four tasks are identified that help to define its meaning and parameters. They are:

- staffing the instructional program;
- monitoring the progress of students and the school's improvement strategies;
- buffering staff from unproductive external demands for attention; and
- allocating resources to foster the school's improvement efforts. (p. 230)

In one study that examined behaviors of effective leadership, Harris and Chapman (2002) studied 10 schools described as facing challenging circumstances where more than 75% of students made lower than average grades and poverty levels were high. A multiple-methods approach was used in which the existing literature concerning effective leadership was included, as were the results of an in-depth case study of these 10 schools. The study found a common pivotal point for the activities the most effective leaders pursue. It was their concern for building the organization's capacity to improve teaching and learning and creating an environment that dismisses the notion that cultural deficits could and will limit the learning of some students. They stressed the quality of teaching and learning within their schools and focused on student attainment and achievement.

In 2010 Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi conceived and tested another approach to how leadership influences learning in schools. This more in-depth, detailed study and its findings was a sequel to his earlier findings (Leithwood et al., 2004) and reported in *Testing a Conception of How School Leadership Influences Student Learning* (Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). Since previous research (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003) showed principals' influence over student learning levels was mostly indirect, this

new study sought to determine how this influence could be most effectively realized through indirect means. The purpose for this study was to search “for the most powerful mediators of leadership influence on students” (p. 672).

Drawing on evidence from previous studies, four distinctive “paths along which leadership influence flows to improve student learning” (p. 673) were identified: rational, emotions, organizational, and family paths. For each path, different sets of variables that could directly impact students’ learning and experiences were determined. By selecting and improving the status of certain variables, school leaders could improve the quality of students’ school and classroom experiences and thus increase the achievement in their schools. To determine which of these variables would effectively “mediate” each principal’s leadership influence each would have to know and consider his local context and have knowledge of relevant research.

The four paths Leithwood identified were:

1. Rational path – understanding learning, teaching, and curriculum;
2. Emotional path – developing relationships and trust within the organization;
3. Organizational path – manipulating the structure, policies and procedures of our schools;  
and,
4. Family path – recognizing and increasing parental engagement.

In completing his study which included over 1400 teachers, Leithwood and his colleagues (2010) concluded that variables included within these four pathways explained 43 percent of the differences in student learning. Although his research showed leadership to have its greatest impact on variables in the Organizational Path, this path was found to have little to no influence on student learning and achievement. Leadership had the lowest impact on variables in

the Family Path, yet evidence shows working on and enriching variables in this path make the greatest difference in gains in student achievement.

**Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003).** In a meta-analysis conducted by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) of 69 principal leadership studies that involved 2,802 principals, 1.1 million students and 14,000 teachers, it was shown as leadership improved in a school, so did its students' performances. Of the 21 leadership responsibilities and associated practices isolated as having a positive correlation to improved achievement, further analysis showed an average effect size of  $r = .25$  (Marzano, McNulty, & Waters, 2005). This study concluded, for every standard deviation in principal improvement, there was a corresponding 10 percentile increase in student achievement and learning. Each responsibility identified in the study was analyzed to determine its specific correlation to student achievement. The conclusions of this study expanded upon the aforementioned qualitative work by Cotton (2003) and increased the credibility of many of her findings by using quantitative data to analyze principals' leadership activities. These 21 responsibilities and the correlation of each to student achievement are shown in Table 2.4.



Table 2.4

*McREL's Leadership Responsibilities and Correlations to Student Academic Achievement*

Responsibility	The extent to which the principal....	Average r
1. Situational awareness	Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems.	.33
2. Flexibility	Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent.	.28
3. Discipline	Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus.	.27
4. Monitoring/evaluation	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning.	.27
5. Outreach	Is an advocate and a spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders.	.27
6. Change agent	Is willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo.	.25
7. Culture	Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation.	.25
8. Input	Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies.	.25
9. Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.	.25
10. Order	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines.	.25
11. Resources	Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs.	.25
12. Contingent rewards	Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments.	.24
13. Focus	Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention.	.24

14. Intellectual stimulation	Ensures that faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture.	.24
15. Communication	Establishes strong lines of communication with and among teachers and students.	.23
16. Ideals/beliefs	Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling.	.22
17. Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment	Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.	.20
18. Optimizer	Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations.	.20
19. Visibility	Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students.	.20
20. Affirmation	Recognizes and celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges failures.	.19
21. Relationships	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff.	.18

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Adapted from: Marzano, R., Waters, T., & McNulty, A. (2005). *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA. 42-43.

Not all schools included in the study where strong leaders were identified were successful in attaining high student achievement. This “differential impact of leadership” the researchers reasoned could be attributed to (a) a principal’s focusing on practices that are more likely to positively impact the general operation of the school than to influence student achievement; (b) their focus on particular classrooms and/or practices that were less likely to have a positive impact; and (c) their lack of sufficient understanding of the impact of changes on stakeholders and their need to adjust their own leadership behaviors accordingly. From this they concluded

some changes can have greater ramifications than others for stakeholders and the school organization. Waters et al. (2003, p. 7) brought attention to this differentiation in order or magnitude of various changes by referring to them as first-order or second-order changes. Table 2.5 defines and illustrates the differences in first-order and second-order change.

Table 2.5

*McRel's Characteristics of First and Second Order Changes*

First-order Change	Second-order Change
When change is viewed as:	When change is viewed as:
An extension of the past	A break with the past
Within existing paradigms	Outside of existing paradigms
Consistent with prevailing values and norms	Conflicted with prevailing values and norms
Focused	Emergent
Bounded	Unbounded
Incremental	Complex
Linear	Nonlinear
Marginal	A disturbance to every element of a system
Implemented with existing knowledge and skills	Requires new knowledge and skills
Problem- and solution-oriented	Neither problem- nor solution-oriented
Implemented by experts	Implemented by stakeholders

Adapted from: Waters, T., & Cameron, G. (2007). *The Balanced Leadership Framework: Connecting Vision with Action*. Denver, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

Marzano et al. (2005) conducted further studies in which his team looked more extensively at how the behaviors associated with each of the 21 leadership responsibilities identified in their study related to first- and second-order change. He characterized first-order change as incremental change that would look and feel like the logical next step one might expect to be taken. Second-order changes were those defined as “dramatic departures from the expected, both in defining a given problem and in finding a solution” (p. 66).

Marzano et al. (2005) concluded that all 21 responsibilities might be associated with effecting first-order changes. Additionally, it was determined 11 of the responsibilities were found to be associated with second-order change. Seven were positively correlated with school improvement. These were:

- Change Agent;
- Flexibility;
- Ideals and Beliefs;
- Intellectual Stimulation;
- Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment;
- Monitoring and Evaluation; and
- Optimizer

Four responsibilities were negatively correlated with second-order change. These four were:

- Culture;
- Communication;
- Order; and
- Input

This may be attributed to how second-order change challenges the status quo, causing staff within the organization to experience discomfort and uncertainty. They may have a sense their world has become disordered, communication is broken, leadership is not as accessible as before, and their feelings of well-being and having a voice in the decision-making process have lessened. The implication for principals is not that these four be disregarded and de-emphasized when leading second-order change, but instead, they need special attention and care when carrying out such change (Waters & Cameron, 2007). The 11 responsibilities Marzano et al.

(2005) found to be associated with second-order change are shown and defined in Table 2.6 entitled *McRel's Principal Responsibilities and Their Operational Definitions*.

Table 2.6

*McRel's Principal Responsibilities and Their Operational Definitions*

Principal responsibility	Extension
<b>Responsibilities positively associated with 2<sup>nd</sup> order change</b>	
Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment	The principal is as knowledgeable about the curriculum, instruction, and assessment as the teachers he/she leads.
Optimizer	The principal provides an optimistic and enthusiastic view of what the school is doing and what the school can accomplish.
Intellectual stimulation	The principal fosters intellectual stimulation and keeps teachers engaged in their learning as it relates to research and innovation.
Change agent	The principal challenges school practices that have been in place for a long time and promotes the value of working on the edge of one's competences.
Monitoring and evaluating	The principal must continually monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of all school curricula, instructional practice, and the impact of innovation on student achievement.
Flexibility	The principal is able to adapt leadership style to the demands of the current situation.
Ideals and beliefs	The principal operates from a well-articulated and visible set of ideals and beliefs regarding schooling, teaching, and learning.
<b>Responsibilities negatively associated with 2<sup>nd</sup> order change</b>	
Culture	The principal builds and maintains a culture in which a common language is employed and ideas are shared.
Communication	The principal establishes procedures and routines that show staff and students a sense of order and predictability.
Order	The principal establishes and fosters clear lines of

communication to and from the staff as well as within the staff.

Input

The principal establishes and fosters procedures that ensure that staff members have input into key decisions and policies.

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Adapted from: Marzano, R., Waters, T., and McNulty, R. (2005). *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results*, 41-75. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

From these findings and conclusions one may surmise it is not enough that a principal has knowledge of these responsibilities which are significantly associated with student achievement. He must also have a thorough understanding of why each responsibility is important (experiential knowledge), when it is best done (contextual knowledge), what it is he must do (declarative knowledge) at each step of the way, and how he can most effectively carry out the responsibility (procedural knowledge) (Waters & Cameron, 2007).

**Gilmore (2009).** A study by Gilmore (2009) employed a correlational research design to examine how principal leadership effected student achievement. Using the results of the 2007 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, this study sought to ascertain whether particular practices could be used to create a profile of a principal whose leadership positively influenced student achievement. Over 900 elementary principals were surveyed and the results analyzed. Factors positively correlated to increased student achievement were those reflecting continuous monitoring of how curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices were carried out and whether they resulted in positive outcomes within their schools. Other principal practices correlated positively to student achievement were those which protected teachers from interruptions, including both internal and external distractions of their time. A small negative correlation was found between practices related to situational awareness and higher student achievement. These practices were identified as “the principal’s awareness of the relationships



among the staff; the principal's ability to accurately predict potential problems; [and] the principal's ability to use his/her knowledge of the school to address problem areas" (p. 80). This study concludes that these practices may negatively correlate to increased student achievement because of test-related practices (narrowing the curriculum; teaching to the test; decrease in higher-order thinking tasks) that have been shown to decrease performance on high stakes state assessments.

**Reeves (2000, 2003).** Reeves (2000, 2003) has completed extensive research seeking to identify variables which lead to school improvement. In "The Learning Leader" (2009), the variables he ultimately identified that contributed more rigor and equity in educational opportunities and thus improved student achievement, were identified and discussed in-depth. He found shared leadership was a critical element for schools to improve. He identified the most effective leaders as those who cultivated collaborative work environments in which leadership was distributed among the members of the organization, clear goals were established, and all members were expected to carry out activities supporting teaching and learning. His study showed there were essential leadership skills that were crucial for school improvement: vision, reflection, human relationships, systematic interactions, collaboration, analytic and communication skills, and worthy character traits (Reeves, 2009). Successful leaders were also able to recognize and make the most of the strengths and talents of individuals within the organization in a way that balanced and supplemented their own skills and characteristics, thus creating strong teaching and learning teams. Bulach et al. (2011) supported Reeves' (2009) earlier findings by identifying five leadership dimensions that, when carried out by teams carefully selected and orchestrated by the principal, will lead to significantly greater gains in students' learning. The dimensions identified were: 1) focusing on the learning; 2) working

collaboratively; 3) analyzing results; 4) sharing and providing support to one another; and, 5) aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

**The Wallace Foundation (2013).** The Wallace Foundation has supported and conducted research over the last two decades to determine whether and how leadership in schools can contribute to improved student achievement in our nation's schools. Of particular note, their efforts firmly validated an empirical link between increased student achievement and school leadership (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). Effective leaders who were responsible for establishing an organization committed to setting high standards and insuring success for all of its students was key to maximizing the potential of all its students and closing the achievement gap between advantaged and less advantaged students. The research literature over the last 20 years clearly has supported the notion that when a principal set high expectations by establishing clearly and publically stated high standards and rigorous learning goals, the achievement gap decreased and the overall achievement of all students improved (Portin, 2004).

The Wallace Foundation's work (2013) identified 5 key tasks or responsibilities a school leader must implement to establish high standards and rigorous learning goals. They are:

1. "Shaping a vision of academic success for all students" (p. 7)
2. "Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail" (p. 6)
3. "Cultivating leadership in others" (p. 9) so that teachers and other adults assume their parts in realizing the school vision. They make good use of all of the knowledge and skills of their entire staff, and encourage them to assume leadership tasks and functions.

4. “Improving instruction” (p 11) to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn to their utmost by focusing intently and precisely on the quality of instruction in their schools by having conversations about instructional methods and strategies with teams and individual teachers. In secondary schools they focus more on instructional strategies than they do on content.

5. “Managing people, data and processes” (p. 14) to foster school improvement. Effective principals hire well, retain the high performers, and give their teachers the support they need to flourish.

Because each of the 5 responsibilities is intertwined and codependent with the others in their implementation, The Wallace Foundation (2013) noted all 5 must be implemented at the same time to bring the most benefit to the school and its students.

**Additional Studies.** By examining the performance of over 7000 practicing principals in Texas, a 2013 study (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin) once again looked to quantify the difference between effective and ineffective principals. After adjusting for individual student and school characteristics, they were able to measure how average gains in achievement varied between principals. The results showed that a decidedly successful principal raises the achievement of an average student in their school by 2 to 7 months in a single school year. Ineffective principals were shown to lower students’ achievement on average by the approximately the same amount except in those students who had a highly effective teacher. In these cases, the negative impact of a poor principal was somewhat mitigated. Specific behaviors the effective principals used to gain success were not examined in this study. Other key discoveries of this study were:

- Less-effective teachers are more likely to leave schools run by highly effective principals.
- Good principals are likely to make more personnel changes in grade levels where students are under-performing, supporting the belief that “improvement in teacher

effectiveness provides an important channel through which principals can raise the quality of education.”

- Particularly in high-poverty schools, the most-effective and least-effective principals tend to leave schools, whereas principals of average ability tend to stay put.
- A substantial share of the ineffective principals in high-poverty schools tends to move on to take principal positions in other schools and districts, rather than leave the profession. (Riddell, 2012, p. 2)

Researchers Valentine and Prater (2011) surveyed principals and teachers in 113 public high schools in Missouri. In each case, the principal had been in his position for three years or more. Each principal self-rated and was rated by their teachers on nine factors of principal leadership. Three factors were managerial in nature and six were adapted from the transformational leadership factors in Jantzi and Leithwood’s (1996) Principal Leadership Questionnaire. Results of the MAP (Missouri Assessment Program) test were used to measure levels of student achievement in each school. Table 2.7 lists *Valentine’s and Prater’s Nine Factors of Principal Leadership* and provides a description of each.

Table 2.7

*Valentine's and Prater's Nine Factors of Principal Leadership*

Factor	Description
Interactive Processes	Organizes tasks and personnel for the day-to-day management of the school, including rules, procedures, and discipline
Instructional improvement	Influences instruction through a command of the knowledge base, effective supervision, and a commitment to quality instruction
Curricular improvement	Influences curriculum by implementing an articulated, outcome-based curriculum by diagnosing student needs and conducting regular systematic program reviews
Developing vision	Develops, articulates, and inspires others with his vision of the future
Providing a model	Exhibits behaviors that set an example for staff members to follow, consistent with the values the leader supports
Fostering group goals	Fosters the development and implementation of a set of group goals that transcend individual ambitions
Providing individualized support	Shows respect for school staff members and concern about their personal feelings and needs
Intellectual stimulation	Challenges school staff members to reexamine some of the assumptions about their work and rethink how it can be performed
Performance expectations	Demonstrates expectations for excellence, quality, and high performance on the part of the school staff

Adapted from: Valentine, J., and Prater, M. (2011). *Instructional, Transformational, and Managerial Leadership and Student Achievement: High School Principals Make a Difference*. University of Missouri, Columbia, MO.

Results from findings in this study showed principal leader behaviors in schools with high achievement differed significantly from that of principals in low achieving schools. This was true to some degree of significance for each of the nine variables considered in the study. Five of them were found to influence student outcomes to a greater degree. These were:

instructional improvement, curricular improvement, identifying a vision, providing a model, and fostering group goals.

Results also showed significant relationships among the nine variables, leading these researchers to conclude “they form an overall valid conceptual model of effective principal leadership” (Valentine & Prater, 2011, p. 21). Additionally this study also showed principals with higher education and training levels were found in the schools with higher achievement levels. While the variable of low socioeconomic status (SES) was found to influence achievement negatively, analysis of the data showed principal leadership can ameliorate some of this negative impact.

In an exploratory dissertation study of 16 elementary, middle, and schools inside a Florida school district of 93,000 students, Hardman (2011), determined increased school capacity and improved test scores resulted when principals implemented actions that increased teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy decreased when teachers were stressed, insecure, and fearful. Actions taken by successful principals to increase efficacy included taking time and action to insure accountability expectations were relayed to teachers, not just as mandates from outside the system, but collaboratively from inside. This included time for answering questions and discussing practical and sensible ways they might respond, including how scarce resources might best be allocated. Teachers perceived these actions as supportive of them and the school culture, causing them to be more willing to take measures to support new mandates designed to improve achievement scores.

A second finding in the Hardman (2011) study was that in improved schools, principals provided for intellectual stimulation through appropriate questioning of belief systems and assumptions. In turn, in more successful schools teachers were enabled and encouraged to find

new solutions to old problems and to use their own talents to solve them. The most effective principals delegated responsibilities to the teachers and frequently monitored their activities for compliance by having them reflect on classroom experiences. From these reflections and as determined by outcomes, professional development was prescribed and provided.

Another finding in Hardman's (2011) study was one that supports Fullan's (2001) claim that principals who positively influence change have a vision and consistently model energy, enthusiasm, and hope. More effective principals are day-to-day role models for active student engagement while less effective principals model more apathetic behaviors.

In a quantitative study of 75 public high schools in Texas, Schindler (2012) collected responses from teachers and principals that measured their perception of which and how much certain leadership behaviors influenced improvements in student achievement. Using the 21 instructional leadership behaviors identified in the research-based findings of Waters et al. (2003), he developed and used the School Leadership Behaviors Survey (SLBS) for collecting data.

His results were inconsistent with those of Waters et al. (2003), indicating positive relationships between student academic achievement and principals' perceptions of flexibility, input, and outreach leadership. When principals adapted their leadership behaviors to specific needs and current situations of the school (flexibility), involved teachers in the processes and decision making of the school (input), served as an advocate to the school and stakeholders (outreach), student achievement increased (Marzano et al., 2005; Waters et al., 2003).

Teachers surveyed in this study showed two of Waters et al. (2003) 21 leadership behaviors being identified as positively correlated to increased student achievement. When teachers' perceived principals communicated and operated from strong ideals and beliefs about

schooling (ideals/beliefs) and established a set of standard operating procedures and routines (order), student achievement increased. Notable instructional leadership behaviors that were not perceived by either group to relate to student achievement were: (a) knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (b) involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and (c) monitors/evaluates. Differences at the secondary level, such as teacher autonomy, professionalism, and subject matter expertise may explain why principals and teachers do not perceive these to be behaviors principals at the secondary level would practice. At most high school sites studied these instructional leadership responsibilities were spread among various personnel to include assistant principal, departmental chairpersons, and principals.

A study conducted by Horng, Klasik, and Loeb (2009) validates to some extent the findings that Schindler's study (2012) would later reveal. They examined the relationship between principal behaviors and student achievement by looking at how principals in high and low performing schools spent their time. This study showed principals' time spent on organizational management activities had a significant and positive relationship on both student performance (grades) and student gains (state tests) while those related to day-to-day instruction (classroom observations) and instructional programs (professional development) did not. They concluded "a single-minded focus on principals as instructional leaders operationalized through direct contact with teachers (e.g., classroom visits) may be detrimental if it forsakes the important role of principals as organizational leaders" (p. 26). Furthermore, they concluded successful, effective managers cultivate the organizational structures for improved instruction "more than they spend time in classrooms or coaching teachers" (Horng & Loeb, 2010, p.67). This includes "hiring and supporting staff, allocating budgets and resources, and maintaining positive working and learning environments" (p. 67).



Using the twenty-one leadership responsibilities Marzano et al. (2005) identified in the book, *School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results*, Carmon (2009) conducted a comparative study to determine the difference an effective principal might make in increasing student achievement in schools. She examined the leadership in nine North Carolina high school, five of which were classified as “Beating the Odds” (BTO) schools and four as “Low-Performing” (LP).

The responsibilities were referred to as “practices” in this study. Using a conceptual framework developed by the researcher, data were collected to reflect the principals’ experience with the practices in each high school. Once collection and analysis of this data were completed, it was compared to student achievement data for each high school. The findings in Carmon’s study show the differences in how leadership is practiced in the schools with higher and lower academic achievement levels. Some of the most notable differences are:

1. Teachers’ instructional planning and delivery is cooperative, collaborative, student-centered and effective. (BTO)
2. Teachers’ instructional planning and delivery is teacher-centered and ineffective. (LP)
3. Teacher turnover is decreased by a positive and inclusive culture. (BTO)
4. Teacher turnover is increased by a negative and non-inclusive culture. (LP)
5. Teacher recruitment is significantly easier because of a supportive and collaborative environment. (BTO)
6. Teacher recruitment is more challenging because of negative school environment realities and perceptions. (LP)
7. Teachers, students, principals and parents celebrate successes and acknowledge failures through a school theme that permeates the school’s culture and increases students’ positive attitude toward learning. (BTO)
8. Teachers, students, principals and parents try to celebrate successes and try to utilize failures to revitalize students’ and teachers’ positive attitudes toward learning, but the latter has stunted the school’s culture. (LP)
9. The percentage of students’ proficient is higher probably because of the principal’s stronger use of the twenty-one leadership practices. (BTO)
10. The percentage of students’ proficient is lower because of the principal’s weaker use of the twenty-one leadership practices which are affected by internal and external challenges (LP). (p. 153)

In a 2012 study, Brown surveyed the principals of schools across the nation identified as Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence. The leaders of each were honored by the US Department of Education for making significant levels of progress in achievement, particularly as it related to closing the achievement gap among minority and disadvantaged youth. The purpose of Brown's study was to explore the relationship between leadership practices identified in the literature as effective and the use of those practices by this set of school leaders.

Using a survey created and validated by Leithwood and Strauss (2009) and a questionnaire entitled *The Nurturing School Inventory* (Green, 2000), the researcher sought to analyze the relationship between the strategies used by the school leader, the changes in the beliefs and practices of teachers, and the changes in students' perceptions of themselves and others.

The results of Brown's study affirmed the importance of leadership, collaboration, professional development, school organization, data analysis, student interventions, and curriculum alignment as factors contributing the success of these Blue Ribbon Schools. Leadership, defined in the study as the deliberate practices, processes and procedures the leader implements in the school, was determined to be the most influential factor among all considered in this study and had the most significant impact on the transformation of this set of schools.

Of all the leadership practices surveyed, the processes and activities related to monitoring students' learning and using the results to plan individualized instruction were shown to be the highest determinate factors of all the practices leading to school transformations. Analysis of this same data to determine and drive the individualized professional development needs of individuals or like groups of staff was the second highest factor identified by these principals as important to positively influencing student achievement.

In a 2012 study entitled *Closing the Achievement Gap: A Study of Leadership Behaviors of Principals at Title I Distinguished Schools*, Maynard surveyed the self-perceptions of principals and teachers in nine schools in Georgia. Six of the schools were identified as Title I Distinguished Schools and three as Non-Distinguished Schools. This quantitative study focused on five supervisory behaviors or domains: human relations, trust/decision-making, instructional leadership, conflict, and control. The purpose was to determine whether there were significant differences between the distinguished and the non-distinguished schools in whether these behaviors were implemented.

Maynard (2012) had predicted that principals of Title I distinguished schools would have higher mean scores in each of the five domains. However, of the five domains surveyed, the domain of human relations was the only one to show a statistically significant difference between principal behaviors in distinguished and non-distinguished schools. Surprisingly, teachers in non-distinguished schools perceived their principals as scoring more favorably in human relations behaviors than did the teachers at distinguished schools. Principals of distinguished schools were identified as giving less positive reinforcement and fewer compliments, having less personal interactions, and being less caring than were their non-distinguished counterparts.

Although not statistically significant, the differences in mean scores of teachers' perceptions of principals' behaviors in distinguished and non-distinguished schools was notable in the remaining domains. Non-distinguished schools' principals were also perceived as demonstrating more positive behaviors in the domains of instructional leadership and conflict. Teachers in non-distinguished Title I schools saw their principals as more knowledgeable about instruction and less responsible for causing conflict.

Maynard (2012) generalized her findings by saying distinguished schools' principals are perceived as tougher or having higher expectations for their faculty than the principals who lead non-distinguished schools. She concluded, "This may be the reason that these schools are continuously making progress in student achievement. These principals may hold their teachers more accountable and have higher expectations" (p. 69).

### **Summary**

This chapter reviews literature that supports the importance of leadership in producing schools which are academically successful. It summarizes the work of several researchers from the last half century and defines the behaviors and practices most strongly associated with the principals leading these schools. Similar and often overlapping lists of effective behaviors and practices have been revealed by these and numerous other studies, adding to the validity of those having parallel or similar findings.

Unquestionably, the research literature from the last three or more decades is replete with well-studied and established lists of what makes for effective principals and school leaders. Presumably, training programs for principals at colleges and universities ensure their trainees leave their programs with the knowledge of what the research shows in regard to what principals must do to produce adequate student achievement in their schools. Principal candidates cannot be certified in the state of Arkansas as principals until they can establish they possess the requisite knowledge to practice effectively. However, there are growing numbers of schools in Arkansas that are not achieving adequately and thus are categorized as being in need of school improvement. While some are able to make the changes necessary to escape school improvement designation, this is rarely accomplished at the secondary school level.

As a currently practicing school leader, my colleagues and I have taken special notice of the few secondary schools that have improved enough to move from school improvement status to meeting standards. Each time I have seen this, it has lead me to wonder how the leaders in these successful secondary schools created the conditions and carried out the actions which they and their staff members believe brought them success and provided the inspiration for this study.

Other researchers point out a need for conducting studies that define and describe how successful principals have come to be so. After considering dozens of qualitative and quantitative studies in their analysis and reporting their findings, Leithwood et al. (2010) concluded there was little need to add to the large body that already validated existing leadership models or to conduct research to create new ones. Instead, Leithwood and his colleagues stated new research should be conducted that would look into how school leaders exercise their influence within the school setting in order to improve student outcomes. This practical question of *how* has and is expressed by both researchers and practitioners frequently. Hallinger and Heck (1996) conveyed research is also urgently needed which unpacks, more specifically, how successful leaders create the conditions in their schools which promote student learning. Additionally, the need for conducting further studies of successful principals goes beyond exploring their use of a particular leadership model is recommended in numerous dissertations completed in the last decade (Almeida, 2005; Carmon, 2009; Chamberlain, 2010; Eldredge, 2002).

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

#### **Organization of the Chapter**

In this chapter, the overarching purpose for and the conceptual framework of this study are given. The research questions the study sought to answer are stated. An explanation is given of how the three schools to be studied were selected. Instruments and procedures utilized for data collection are described and justified. Methods used to organize and analyze the data that were collected are presented. How the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the study were established is acknowledged.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose for this qualitative multiple case study was to identify and describe the responsibilities, behaviors, and processes the principals in three Arkansas secondary schools acted on to exercise their influence within their school settings and improve student outcomes. Each of the schools in which the study was conducted are schools that have demonstrated improved student outcomes by rising from school improvement status to a status of meeting standards as determined by the ACTAAP.

Many of Arkansas' public secondary schools are classified by the state as being in various stages of school improvement. This is because large numbers of their students are not scoring proficiently on state assessments in math and literacy. Once designated as being in school improvement, few secondary schools have been successful in making the gains necessary to meet state standards and thus, they remain on the school improvement list. For each year they remain in school improvement, various rules of operations and sanctions are added, presumably for the purpose of supporting or forcing improvements.

For a school to be removed from improvement status, it must make academic gains in one of two ways for two consecutive years. The first is to meet established adequate yearly progress goals and the second, for those who fall short of this, is to reach safe harbor. To attain safe harbor status means decreasing by 10% from the year before the students who score below proficient on the state's assessment. Most of the schools in Arkansas that have succeeded in accomplishing this are elementary schools. Of the few secondary schools that have been removed from the school improvement list, three were chosen to participate in this study.

This qualitative multiple case study inquiry was undertaken to determine which responsibilities, behaviors, and processes exhibited by each principal were believed by themselves and members of their staff to have contributed to each school's improved status. With particular focus on the 11 responsibilities Marzano et al. (2005) found to be associated with second-order change (Chapter Two, Table 2.5), this study of principals in three Arkansas secondary schools examined the responsibilities, behaviors, and processes each used to lead to their schools from school improvement status to meeting standards. I chose to look for evidence of second-order responsibilities in the three schools studied because the results of second-order change is deeper and can change the status quo in a lasting and more substantial way than the principal's activities that inspire first-order change. By first anchoring much what was reported to have occurred in each school to this well-established list, I was then able to accomplish two tasks – to look for principal actions that fell outside of the 11 items on this list and to describe “how” each responsibility was implemented. Through the collection, coding, sorting and categorizing of data from in-depth interviews with the principal and staff, observations of the principal in action, and the examination of documents and other artifacts, I defined and described the means each used in their school to improve student outcomes.

Descriptive data were collected through interviews with the principals and selected staff. Additional data to both expand and verify findings were collected through observations and examination of documents and other artifacts. It is believed that the resultant findings will be a resource for informing the practice of other principals who are struggling to meet standards.

### **Research Questions**

To support the purpose of this inquiry, the following research questions were used to guide this qualitative study:

1. To what leadership responsibilities and behaviors do school principals in three achieving Arkansas secondary schools attribute their success in moving from school improvement status to a school meeting standards?
2. What were the processes these principals implemented within their leadership roles to which they attribute their success?

### **Research Methodology**

Qualitative research is appropriate for describing little understood phenomena, in recognizing and understanding the gap between what is known about theory and practice and what is actually implemented (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002). Exploratory by nature, a qualitative approach allows the researcher to study and analyze human behaviors as they occur in natural, everyday environments (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) while being careful to create as little distraction to the setting as possible (Merriam, 1998b, p. 5). Yin (1994, p. 9) regards the use of case study as appropriate when how or why questions are being asked about a current set of events over which the researcher has little or no control. Simply put, a qualitative study is appropriate for use when the research questions start with how or what (Creswell, 1998).



A qualitative case study is an “investigation defined by an interest in specific phenomenon within its real-life context” (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998, p. 121). “Case studies are differentiated from other types of qualitative research in that they are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single or bound system” (Smith, 1978, p. 4). The “case” for study may be a phenomenon or a social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community. Conducting such a study on one particular program or case is appropriate when it is typical, unique, experimental, or highly successful (Merriam, 1998a). In Arkansas, secondary schools that have escaped school improvement status and now meet standards status are rare enough to be considered unique.

According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003), “Researchers generally do case studies for one of three purposes: to produce detailed descriptions of a phenomenon, to develop possible explanations of it, or to evaluate the phenomenon” (p. 439). The researcher’s intent is often meant to add “in-depth examples to other information” (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998, p. 155), and is “a particularly useful methodology for addressing problems in which understanding is sought in order to improve practice” (Merriam, 1988, p. 32). Hans Eysenck (1976), who submitted in his early writings that the case study was nothing more than a method of producing anecdotal accounts of an occurrence, later realized “sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases—not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something” (p. 9).

This case study focused on three schools identified as successful in advancing their academic standing from school improvement status to meeting standards. Its purpose was to extend the research findings summarized in the literature review by focusing on why and how

each of these three school's principals was successful in making improvements. It identified and described the responsibilities, behaviors, and processes each principal used to accomplish this.

Data were gathered in each of the three schools included in the study to determine the responsibilities, behaviors, and processes each principal implemented that they and selected staff believed contributed to the school's moving from school improvement status to meeting standards. As the study progressed and these responsibilities were identified, additional data were collected from each principal to determine why they chose to act, what was implemented, and how they carried out their actions. It was hoped that collecting such in-depth examples would add to and deepen the understanding of what, how, and why other secondary principals might implement similar behaviors and practices and thus, increase their own effectiveness.

### **Researcher as Instrument**

“... [T]he researcher is as much a part of the inquiry as the intent of the study and the inquiry process. In fact, *the researcher's thinking* lies at the heart of the inquiry . . .” (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p.24). Because this is true, the researcher becomes the primary research instrument in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Human traits that contribute to their being naturalistic inquirers include them being:

responsive to environmental cues and able to interact with the situation; they have the ability to collect information at multiple levels simultaneously; they are able to perceive situations holistically; they are able to process data as soon as they become available; they can provide immediate feedback and request verification of data; and they can explore atypical or unexpected responses. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 2-4)

Merriam (1998) gives three critical characteristics of a good researcher: “... the researcher must have an enormous tolerance of ambiguity ... [He/she] must be sensitive to the context and all the variables within it ... [and] the qualitative research investigator must also be a good communicator” (pp. 20-23). It is the researcher who sets the stage for the flow of

communication, identifies cues, creates prompts and probes to enrich responses, and most importantly, sets the respondents at ease.

Since the qualitative researcher acts as a “data collection instrument that is sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 1), it was necessary to remain open to new paths and discoveries as they are revealed and focus on the discovery and creation of meaning and descriptions rather than on discovering facts and certainties (Wolcott, 1994). The researcher must be flexible – both reflective and responsive to the people and environment they are studying and willing to adjust and modify their inquiries as new paths are revealed, understanding is deepened, and if and when situations change (Maxwell, 2005).

**Theoretical Sensitivity.** When the researcher acts as the research instrument, both “objectivity and sensitivity” to the research and the data “necessary for making discoveries” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 43) must be maintained. The theoretical sensitivity of the researcher is influenced by the personal qualities they possess which contribute to their understanding of the subtleties in the meaning of the data. It refers to their attributes of having insight, the ability for assigning meaning, the capacity to understand, and the capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 42). The researcher’s theoretical sensitivity is influenced by (a) professional experience, (b) personal experience, (c) personal knowledge of the literature, and (d) analytic rigor.

*Professional experience.* With nearly 38 years of experience as a practitioner in the field of education, I have sought to identify factors that contribute to learning and improvement in schools – first as a teacher working with students and then as an administrator working to improve the performance of teachers I have supervised, which in turn, could improve the

achievement levels of students. While I have come to realize there are many variables that influence how well a school and its students perform academically, I am convinced how a principal leads is perhaps the most critical element in whether a school will succeed in helping its students attain adequate academic success.

*Personal experience.* By nature, I am a person who is always looking to make things better and am certain if one keeps looking and experimenting, better ways to do things can be found. I am not comfortable with the status quo in those cases where outcomes count and are not where we want them to be. Conducting this study was personal for me. My goal in conducting it was to develop a thick, rich description of what the three successful principals in the study did and how they did it so other practitioners might know what it is they need to do to cause positive changes in their organization and thus, increase student achievement.

*Personal knowledge of the literature.* Much of the research literature that examines school leadership and the academic achievement levels of students shows a relationship exists between the two. Many of the studies provide empirical data that measures the effect of leadership on achievement. These and other studies have resulted in lists of behaviors and characteristics of the leaders in successful schools. As a longtime and current practitioner in the field of educational leadership, as I searched the literature for information and expertise which might be of help, what appeared to be missing were adequate details and descriptions about how successful leaders were able to take schools from failing to meeting standards. This gap in the literature and my professional desire to improve my own practice were the impetus for my study.

*Analytic rigor.* In completing a qualitative study, substantial amounts of data that could have multiple meanings are collected at both individual and social levels. It becomes the researcher's challenge to analyze it – to manage the words, language, and meanings implied by

the data and from it to create rich descriptions and understandings of what is being studied (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Dey (1993) has suggested that “we break down data in order to classify it, and the concepts we create or employ in classifying the data, and the connections we make between these concepts, provide the basis of a fresh description” (p. 30). Using coding, the data were broken into bits of information that were then compared for similarities and differences, categorized, and sometimes recategorized with identifying codes (Padgett, 1998; Patton, 2002; Tutty, Rothery, & Grinnel, 1996). “Coding is an iterative, inductive, yet reductive process that organizes data, from which the researcher can then construct themes, essence, descriptions, and theories” (Walker & Myrick, 2006). The data for this study were collected and analyzed in a continual, ongoing process throughout the duration of the study using the constant comparative method.

### **Site and Sample Selection**

Purposive sampling was used to select the three school sites, and thus the principals, for this study. According to Merriam (1988), “purposive sampling is built on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, or gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most” (p. 48). Issac and Michael (1997) assert, “The power lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth, cases from which one can learn most about issues central to the purpose of the study” (p. 169). Patton (2002) maintains similarly, “Information-rich cases are those for which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 169).

The National Office for Research on Measurement and Evaluation Systems (NORMES, 2008), housed at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, is the primary warehousing site for Arkansas’ school assessment data. Through this site, one may access School Performance

Reports for current (2012) and previous years (2003-2011). The first step in choosing cases for study was to examine these reports for years 2003 through 2012 for all secondary schools in Arkansas to determine which secondary schools have been designated as being in school improvement in previous years but are now listed as meeting standards. The second step was to eliminate from this list those schools that changed principals during this time. From those that remained on the list, three sites and their principals were chosen.

The superintendent of each district where the school is located was contacted and informed of the purpose and details of the study. Each superintendent was asked if the district was interested in participating in the study. If so, the principal of the school designated for study was contacted to determine his/her willingness to participate in the study.

### **Research Ethics**

The rules and regulations of the University of Arkansas IRB were honored and followed at all times during this study. To gain and hold the trust and respect of all participants engaged in the study, I maintained a high degree of ethical conduct. From the onset of the study, all participants were fully informed of the nature, purpose, and scope of the study. Each was asked to sign a form to verify informed consent and willing participation. The right to withdraw from the study at any time was made clear to participants. All data collected was kept in a private and secure place at all times. I did not reveal the identity of the sites and the subjects at any time during the study nor will I in the future without express permission from the participants and the superintendent of the school.

### **Instrumentation and Methods for Data Collection**

An important characteristic of case study research is the use of multiple data sources. A single source of data collection is less likely to shed light and as deep an understanding on a

phenomenon than are multiple sources. Using multiple sources assures data credibility (Patton, 1990) and that the findings are worth paying attention to (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The validity and trustworthiness of case study findings are enhanced when data from multiple sources are collected and analyzed through a process called triangulation (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 447). Triangulation is “collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods” (Denzin, 1970, as cited in Maxwell, 2005, p. 75). It raises construct validity in that multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon (Yin, 1994).

Because a “qualitative design is emergent and the researcher usually does not know ahead of time who might be interviewed, all the questions that might be asked, or where to look next unless data are analyzed as they are collected” (Merriam, 1998, p. 155), the following provided a beginning but substantial framework for the data collection that was completed. The need for collecting data from other sources emerged as the study began and continued.

In completing this study, data were collected from three sources at each of the three school sites. These sources were interviews, direct observations, and collection of documents and artifacts. Selection of the informants, events, and materials to be included in the study were chosen for their unique capacity to explain, understand, and yield information that might lead to a deeper understanding of the phenomena under study. All materials gathered during the study were tagged with the date, time, and place from which they were collected and then maintained securely to preserve confidentiality of all involved.

Data collection occurred during the spring semester of the 2013-2014 school year, beginning with the interviews. All data gathered from participant resources were collected with

explicit permission from the participants and in full compliance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines.

**Personnel Interviews.** Face-to-face interviews, considered to be one of the most important sources of case study information (Yin, 2003), were conducted at each of the three sites chosen for the study. Each was recorded electronically. I kept a researcher's journal in which I collected field notes during each encounter to document my thoughts and perceptions and contextual details, such as environmental features and conditions. Care was taken to use methods that would not distract the subjects or detract from the process.

Both structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal and selected staff members. A list of open-ended questions, located in Appendix A, was prepared by the researcher for use during each interview so that predetermined areas of inquiry were addressed by the interviewee. These questions helped ensure that the same basic information was obtained from each subject and that the interviews were kept focused. However, as each question was answered, in keeping with the flexible nature of qualitative research design, the researcher also chose to probe for more information (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). Detail-oriented probes were asked when the researcher became curious and needed other details about what was said. Elaboration probes were utilized to encourage each interviewee to tell the researcher more. When the interviewer was unclear about what the interviewee was talking about or meant by what they said, clarifying probes were posed (Patton, 1990).

Prior to conducting these interviews, each participant was asked to sign an informed consent attesting to voluntary participation in the study. A copy of the informed consent, which complies with the University of Arkansas IRB requirements, is located in Appendix A.



Permission to conduct the study was approved with IRB Project Number 14-01-386 and is located in Appendix B.

***Principal interviews.*** The principal's responsibilities, behaviors, and the processes used in producing notable academic gains in the selected schools were the focus for this study. Therefore, conducting interviews of the principal provided data crucial for completing the study. During the spring of school year 2013-2014, interviews were conducted with each of the principals. In each case, these interviews were held in a private setting such as the principal's office.

Each principal was interviewed on at least two occasions. The first interview began with an introduction that provided the principal with information about the purpose for the study, a general outline of how it would be conducted, and how confidentiality would be maintained. This was followed by a semi-structured interview during which the researcher progressed through the set of open-ended questions found in Appendix A. As each was answered, the researcher also asked probative questions to gain a broader, deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied and reported by the interviewee.

Approximately two weeks later, a second interview was conducted. Its purpose was to ask and seek answers to any questions that remained after the first interview.

***Instructional staff interviews.*** Kreuger (1988,) defined a focus group as a "carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (p. 18). The size of each focus group interviewed in this study remained small enough for the researcher to manage comfortably while allowing sufficient participation by most members (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990). However, each group was large enough to justify group interviewing over individual interviewing to allow substantially

greater coverage of information. Two focus groups of four to six teachers and instructional staff participated in semi-structured interviews at each of the three schools studied.

All instructional staff in the school were asked to volunteer for the pool of participants. Letters describing the purpose for the study, how it was to be carried out, how confidentiality was to be maintained, and specific information about the focus group interview were sent to each. The principal was asked to support and encourage participation. Those who wished to volunteer were asked to respond to me by e-mail. From the pool, two focus groups were chosen for interviews with attention given to choosing a representative sampling of the entire staff.

Questions from the researcher served to set the agenda and guided the discussions (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The order of questions moved from open-ended and general to specific. This funnel approach engaged the attention of members while keeping the focus of the discussion from narrowing too early in the interviews. The questions found in Appendix A guided the interviews and discussions in each group. A single interview with each group was planned but additional interviews were held when an extension or clarification was needed beyond the initial discussion.

**Observations.** Observations are a valuable qualitative research method because they take place in a “natural field setting” and because they give the researcher a “firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, 1998, p. 94). During observations, the researcher took care to neither manipulate nor stimulate other individuals in the setting being visited because qualitative observation is “fundamentally naturalistic in essence: it occurs in the natural context of occurrence, among the actors who would naturally be participating in the interaction, and follows the natural stream of everyday life” (Adler and Adler, 1994, p. 378). Because making repeated observation of a phenomenon can increase the reliability of case study findings

(Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2003), where available and possible, multiple observations of the similar or related events or settings occurred.

The primary individuals targeted for observation in this study were the principals of the three schools being studied. The goal in conducting these observations was to witness and describe the events and interactions in which the principal played a role, particularly those the principal identified as significant to making the changes that led to the school meeting standards. Events and interactions that were observed (but not limited to) were staff and team meetings, student assemblies, and classrooms. Other settings for observations were determined as insights about relevant principal actions and interactions emerged from the interviews and initial observations.

Prior to conducting these observations, each participant was asked to sign an informed consent attesting to his voluntary participation in the study. This form complies with the University of Arkansas IRB requirements.

**Collection of documents and artifacts.** “One of the greatest advantages in using documentary materials is stability. Unlike interviewing and observation, the presence of an investigator does not alter what is being studied. Documentary data are ‘objective’ sources of data compared to other sources” (Merriam, 1998, p. 126).

The collection and study of documents and artifacts not only provided valuable information about the site, subjects, and phenomena being studied but also inspired the researcher with new and relevant thoughts and questions worthy of exploration through more direct observations and interviewing (Merriam, 1998). Thus, analysis of the documents and artifacts collected helped corroborate or refute findings collected during the interviews and from observations and, in some cases, they revealed additional findings of importance.

Documents and artifacts collected and analyzed for this study generally fell into one of three categories: (a) school newsletters, yearbooks, and student newspapers; (b) school plans including the Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (ACSIP), district reports, grant proposals, meeting agendas, achievement data, professional development calendars and training materials, and program evaluations; and (c) researcher's notes and all correspondence between the researcher and the school.

During a qualitative research study, vast amounts of raw data are collected and must be organized and managed appropriately and effectively to facilitate analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Throughout this study, data collected during interviews, observations, and collection of documents and artifacts were organized and cataloged in a manner that made it more accessible and easily retrieved. It was labeled and logged according to the dates, times, names, and places from which it was gathered, thus creating a "chain of evidence" (Yin, 1994). All evidence was stored in a secure area and available only to the researcher to protect the confidentiality of all involved.

### **Data Analysis**

The focus for this qualitative multiple case study was to identify and describe the responsibilities, behaviors, and processes the principal of each school used to successfully effect academic improvement. The data collected for this study came from transcribed interviews, handwritten field notes, observations, and examination of documents and artifacts. Additionally, from the beginning of data collection, a reflective research journal in which to keep outlines, summaries, reflective memos, and notes was maintained.

Patton (2003) recommends that each case in the study should stand alone and be reported as a unique, holistic entity that represents an "idiosyncratic manifestation of the evaluation

phenomenon of interest” (p. 11). Because “the qualitative analyst’s first and foremost responsibility consists of doing justice to each individual case” (Patton, 2003, p. 11) the data collected from each school was initially analyzed as a separate and specific case.

Subsequently, a cross-case analysis, grounded in the individual case studies, was conducted. This analysis was used to detect cross-case patterns with each being identified by citations and illustrations from the individual case studies. Cross-case comparisons may be of value in revealing the processes and outcomes that are similar in each case and those that are different, thus shedding light on how “they are qualified by local conditions, and thus develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 172).

While principals of different schools were studied, each had achieved a rare accomplishment of a standard goal – rising from school improvement status to meeting state academic standards. From the findings of this study, I sought to draw conclusions regarding if, how, and why the leadership practices of each principal might be linked to the increase in student achievement. Comparison of the three schools and their principals allowed me to try and determine if and how varying conditions, contexts, and demographics may have impacted their courses of action and outcomes.

While not seeking to reduce data to statistical evidence, qualitative data nevertheless requires systematic analysis. Its goal is to make sense of and draw meaning from the information collected through multiple sources throughout the study. This is accomplished by consolidating, reducing, and interpreting it into categories, patterns, and themes. It most often involves an iterative, spiraling, or cyclical process that proceeds from general to more specific observations (Creswell, 1998) where each source of data can be viewed as a single piece of the

puzzle that when converged with other pieces results in a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study. Patton (2002) described data analysis and interpretation as “making sense out of what people have said, looking for patterns, putting together what is said in one place with what is said in another place, and integrating what different people have said” (p. 380).

**Methods of analysis.** “Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. No formula exists for that transformation. Guidance yes. But no recipe. . . the final destination remains unique for each inquirer, known only when – and if - arrived at” (Patton, 2002, p. 432).

The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), considered by many to be suited to all qualitative research (Merriam, 1998), was used in this study to transform data into findings. This means that the data from all sources was constantly compared and themes developed in an overlapping and cyclical process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

While some advise that data analysis should occur soon after each data collection event, Merriam (1998) asserted that “the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it *simultaneously* with data collection” (p. 162). This aligns with Stake’s (1994) statements regarding the intrinsically reflective nature of qualitative research. He wrote, “in being ever reflective, the researcher is committed to pondering the impressions, deliberating recollections and records....[D]ata [is] sometimes precoded but continuously interpreted, on first sighting and again and again” (p. 242).

Yin (1994) stated that “data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of a study” (p. 102). The data collected during this qualitative study was analyzed using the four-step process offered by Creswell (1998). The steps are: (a) reading the data and identifying major themes, (b) examining

the data to provide detailed descriptions, (c) categorizing data into themes, and (d) interpreting data into general conclusions.

Soon after each set of interview data were collected and transcribed, the transcript and any field notes taken were read and reread until the researcher was immersed in and intimately familiar with them. Through inductive analysis, the salient points and recurring language was used to reveal and develop meaningful patterns, themes, and categories (Patton, 2002). These themes and categories revealed themselves as internally consistent or convergent, yet distinct or externally divergent from one another (Guba, 1978). A coding scheme to formally represent these categories and themes was developed and used to mark the text data. As coding occurred, new patterns and themes were revealed, sometimes requiring an alteration in the original system. The themes and categories were organized by their relevance in answering the research questions posed by this study. Care was taken to ensure that this is not a forced fit, causing the questions to influence what the data were saying. Thus, any outliers were recognized and valued for the story they told.

A researcher's journal of my thinking and reflections was kept during the analysis and interpretation phase of this study. Such a practice is recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2006) who advise that the researcher keep notes and reflective memos to record thoughts, insights, and questions that may occur to her during this phase. Knight (2002) advised that such journal writing was "part of the research process" (p. 1) and should be intertwined continually with the researcher's thinking.

**Verification.** In qualitative research, verification strategies are used to ensure that the researcher's investigative actions during the course of the study are rigorous enough to establish reliability and validity in the mind of the study's consumer (Creswell, 1998; Kvale, 1989).

Creswell defines verification as “a process that occurs throughout data collection, analysis, and report writing” (p. 194). Creswell and Miller (2000) outlined eight procedures that may be used for verification: (a) triangulation; (b) prolonged engagement; (c) development of rich, thick descriptions; (d) negative case analysis; (e) acknowledgement of bias; (f) peer review; (g) member checking; and (h) external audits (pp. 126-129).

Triangulation is using more than one source of data to cross-verify data from multiple sources. Triangulation of data helps overcome weakness or intrinsic biases and problems that may come from using only a single source of information, thus increasing the validation of findings. Prolonged engagement means collecting data during sustained contact with people in the settings where they normally spend their time. This may cause the subjects to be more comfortable and trusting of the researcher, thus minimizing the likelihood that distortions in the setting and environment will occur because the researcher is present.

The development of rich, thick descriptions refers to the researcher’s description of the phenomenon and data collected. Describing it in adequate detail may increase the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people. Negative case analysis means recognizing and discussing elements of the data that do not support or appear to conflict with patterns or explanations that are emerging from the data analysis.

Acknowledgement of bias recognizes that qualitative researchers may be susceptible to personal bias and concedes this by listing variables that may influence the researcher in data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The researcher may lessen the effects of design bias by acknowledging the weaknesses of the research study and thus, add credibility to the study.

Peer review is the evaluation of a research study by other persons with knowledge and expertise in the same field to insure that the quality of work and performance of the researcher



and maintained and enhanced. Member checking is a procedure used by qualitative researchers when respondents are asked to check for accuracy and authenticity the data collected and recorded from them or the researcher's interpretation of the data.

An external audit occurs when a researcher outside of study examines the process and the product of another's research study to evaluate the study's accuracy and whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data. It is imperative that a researcher maintains and reports an audit trail of methodology and analytical decisions as the study is carried out to establish the conformability of the research (Rice & Ezzy, 2000, p. 36). Creswell (1998) recommends that researchers utilize at least two of these verification methods when conducting a study.

Qualitative research is by nature an iterative process, meaning it may move back and forth between design and implementation. This ensures congruence between the study's components: questions, literature, data collection sources and strategies, and analysis. When the mechanisms of verification are applied, they act to check for congruency and possible errors, thus providing cues the researcher may use to know when to continue, stop or modify the process in order to achieve reliability and validity and ensure rigor.

Choosing which verification procedures to use is dependent upon the type of study being conducted. For this case study, five of these eight verification methods were used. These five are further defined in the following paragraphs.

***Triangulation.*** When a researcher seeks to learn more about a particular phenomenon, use of a single source of data will not provide adequate illumination or depth of understanding. The validity of a study increases when data from multiple sources are collected and analyzed using the process of triangulation (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). This increases the credibility of

the study and makes the findings worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The multiple sources and methods used in this study included interviews with the principal, interviews with teachers, observations of principals in various settings and activities, examination of documents and artifacts, and field notes and reflection journals.

***Development of a rich, thick description.*** The presentation of a rich and extensive set of details about methodology and context that describe a study enables the reader to make judgments about its believability and thus, the value, of the study's findings. Readers can learn vicariously from an encounter with the case if the researcher's narrative description (Stake, 2005) is adequately filled with sufficient detail to take the reader into the setting being described. My goal is to ensure that what I learn and report from conducting this study will add value to the field as the knowledge gained may be transferred to and used in similar situations (Erickson, 1986).

***Acknowledgement of bias.*** At the time this project began, I was serving as director of secondary education for one of the largest public school districts in Arkansas. As it continued, I became superintendent of a small rural school district in southern Arkansas. As first a specialist in secondary education and subsequently, a superintendent of schools, my reason for choosing this specific topic for study is admittedly personal and somewhat self-serving. Learning more about what made these principals effective instructional leaders will allow me, with increased confidence and surety, to provide leadership, support, and appropriate levels of accountability to those principals I will be responsible for leading and supervising now and in the future.

I have spent more than 37 years in education. Most of those years have been spent as a principal or a leader of principals. Admittedly, I have some preconceptions about what makes a

good instructional leader. Thus, past history and present practice may have lent themselves to my having some unintentional bias (Maxell, 2005).

Reflexivity is also important because a research study is always in some way or another influenced by individual experiences. It “requires an awareness of the researcher’s contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining “outside of” one’s subject matter while conducting research” (Willig, 2001, p. 10). Throughout this process, I made deliberate efforts to maintain a mindset of authentic, non-biased inquiry. I used reflexivity to reflect and recognize the influences that may have contributed to bias, to self-correct as appropriate, and to disclose them appropriately in my final report.

***Member checking.*** Guba and Lincoln (1989) consider member checks “the single most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 239). Member or respondent checks can be accomplished by multiple means, all of which were used during this study. During the interviews, I restated, summarized, or paraphrased what was heard or written to make sure that the content of what was spoken was accurate and conveyed the intended message.

Each of the interviews was taped and transcribed soon afterward completion. Each respondent was asked to read through the transcript of their interview to check for accuracy of content. Once analysis began, a dialog with the interviewee about my interpretation of the data collected during the interview occurred at various times. In instances where the respondent wished to alter or add to their original responses or comment about the interpretation and its relationship to their reality, these were documented with potential for incorporation into the study’s findings.

***External audits and audit trail.*** The accuracy or validity of a qualitative study may be evaluated when a researcher not involved in the study examines the process and product of a research study to assess it for accuracy and whether or not the conclusions, interpretations, and deductions are supported by the data.

A research study's confirmability and trustworthiness can be strengthened if the researcher takes deliberate care to develop and complete a research audit trail. An audit trail is the record that is kept by the researcher to document how a qualitative study is conducted. It includes all field notes that record what the inquirer does, sees, hears, and thinks throughout the study. Qualitative design by nature is an iterative process in which data is collected and analyzed. During this process the researcher must be prepared to make frequent decisions about the direction of the study as it progresses. An audit trail establishes a means for the retroactive evaluation of the handling of the inquiry and a way to deal with concerns related to the rigor of the research. Malterud (2001) emphasized the need for an audit trail that records the analytical steps taken in a study when she wrote:

Declaring that qualitative analysis was done, or stating that categories emerged when the material had been read by one or more persons, is not sufficient to explain how and why patterns were noticed... the reader needs to know the principles and choices underlying pattern recognition and category foundation. (p. 486)

**Trustworthiness.** The purpose for establishing trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is to support the argument that the study's findings are "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). In any qualitative research project, four issues of trustworthiness are called for: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility considers whether or not the research findings represent a "credible" conceptual interpretation of the original data collected from the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied and relevant beyond the limits

of the study. The dependability of a study assesses the quality of the combined processes of data collection, data analysis, and development of theory. Confirmability gauges how well the study's findings are supported by the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Of the eight methods listed and described above for establishing verification in research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend use of six of them for ensuring a study's trustworthiness. They are triangulation, prolonged engagement, persistent engagement, peer debriefing, member checks, and audit trail.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study will involve only three secondary schools and their principals – an extremely small representation of the large number of secondary schools and principals in the state of Arkansas. The findings in this limited study may actually reflect only the settings and circumstances in these schools and not be representative of other schools. Whether they may be germane or generalized to other school sites and principals can only be judged by individual readers of the study.

### **Summary**

By using a qualitative multiple case study design focusing on the principals in three notably improved secondary schools, this study sought to determine and define the particular responsibilities, behaviors and processes each exhibited and facilitated which led to the changes that contributed to their schools' making significant academic gains. This chapter presents the research design of the study, and how data were collected and analyzed.

Chapter 4 presents the data and describes how it was organized for analysis and the method(s) used to analyze it. Chapter 5 summarizes the entire study including a review of the problem and a restatement of the research questions. A brief overview of the research literature

is presented and the participants in the study described. Organized around the research questions, conclusions arising from the data are presented and discussed. Recommendations for how the conclusions of the study may be used by practitioners in the field are given as are recommendations for further study needed in the field.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

In conducting this study, a thorough and systematic look was taken of three Arkansas secondary schools which were at one time ranked academically by the state at serious levels of needing improvement. The schools chosen for this study were able to improve their academic performance significantly enough in subsequent years to be reclassified as achieving or meeting standards – a rare phenomenon for secondary schools in the state. The purpose for completing this study was to determine what these three schools did to accomplish this. Having come to believe, through experience and perusal of relevant research, that leadership is a critical factor in organizational effectiveness, the focus for the study is on identifying the responsibilities, behaviors, and processes the principals in these three schools used to gain such success.

This chapter begins with introductory sections that provide set and context for the presentation and analysis of the data. The researcher's interest in this project is described as is the audience to which it is largely directed. A section explaining an adjustment in rationale for site selection that occurred after the study proposal was approved by the dissertation committee is given and the data analysis process is summarized. A summary of the descriptive data collected from interviews, field observations, and document reviews is presented. Recognizing that each school site has and deserves to have its own story told, data from each was analyzed and is reported as a separate case. In conclusion, a cross-case analysis was conducted and its findings, which summarize the similarities and differences between the cases, are presented.

In pursuing this study the goal was to do something most educational practitioners have found themselves wanting to do many times throughout their careers - to take more than just a cursory look into schools that have shown significant academic improvement and moved from

performing poorly to demonstrating notable success in an area, to take a thorough look at what they did to accomplish this, and in turn, to apply what they learned in the process to make improvements in their own school. By completing this study of three such schools with a focus on principal leadership, a thick, rich description of what was discovered and described could inform my own practice and be helpful to other practitioners who are looking for successful methods and strategies to emulate in their own schools.

### **Post-Proposal Adjustment in Rationale for Selection of Participating Schools**

During the time the proposal for this study was created, school achievement designations assigned by the State of Arkansas between 2004 and 2011 were the planned parameters to be used to select schools for inclusion into this study. This span of years were chosen because the state continuously and consistently operated under and assigned academic accountability ratings as defined by the Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability Program Act of 1999 (ACTAAP, 1999). As a result of the 2011 application and 2012 approval of Arkansas's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility Plan by the U. S. Department of Education (USDOE) (2013), Arkansas's accountability and ratings changed. With this in mind, it seemed prudent to select study sites using the 2004-2013 data and ratings.

After filtering and sorting each year's list of schools and their accountability status, it was determined that there were only five secondary schools that fit the first criteria for inclusion as a study site – a school in at least year three of a school improvement designation with two consecutive years of meeting standards to follow. Of the schools identified, only one met the second criteria set for the study – a school with the same principal in place during the time spanning needing improvement status and meeting standards. With only one school to study, the next step was to considered whether it would be feasible to expand the site selection pool to



include secondary school ratings for the 2012 and 2013 years as well. Keeping in mind the intent of the plan for site selection at the inception of this study - to identify and study schools that had struggled significantly with academic achievement and subsequently, improved for two consecutive years so that they were no longer identified in the “needs improvement” category – the question was whether identifying sites for study across two differing accountability systems would satisfy the original intent.

As described in Chapter One of this study (p. 4), Arkansas’ plan for reaching 100% proficiency between 2004 and 2014 required the percentage of students who demonstrated proficiency to increase incrementally each year. Every public school was expected to meet the benchmark percentage yearly in order to demonstrate AYP. Safe harbor, an alternate method for demonstrating AYP, was developed for those schools that could demonstrate growth, but in smaller increments and at slower rates than those meeting full AYP requirements (Arkansas Department of Education, 2010, p. 17). To meet safe harbor requirements, a school must have reduced by at least ten percent the number of students not proficient from the year before.

With approval of the state’s waiver application in 2012, three accountability provisions were waived including the implementation of a statewide system of differentiated accountability. Thus, the system for rating schools in Arkansas was changed to allow “differentiated recognition, accountability, and support” (Arkansas Department of Education, 2011) beginning with the spring 2012 testing results.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements and goals (as discussed in Chapter 1, page 4 of this study) were abandoned. New goals for student performance were adopted that moved the old requirement of 100% proficiency in English language arts and math by 2013-2014

to a new goal of reducing proficiency gaps by half by 2016-2017 (Arkansas Department of Education, 2012). Additionally, the following changes were made:

- NCLB accountability status labels eliminated - only using accountability and assistance levels for all schools;
- AYP replaced with accountability levels based on new Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) for schools and districts;
- Performance (proficiency), growth and graduation rate indicators using minimum N of 25;
- Enhanced focus on subgroups through the Targeted Achievement Gap Group (TAGG); and
- Federal SES and choice requirements replaced by supports and interventions responsive to identified needs. (p. 1)

Upon completing a review of the lists of schools and their accountability results for the 2012 and 2013, I found the following (Arkansas Department of Education, 2013a):

- At the end of the 2013 school year, 793 public schools in the state did not meet their AMOs for the year and were identified in the “needs improvement” category.
- 137 schools progressed sufficiently to meet their annual targets
- Twelve schools met their AMOs for the first time in 2013. Six of these were secondary schools.
- Eighteen schools across the state made significant improvements and met their AMOs during both the 2012 and 2013 school years and thus, were reclassified as Achieving.
- Eight of these were secondary schools.

In conclusion, it was determined that these eight did indeed meet the site selection goal established in the planning stages for this study - to identify and study schools that had struggled significantly with academic achievement and subsequently, improved for two consecutive years so that they were no longer identified in the “needs improvement” category. Thus, two of the school sites selected for inclusion into this study came from this list.

**Audience**

Those who may benefit from the findings of this study are school leaders whose job responsibilities include the improvement of student academic performance in their respective school(s). Building principals serving in secondary schools are the primary audience but others who may gain from the study's findings include assistant superintendents and directors for curriculum and instruction, superintendents and other policy makers, and those in higher education whose responsibility it is to train principals for work in the field. While this study focused on effective leadership responsibilities and strategies implemented in secondary schools, principals currently serving or preparing to serve at any level may profit from its findings.

**Transcribed Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with the principals of each school as were focus groups of teachers at each site. In each case, the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed word-for-word.

Respondents sometimes used incomplete sentences and casual language to express their thoughts. Because the exchanges were spoken educator-to-educator, school jargon was often used. When direct quotes from the transcripts were used, I was concerned that readers of this study might not always understand the meaning of what the respondent was attempting to communicate. With this in mind, occasionally words were added to clarify the meaning of what the respondent was attempting to communicate. In all cases where this was done to assist the reader, the extraneous words added are surrounded by parenthesis marks like this ( ). Each time this was done, care was taken not to alter the meaning of what the respondent was attempting to communicate.

### **Audit Trail Notations**

To protect anonymity, audit trail notations were assigned to identify each of the three participating schools, the participants, collected documents, and observations included in this study and throughout Chapters Four and Five. So the identity of each could be kept confidential, all participants in the study were assigned a code.

Throughout Chapters Four and Five, when individual respondents are referenced, their audit trail notation code is used to identify them. If quoted, they are cited, using their code bounded by brackets < >. When directly quoting an individual, the audit trail notation code is followed by a slash and a number that denotes the page number in the transcribed interview from which the quotation was taken. Table 4.1 is a list of all audit trail notations used to identify individuals in Chapters Four and Five.

When other sources of data are used, audit trail notations are inserted in the text to identify the source. When this is done, the site or individual associated with the data source is identified first in the code and an extension added after a slash. Documents are identified using the extension /DOC; field notes are /FN; pictures are /PIC; observations are /OBS. Table 4.1

Table 4.1

*Audit Trail Notation Codes for Participants Included in Study*

School	Notation	Position or Source
A	PRIN-A	Current Principal of School A
	TCH-A1	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Literacy Teacher
	TCH-A2	7 <sup>th</sup> Grade Science Teacher
	TCH-A3	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math/Science Teacher
	TCH-A4	Instructional Facilitator
B	PRIN-B1	Current Principal of School B
	PRIN-B2	Previous Principal of School B
	TCH-B1	7 <sup>th</sup> Grade Reading Teacher
	TCH-B2	7 <sup>th</sup> Grade Mathematics Teacher
	TCB-B3	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Writing Teacher
	TCH-B4	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade Reading Teacher
C	PRIN-C1	Previous Principal of School C
	PRIN-C2	Current Principal of School C
	LIB-C	Media Specialist at School C
	AP-C	Assistant Principal at School C

**The Data Analysis Process**

For each of the three cases (sites) studied, the coding process began with open coding where each text was analyzed line-by-line and concepts and categories carefully labeled using codes. Once this was achieved, inductive analysis was used to develop axial codes - meaningful patterns, themes, and categories that emerged from the salient points and recurring language that

was revealed during open coding (Patton, 2002). The axial codes became the basis for determining the major themes that are defined and described throughout this chapter.

## **The Case of School A**

### **The School**

School A is a middle school that includes grades six through eight. This middle school was created from what was once a junior high campus until the district's grade configuration was adjusted just prior to the start of the 2003-2004 school year. Labeled by the State of Arkansas as a rural district, it is located in the state's southwestern quadrant. It is physically located in the school district's largest town of nearly 11,000 citizens and serves both in-town and out-of-town youngsters. The town in which School A is located is the home of two four-year colleges – one private and one public. The school's enrollment in the 2012-2013 school year was 465 students. There are 42 staff members, a principal, a fulltime assistant principal, and a fulltime resource officer. Fifty-seven percent of its students qualify for free and reduced meals. Its racial demographics are: 58 % Caucasian, 34 % African American, with a combination of three other race designations making up the remaining 8%. During my site visits to the school, I heard references to notable demographics that respondents thought had implications for the district and their school. One of the focus group teachers described the school this way:

We are a rural middle school with a dichotomy of students. We have very well to do students, we have very poor students and we have almost no middle class. We have two universities in the town and if their parents are educators or they're lawyers or doctors they do very well, but then most folks don't have a job unless they are working Wal-Mart or fast food otherwise because our industries have left (TCH-A2/1).

### **Selection of the Site**

School A's academic status reports show it to have reached a performance designation of SI-4 (School Improvement – Year 4) by the 2008-2009 school year. Between 2004-2005 and

2011-2012, the school intermittently met standards and slowed the progression of school improvement status designations. School A was able to improve significantly enough to meet standards, using safe harbor calculations (see Chapter One, p. 4 of this document) and was removed from school improvement status after the 2009-2010 assessment results were published. Table 4.2, assembled from information taken from multiple Arkansas Department of Education (2014) status reports illustrates the accountability designations for School A between 2004-2005 and 2011-2012.

Table 4.2

*School A's Academic Accountability Status for Years 2003-2012*

Year	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12
Status	A	SI-2 (M)	SI-3	SI-3 (M)	SI-3	SI-4	SI-4 (M)	A	Ach

SI = School Improvement      (M) = Met Standards      A = Alert      Ach = Achieving

**Researcher's Prior Employment at the School**

This researcher was employed as Assistant Superintendent for Grades K-8 in this district for two years, beginning in 2005-2006. My position called for me to be responsible for a wide range of management and leadership tasks with particular emphasis placed by my superintendent on my role in finding ways to improve student performance in the schools served. Therefore, I became Principal A's direct supervisor during her second year as principal and considered myself the campus's director of curriculum and instruction for the two years I was employed by the district. Although I have moved on to other employment, I have since taken other school leaders I have supervised on "fieldtrips" to visit this campus so they could hear and learn firsthand how Principal A has lead her school in improving achievement. I have also had a number of teachers visit the school to observe particular programs and teachers that have been successful in attaining high levels of academic achievement among the students they serve.

I have been particularly cognizant of my familiarity with this school and its staff throughout this study. Admittedly, there were some questions where I believed I already knew the answers. For this reason, I was particularly careful to remind myself each time I collected and worked with their data to make no assumptions, but to ask and record for-the-record, everything I wanted to know about and include in the study.



## **The Principal**

At the time the junior high was converted to a middle school, Principal A had been serving as assistant principal for the junior high. She was assigned to become principal of the new middle school and has served continuously since. This is her 37<sup>th</sup> year to work in public schools (35 in her current school) as an elementary classroom and music teacher (1.5 years), a junior high math teacher (20 years), an assistant principal (5 years), and now as a principal, in her 11<sup>th</sup> year.

There is a fulltime assistant principal assigned to School A. The respective roles that Principal A and her assistant play are clearly defined and are particularly relevant for this study. Because of the role the assistant principal (AP) plays, Principal A is free to devote the entirety of her time to fulfilling the role of instructional leader. The AP takes care of the day-to-day management of other matters in the school. He manages such things as the facilities, the student discipline, and all matters related to technology management. When observing and talking with them, the trust and respect the two have developed and share is palpable. Comments from the staff affirm this conclusion.

Principal A is very energetic and active and several who work with her state that she hardly ever sits down. She describes herself as being hyperactive. This, and a number of other descriptors were repeatedly used by staff members. Others used were: “never forgets anything” and “she’s just everywhere”.

## **Collection of the Data**

**Principal A Interview and Conversations.** For this study, Principal A was interviewed one time formally. Subsequently, during two other site visits a number of additional unstructured conversations were held with her to ask clarifying questions and to elicit extensions

to answers she had given during the formal interview. Records of these were noted in my field journal. Email exchanges were made with Principal A to ask clarifying and extension questions.

The formal interview occurred in the principal's office with both of us sitting at a conference table. It was recorded for later transcription into text. The principal stepped away from the table at times to other places in her office to retrieve documents and materials that she offered in support or to illustrate the verbal information being given. The surroundings were comfortable and conducive to having a productive interview. No interruptions were experienced during the interview. The formal interview was approximately 90 minutes in length. The questions found in Appendix D were used to structure the formal interview.

**Focus Group A Interviews and Conversations.** A focus group of four individuals was formally interviewed one time at School A. Using the questions found in Appendix E for structure and guidance, the interview was approximately 60 minutes in length. Subsequently, unstructured conversations were held with individuals from this group and the exchange noted in the researcher's journal. Three of the focus group participants were classroom teachers. The fourth was a former teacher at the school who now serves as its fulltime instructional facilitator. The interviews were conducted in the office/conference room of the instructional facilitator. Notable in the room were the colorful data charts that lined several walls. The participants appeared to be comfortable during the sessions and were eager to answer and discuss the topics raised by the questions asked of them.

**Documents and Observations.** Additional data were collected and recorded for School A from observations and examination of documents.

## **Presentation of the Data**

*The Presentation of Axial Codes (Major Themes).* Axial codes emerged as the data from my encounters with Principal and Focus Group A were analyzed. These axial codes were used to develop the major themes. Six themes emerged from the data. They were (a) data as driver, (b) leadership, (c) expectations and accountability, (d) instruction, (e) teacher quality, and (f) responding to student and parent needs. Data from other sources were examined subsequently to determine whether they substantiated or contradicted the themes as true and accurate.

Table 4.3 shows the axial codes that emerged and beneath them are examples of the open codes that were found in the data collected during the interviews. Each open code is indicative of a trait, behavior, process or action attributed to the principal.

Table 4.3

*Axial Codes and Sample of Open Codes for School A*

Data as Driver	Leadership	Expectations & Accountability	Instruction	Teacher Quality	Responding to Student/Parent Needs
Data Does Not Lie	Respect from Staff, Students, Community	Clear Expectations	Principal as Expert - Research-Based	Recruitment	Principal Knows Every Student's Status
Data Walls	Regular/Frequent Team Meetings	Handbook	Reading's Key	Care in Hiring	Teachers Know Your Students
Teams	Common Planning	Procedures	CMP-II	Matching Talent to Assignment	Conversations with Students
GLU Meetings	Classroom Observations	Classroom Observations	Literacy Lab	Person-to-Person	Conversations with Parents
Formative Assessments	Reflects Energy, Enthusiasm, Hope	Constant Monitoring	Teach Reading, not English	Work in the System or Move On	Student Recognition
	Central Office Support		Cross Curricular for Literacy/Math	Leads Regular/Frequent Collaborative Team Meetings	High Expectations for Academics & Behaviors
	Feedback		Book Studies		

## The Themes

The themes that emerged from analysis of the data collected at School A were (a) data as driver, (b) leadership, (c) expectations and accountability, (d) instruction, (e) teacher quality, and (f) responding to student and parent needs. Data from multiple sources - interviews, conversations, observations, and documents – were triangulated to validate and support these themes. The themes can hardly be isolated one from the other because aspects of one may be interconnected to and even co-dependent upon some or all of the others. This is noted at times in the discussion of each theme.

**Data as Driver.** As I completed the initial interviews with both the principal and focus group teachers at School A and began to reflect on what I had heard, the prevailing thought that occurred was the realization that the use of data was at the apex or was perhaps the heart of everything that happened at the school. Comments about use of data in the school was woven into each interview and the evidence to support what I was told by the principal and teacher was verified through data collected during observations and examination of documents. The extensive data-walls containing details of every student's status in math and literacy that lined the walls of the instructional facilitator's office/work room, was such a testament. Comments such as "this is a data-driven school", "the numbers don't lie", and "the data shows the brutal facts" were repeated numerous times during interviews and conversations with the principal and focus group teachers. The principal's demonstrated ability to remember the details of the data – for the school, for the grade levels, for both mathematics and literacy, and for individual students - was remarkable. Principal A noted in her comments that this might be influenced by her background as a math teacher and her love of and appreciation for numbers.

The importance of using data to make decisions was realized by Principal A early in her tenure. By the second year (2004-2005) of her principalship the school was already designated as being in year two of school improvement because of low scores in both mathematics and literacy. Upon begin notified of this, she turned right away to the achievement data to look for answers:

I was able to go to Defour's PLC (Professional Learning Community) training (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). I was able to do some training that I took, I mean, I have a math background, so I started looking. Let me say this, I will never forget when they started talking about *No Child Left Behind*, I thought to myself, self what am I going to do, see a student walk down the hall and know his Benchmark score now, like a prison? But somehow I do, it is the way I think. So, we started studying data, we started to look at our math scores and our literacy scores and I had the opportunity to have some training. So I just started doing some shifts. (PRIN-A/2)

The teachers in the focus group confirmed this. When I asked the group to describe their journey and how they began their move from school improvement to making gains and meeting standards, one described the early use of data this way:

Well, I mean, at the very beginning it does go back to <PRIN-A>, our principal. She immediately started, we had always looked at data, sort of, kind of, but not fully in depth and she started breaking it down, showing what 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, what 5<sup>th</sup> grade was doing before they came up. And we started just really focusing on that. (TCH-A-1/3)

The teacher participants described how Principal A found a way to make the data more accessible to teachers, and at the same time, developed a data-wall system where cards and color-codes were used to depict the performance status of every student in the school in mathematics and literacy. Once this was developed, it gave Principal A and her teachers a visible focus for having discussions around individual student's progress and what might be done to move students along on the wall. This is illustrated in this set of teacher comments:

TCH-A1/3: It helped too, before we knew about the school improvement things, all of the student information and data were kept in the counselor's office. If you wanted to find anything out about a child you had to go over there and sit and look at the folders.

TCH-A2/3: And we were expected to before school started on our own time.

TCH-A3/3: You feel like you're invading privacy when you do that.

TCH-A1/3: So, you know, you couldn't look at a wall to see how things are moving as a teacher, how you're doing. Those things helped.

TCH-A4/4: I agree. I mean, I think the data-wall is really a great thing, it is good for the teachers. They can just walk in. <Principal A > loves it because she can just walk in, she loves everything color coded, so. She knows what every kid's status is. You know, it is so funny, she'll have them in her office and they'll be in trouble and she'll go, and by the way, did you know that you are not proficient and you need to be and you are only x amount, you know. It's just part of our culture now.

TCH-A2/4: The other thing you were talking about having to go and dig it out of the counselor's office and things, I'm going to be honest, unless somebody was between a rock and a hard place, I mean we were really not figuring out what was going on, we didn't do it. But with TLI (The Learning Institute, a system the school subscribes to for conducting frequent formative assessments correlated to the spring state testing) and being able to go back and look at all that stuff instantaneously almost, that has been wonderful. Because you can go back and see the trend. This child is not performing and their 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher said, well, they did really well last year, but you go back and look and they didn't do well on their test, they didn't do well the year before, but in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade they were fine, so what happened between here and here?

Principal A uses data to make critical programming adjustments within the school. One of the most sweeping examples occurred during the 2004-2005 year when school fell into year two of school improvement. The data revealed that students were performing poorly across the board in both reading and mathematics. Realizing what they had been doing in classrooms was not getting adequate academic results for their students, Principal A took a bold step. With help from central office curriculum personnel (this researcher) assigned to School A, she decided to find and implement research-based programs in both mathematics and literacy within a single year.

After extensive training of the staff, two new comprehensive programs, one for teaching mathematics and one for literacy, were adopted and put into place (this will be discussed in more detail later in the *Programs and Instruction* theme section of this chapter) - *Connected Mathematics II* (CMP-II) and *Literacy Lab*. During that year, the school also subscribed to the services of The Learning Institute (TLI) – a testing service through which students could

periodically be formatively assessed in mathematics and literacy on attainment of the learning standards for their grade as they moved toward spring state testing. At this same time, Principal A began meeting with the math and literacy teachers, sometimes weekly and sometime bi-weekly and focusing on what the data revealed. Additional team time was spent formulating solutions to the problems the data uncovered. About this, she said:

I had asked the teachers before they came, I need ten kids that you are going to move academically. At that time we called them the bubbles, ... I had an 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher come in and she had thirty kids ... and she said, "I'm going to move these thirty kids", and I laughed at her, I laughed at her and I said, "It's not that I don't think you can, but <teacher name> all I need is ten". She moved thirty. We met in literacy first because we were driving the academic train, we were looking at kids really <researcher>, and you have a Special Ed background, every kid had their individual plan. I could go in the data room, I saw their card. I met with teachers, I also met with students. I would call them in and, I wish I had a picture of some of their expressions on their faces, because we also at the time went with *The Learning Institute*, ... we test every three weeks, but we were able to use that data and that data projected how we were going to do on Benchmark. Also, because I am an old basketball player my goal in life was to meet (the state benchmarks). I think that I knew deep down that what we were doing was right. It was a lot of hard work. I made a lot of teachers mad and I made a lot of parents mad. (PRIN-A/3)

Once access to the data became easier for teachers and the first data-walls were developed, Principal A used the data to motivate teachers. She used it in ways that encouraged them to become more committed to finding and implementing new strategies that would better serve their students and improve student achievement. This statement offers some insight into how she thought about and carried this out:

... they respected me because, I'm going to tell you, here is the bottom line, data don't lie. We also did a book study and it was brutal facts and I just started really having to give them honest feedback and you put that data up and teachers want to be distinguished, they want to make the A+, they will do everything they can and when I say to them you've got to move thirty kids for us to meet they did everything they could to do it. I had some phenomenal teachers, but it was kind of funny because I don't have a literacy background at all but I did attend the *Literacy Lab*. So I knew enough to be able to talk the talk. I knew if they would just move that many kids ... here's something else we always did and I'm not sure the teachers knew this, because some things you just don't tell, we padded that number a little bit and we would say okay, we gave ourselves some padding, because you never know the week of Benchmark ... Johnny's



grandmother dies and grandmother is the main. So we would tell those teachers, I need twenty names and I would pressure them, I need their first name and last name, what are you doing? I might have really just needed fifteen but it was just my insurance. Now here is what we also did. We found that group, that identified, we called them our bubbles, we courted them, we provided after school tutoring until they cut our finances.

We took care of those kids. We met them before school, they had noon study hall, they had after school study halls. I know this 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, she came up here one morning at 8:00 on Saturday morning and she kept that identified group of kids until 3:00. Not every principal has that, I know that, but you just get people that they buy in because they are here for the right reasons. So we did a lot of things. We had before school, and we took those kids to Pizza Hut. I remember the first year we met those 8<sup>th</sup> graders went to the high school. I got a bus, we went out to the high school, they let me get on the intercom and I called those kids in. You would have thought I was queen bee. We took them to eat. I said guys remember, remember what you did. Actually, it is this group of seniors that is fixing to graduate. We held to our word, we made them promises and we kept our promises. Because we had the data and we could see the TLI results and then you pull the parent it, well there is no one parent in their right mind that does not want their kid to achieve academically. It wasn't easy but that is pretty much what we did in a nut shell with The Learning Institute helping. It just got better and better with the technology. The TLI, they got more sophisticated. We all kind of grew together. For <School A>, with our demographics in Southwest Arkansas people told me you're not going to come out and I guess I was just so competitive that I told them yea, we are. (PRIN-A/5)

After hearing this response, Principal A was asked if there were teachers who did not “buy in” to her beliefs and methods. I asked more specifically if any of them refused to implement the changes she was directing them to make and instead, placed the blame for the school's poor performance on the kids and parents. She responded:

It's leadership. When we had those data meetings and I was up with my marker and my flip chart it was understood from the very beginning you're going to give me ten kids. Now you find them, we are going to move ten kids. <Teacher>, you're going to move ten kids. At first they said well this isn't going to work, <Principal A>. I wouldn't listen to them. I told them, I said guys we're not going to be the dumb school. We've got the best kids in the whole wide world. So we changed our thinking from I don't think they can to they can. I never would let them do that because I said, you know, it doesn't matter if their daddy is an attorney, a judge or he works for the trash truck, they are going to move. Maybe right at first they didn't but once they started seeing the kids moving I mean it was like Christmas morning. It gave them confidence. (PRIN-A/6)

Not only is student assessment data used to drive the school. Principal A collects data both formally and informally as she moves through the hallways and classrooms observing and monitoring what is happening in her school. This kind of data she combines with student data and uses it to make decisions about what is needed to improve teacher quality, for setting expectations for staff and holding them accountable, and for insuring that the structure used within the organization is conducive to achieving their goals. This will be discussed in greater detail as other themes are described, particularly the *Expectations and Accountability* and *Leadership* themes.

**Leadership.** During the axial coding process, *Leadership* was identified as a theme for School A. In Chapter Two a leader was described as a visionary, a person with strong personal and professional beliefs, who is skilled at articulating his vision to others to inspire them to embark on the change process (Guskin, 1996). As the data from School A was collected and analyzed, it was evident that Principal A did unquestionably have strong personal and professional beliefs. What I was most interested in looking for in the data however, was how she had inspired others to engage in the change process and do the hard work that it has taken to improve student performance in the school. While many school leaders encountered during my career have possessed strong personal and professional beliefs, too few have been successful in carrying out the second part of the definition of leader and inspire others to embark on the change process.

The evidence revealed the focus group teachers' clearly expressed belief that Principal A is their leader. Behaviors and actions that attest to her leadership of the school are demonstrated daily and seem to be both the engine that has moves the school along the path it has followed and at the same time, the glue that holds all of the working parts together. The focus group teachers

frequently used the word “leader” (referring to Principal A) during my face-to-face interactions with them. The respect and admiration they hold for her was obvious in their tone and words as they talk about her leadership and her as a person. One teacher, expressing admiration of her principal’s leadership said, “She could make anything work when you say it can’t” (TCH-A1/12).

Using her own strong convictions and beliefs as inspiration, Principal A established from the beginning, a vision and purpose for her school and communicated it through words and actions to her staff. The methods and activities they have used to accomplish their purpose and vision has varied over time as they have “monitored and adjusted”. The vision and purpose have remained constant since she became the campus leader.

The vision and purpose was build around her deep personal conviction that the capacity to improve teaching and learning at School A existed in her own leadership and in the school. She also believed that the notion that racial or cultural deficits could and would restrict the learning of some students should be set aside. It became her goal to set a tone and direction for the school that would establish an environment that was effective and supportive for all students.

A repeating trend in the data that I noticed, even as I collected it, was the use of certain phrases that I heard frequently from participants as they were woven into the responses they gave to my questions and comments. Many of the buzz phrases that Principal A began using from the beginning to convey the essence of her vision and purpose continue to be echoed over and over when you converse with the teachers now 11 years later. The enthusiasm and conviction with which these phrases are frequently integrated into their comments convey that these sentiments continue to be alive and at the heart of the school’s belief system. Examples phrases are, “One

thing that she'll always say. Is it for the kids" (TCH-A1/20), and, "What's good for the best is good for the rest" (TCH-A4/1).

Principal A is highly visible in the day-to-day activities of her school. Teachers described how, as she goes about her day, she demonstrates through actions, a living exemplar that reflects the school's vision, goals, and beliefs saying, "I mean, her sleeves are pushed up too. She's not just sitting at her desk telling us do this, do that" (TCH-A3/8).

By spending her time, not in the office, but out in the school among the students and teachers – in classrooms, hallways, and meeting rooms – she is very aware of what is going on throughout the school.

She's rarely in her office. That's one thing we can say about this. If we need to talk to <Principal A> we go into the main office and we say where's <Principal A> because nine times out of ten she is not going to be in her office. She is going to be somewhere on this campus doing an observation or working in a meeting or doing something like that. (TCH-A2/8)

Providing the resources for her staff to support and assist them in their instructional efforts as they work to gain high levels of student achievement is a leadership behavior that Principal A exhibits. At times Principal A seemed to anticipate what her staff needed or what might give them difficulty even before they embarked a difficult task or on something new. To keep them from becoming bogged down or too discouraged to continue their efforts, she worked to be up-to-date on every aspect of what was happening in the school, thus enabling her to better mobilize resources within the school in support of its vision and mission. Focus teacher participants described their thoughts about this:

If it's going to be, if money is needed or resources are needed, she doesn't just say you do it, she is right in there with you helping you with it. She doesn't forget. She keeps up with every bit of it and stays right there with us. I mean, she is just there with us all the time. (TCH-A1/5)

I mean, it just we know that if we see something that our kids need, if we see something that is vital for them that they can learn it, you can go talk to her and she's on it. (TCH-A1/7)

TCH-A2/6: Technology. She has managed to find money for technology. We have probably got more technology in our middle school than half of the wealthy schools around because she puts the money where it can be used.

TCH-A3/6: And then she requires us to use it

TCH-A2/6: Yes, so we got smart boards, we've got projectors in almost in every classroom, we've got smart boards in most every classroom. I-pads for the core teachers to get things on. We've got student response systems. Document cameras. I mean it's just, I talk to teachers from other districts and they don't have this stuff and they're much wealthier than we are.

Principal A provides other resources that are critical for her teachers as they do the hard work of providing effective instruction and raising student achievement levels. She does this by setting clear expectations for classroom instruction and learner outcomes, regularly observing in classrooms, and following up with feedback to the teachers so that they can reflect upon their practices, adjust as needed, and grow professionally. Realizing this, I wondered whether the teachers felt her credible in advising them about their own performance. I asked them about her knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment and whether they believed she had the expertise and the right to do this, an example of the affirmative responses I got follows:

She's just got such a wide background. That's one thing that is to her advantage, is just the fact that she has an elementary background and then she taught at the middle school level, junior high level, whatever, so she's got the elementary but then she's got the secondary to go along with it. You just have to know her, but, you could walk up to her and say, what's Rosa doing in her class today she she'll know. She can tell you what's going on over this whole school. She is just unbelievable. All she observes, knows and keeps up with, I don't know how she does it. (TCH-A4/9-10)

The clear expectations she sets for instruction are always heavily interwoven with what the student data has revealed about current performance levels of the students compared to the projected learner outcomes that is desired and what each student's needs are for getting there. Seeing that current student data is easily accessible and presented in a format that is

understandable and useful (example: data walls) for driving conversations, planning, and instruction is a critical resource for them. Because of the creative scheduling that Principal A and her assistant works throughout the school, time and opportunity for team collaboration (with the *Data as Driver*) is another resource provided for teachers. Throughout the exchanges I had with the principal and teachers, a number of comments confirmed this:

I think we were looking at learning, not just let's do something, but how do kids learn, how do we push them to learn and just more research based, it was not just let's just pull something off the shelf. (TCH-A3/4)

I remember us getting together as a group ... and looking at what we're doing and how we can cross curricular, how we can kind of beef each other's things up. We would have never thought about doing that before. It just wasn't in our game plan. (TCH-A2/4)

I think our teachers have become more a facilitator than the sage on the stage for the kids. You know, when you have a middle school principal like Ms. Garner who thinks out of the box anyhow, it's fine with her. She wants our teachers thinking out of the box and so that makes it easy for them. That's the great thing about her, she does think out of the box, all the teachers know it, they're not afraid to ask for anything. If they can explain and give a reason and back it up, let's do it, let's see, you know. It's having the freedom and having a leader that ... back you up. (TCH-A4/5)

If you have an idea she will go to bat for you. (TCH-A1/5)

Principal A also assumes the role of leader by deflecting outside interferences and pressures that might distract them from pursuing their goals with students. One teacher described how this was done this way:

If you are teaching in your classroom and yet you're having to defend your actions at every turn to parents, to other staff members, to the community at large, you don't have time to teach and you're too stressed to care about it. We had an administrator (referring to Principal A) that stepped in between us and took the target off our back, let us innovate, let us try new things and if it didn't work we agreed it didn't work and we tried something else. But she gave us the freedom to find out what worked. She took those blows for us because the community did not want to back off on it for a while. (TCH-A2/3)

Although it is clear that teacher performance expectations are high at School A, it seems to be accepted, even embraced by most. Perhaps this is mitigated by her personal support of them as people. The focus group teachers described it in this set of responses:

TCH-A4/10: Well, you know, she is still their biggest cheerleader. She's still the teachers' biggest cheerleader and biggest support. You know, and she will, I mean it's kind of like we've said, she gets us together every once in a while and we'll have a pep talk, you know.

TCH-A4/11: She rolls up her sleeves. We have happy hour from Sonic.

TCH-A2/11: Or she'll come by the classrooms and stick her head in and say great job, I heard this was going on and that was going on.

TCH-A3/11: She's concerned about us as people. I mean, I don't feel like a drone that comes to work. She's concerned about our personal life too. I don't know. It goes back to how we treat our kids. I mean, she treats us like we treat our kids where we want to know how their doing.

TCH-A4/11: She's like an overall culture.

TCH-A3/11: You don't want to let her down. Just like you don't want to let you dad down, you know. You don't want them to be disappointed with you. I guess that's just kind of how that relationship she fosters.

TCH-A2/11: Her belief is she treats us the way she wants us to treat our kids.

Another example of how Principal A supports and encourages teachers is shown in this comment:

It's really cool because she will see one of us doing one thing that she likes and she'll bring it to the attention, and that is one of the things of a strong leader, she'll take that and show the whole faculty. (TCH-A2/14)

Although, Principal A is perceived by her staff as the leader in School A, she also shares the leadership and decision-making role with others through the establishment and facilitation of leadership teams within the school.

Some of our key decisions and policies occur around this table when we have PLC's, some of it occurs when we have leadership team and then some of it just occurs one-on-one. Maybe a teacher will go to her and say what about this and then we will talk about it in PLC, you know. (TCH-A4/15)

The teachers' give credit to the principal in her leadership role for the school's improved student performance status as reflected in this set of statements:

TCH-A4/18: I would just like to say without <Principal A> being the leader she is, we wouldn't have gotten off school improvement. I mean, yes, it takes all the teachers jumping in and helping and yes it took us developing the data wall and using it, but she's still the one that makes it go. If she was not accessible to come to the PLC's and be the heavy and drive the train and apply pressure when pressure was needed and cheer, you know, if she wasn't around to do all of that, this wouldn't be.

TCH-A2/18: If she wasn't her,

TCH-A4/18: it wouldn't work.

**Expectations and Accountability.** *Expectations and Accountability* is another theme that developed from the axial coding of School A's data. Within this theme, two categories were identified. The first of these categories was the structuring of the day-to-day processes and procedures, communicating these, and then monitoring for compliance to facilitate the work of the staff and students. The second category within this theme involved setting instructional performance expectations in the classroom for teachers and staff and monitoring for compliance. Findings for each category will be illustrated in this section.

School A operates under a well-established set of standard operating procedures and routines (Marzano, 2005) with little left to chance. All of these procedures are presented in the teacher handbook (DOC-A1) to which I was introduced when I visited the school a few days before my first formal interview with Principal A. It was a 4-inch binder of materials that included such things as meeting dates, expectations, and procedures. During my initial interview visit with her she showed it to me again and gave the following explanation to illustrate how it is used:

This is the <School A> teacher handbook and you see it's gotten bigger and bigger. But when we have our staff development the first day of school, I have everything that they could ever need with the exception of toilet paper in this book. Here's their schedule, here is the master schedule, their duty schedule, their PD schedule, what to do during the school day. Then we go here - general guidelines for teachers and <researcher>, I teach these. I will go over every one, but then we get over here and I name the leadership team meeting right off the bat at these August meetings. Not only do I name them, I go ahead and give them their whole schedule. I give them the name of their book (for book study) and these are not optional. Now sometimes on my leadership team, I hand pick those



because some are better than the others and some are just not good at leading the team. We will have the leadership team meeting, like we have here for February 4<sup>th</sup>, and on the 5<sup>th</sup> that leadership person from this meeting has a meeting called the <School A> Leadership Update, that's GLU for short, and they will meet and that leadership committee member will regurgitate everything I did. I hand them everything they need. Then we do the book study. This year it's been Charlotte Danielson and I have done most of the teaching just so it's not as dry. They're so on the first level of Blooms on it, you know, it's all information. So, what I've tried to do is sporadically do these. They lead those GLU meetings. Now, what they have to do is they have to turn in sign-in sheets and then if I have a coach that might accidentally leave and not go, I call them in the next morning and I say okay, you skipped a GLU meeting. Oh, I did, I missed it and they don't miss them anymore, it's accountability because I make those leadership team members bring their sign-ins and all that to me, who didn't show up, you know. That has been a shift because I am able to sit down with them in a small group and they get a piece of <Principal A>. I just give them, I just tell them I say guys, you know, we've got five fights last week on bus duty. Somebody's not on their letter (a strategy she uses for assigning duty locations). You know, it's a small setting. You get in those faculty meetings and you can get dogged. There is strength in numbers. It gives them a time to talk and work through things, then we always talk about kids. It still comes back to the accountability piece. I give them this. I will never forget, we had our September GLU meeting and then October's. Several people (said) well I didn't know about it. I said well, you need to go back to your little handy-dandy book and mark every one of these dates. There're no surprises. You know, I learned to do that. I go over everything with them, I give them their TLI schedule, so they can't come to me and say, I didn't know we were having the TLI test. Yeah, you did, because I gave you a schedule. It's just, again, like they're kids. But that has given me time to have small group time with my teachers. I will have one faculty meeting this year and that's our mandatory Benchmark faculty meeting. You know, <campus testing coordinator> has to give all the testing rules and regs, but that's it and they know that. It goes back to that accountability. Then I get to see everybody. I get to see my coaches, I get to see my band directors. But, I tell you what, it's work on my part. I mean it keeps me hoppin'. (PRIN-A/14-15)

Comments from a teacher put it simply:

Her expectations are very clear and most often she puts them in print so we can follow it, because some of us don't remember (TCH-A2/14).

The teachers consistently conveyed how much they appreciate that a set of standard operating procedures exists. They also agreed that Principal A was not flexible when it comes to following the procedures and expectations that are covered in the teacher handbook except in the case of unusual, short-term circumstances. Those who do not adhere to the process are called "in her office and counseled about it" (TCH-A2/14).

According to both Principal A and the teachers, if there's a process or procedure in place that teachers are expected to be accountable for, Principal A constantly monitors for compliance. When teacher participants were questioned about whether they ever resented this, they strongly denied any such feelings. They all agreed that they realized and accepted the purpose for every expectation she set for them. The requirement for completing communication logs was given as an example of this:

TCH-A4/14: She makes us give her a communication log. Okay, then she is in there in her office and she's got the D and F list. Who's flunking? She is going through there and she's getting those communication logs and she's like well let me see, have they called this parent, you know. Those wheels are always turning, always turning.

TCH-A2/14: She's going to look on there and she is going to see a phone log and she's going to see maybe two phone calls in an entire nine weeks.

TCH-A4/14: Yeah, so she is always thinking and things that we just turn in that is mundane to us, she has a reason.

Since the handbook and the assignments in it are created and monitored by the principal and assistant principal, the teachers were asked if they are comfortable making suggestions to it when they feel something is not working or they think they have a better idea. They expressed that they do this occasionally without fear of reprisal and stated the following as examples of this:

Oh, yes. I know some of our key decisions and policies occur around this table when we have PLC's (team meetings), some of it occurs when we have leadership team and then some of it just occurs one-on-one. Maybe a teacher will go to her and say what about this and then we will talk about it in PLC, you know. (TCH-A4/15)

Just like we're getting ready to approach her with, because we're having trouble with our dress code, the way it's written, and so we are getting ready to approach her with a possible dress code idea. We know she'll listen to it and if it's feasible. We're doing it now so that she'll have time to think about it. (TCH-A2/15)

Setting instructional performance expectations in the classroom for teachers and staff and monitoring for compliance was a pattern that was evident in School A. Principal A established a

set of clear expectations for teaching practices in the classroom. She asserted the importance of classroom visits to teacher accountability by saying:

It is just the accountability piece. The real key though is me being in those classrooms. That just changed everything. I mean, they never knew when I was going to pop in and I try to do it randomly. (PRIN-A/16)

Because the assistant principal handles the management of the discipline and other school duties, Principal A spends most of every school day in the hallways and classrooms or meeting with staff for data review, planning, and problem-solving. She says of this:

Now, a principal cannot run their school from their desk and I'm very seldom in my office and these secretaries up front, you know, they had a little bit of a hard time with it at first and then cell phones came along and I try to report to them, but I don't stay in my office. We laugh because I'm a little bit hyperactive. But that's not where it is happening in there in my office. (PRIN-A/10)

She uses what she observes not only hold her staff accountable, but to make sure that teachers are using effective practices consistently. She often uses what she sees as a platform from which to deliver feedback to teachers about their performance. The teacher participants in the focus group conveyed that it is not unusual for Principal A to question them about an instructional strategy that they may be using that she is not familiar with, to ask for an explanation of its use, and to produce evidence as to whether it is an effective practice. Principal A gave these examples about how she uses walk-throughs to monitor and to drive feedback to teachers:

One huge thing that I did, I started doing classroom walk-throughs. I remember this example. I had a 7<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher and remember math is a tested area. I walked by her room about twenty-six times and over half of those times she was behind her desk, kids were doing worksheets. So, I called her in one day and I was just real nice and I said well I just want to talk to you a little bit about the walk-throughs. Half the time I have been by your classroom you are behind your desk. Now, I love this, a teacher on her feet is worth a thousand on her seat and I said honey, you're wasting half a year on your seat. I never walked by again that school year that she wasn't up in front of the classroom even if she was giving a test. It's accountability. (PRIN-A/8)

She continued her description of observations and feedback to teachers with the following responses:

I would go in on them. I would have their lesson plans, because I knew what I did as a teacher, but was also able to give them feedback. Now why have you got this one sitting over here, you know, I was able to give them some feedback that I think in my mind was helpful and I was confident enough because I came out of the classroom. Then they respected me enough to do it. Now in time some of the people that put their skids on were the old ones fixing to retire, the ones who are my age now. Because, they were burned out, they had been doing it that way all these years and I ruffled their feathers, made some made, some quit, some went ahead and retired but when you start telling teachers that okay, Ms. Jones, Ms. Smith over here y'all are teaching the same thing but her scores are a lot better. What is she doing that you're not doing and teachers don't like that. But again, it's honest feedback. I had to learn to do that, you know, I like people but I was able to do it in such a way that you know, you need to get down there Ms. Jones and Ms. Smith is doing something really good. You always try to do it in a way that you don't just tear them completely down and she might want to check with you, which at that time we were also having the team planning times. So, we had our math team and literacy teams planning at the same conference period, which was another scheduling issue. (PRIN-A/8)

So when you start telling them, hey why is this one over here scoring better? It is an intrinsic thing and they say well <Principal A> I don't know, I don't know. And then you meet with them again. But it is brutal facts, it's the data. It's not me giving a biased opinion, when you lay that down and you say this is it, now why is this happening, did you by any chance not teach this SLE. It's just been a real big picture with the TLI and the feedback we get from those. I mean I've knocked some of them out of their seats and they'll say you're right because they know. Or they'll say I don't like division or fractions or they'll give me some stupid answer and I'll say but I'm sorry, you know. That's been a big way I've been able to have feedback with them because it's honest feedback. (PRIN-A/9)

***Instruction.*** *Instruction* was identified as a major theme during the axial coding of School A's data. Many of the programs of instruction in place at School A currently are programs that were sought out , adopted, and implemented within the first three years of Principal A's service. With persistent reflection and determination, she and her staff have worked strategically to modify and strengthen these early-adopted programs every year since.

As was noted earlier in this chapter, by the second year of the school's existence (and the principal's tenure), the students were scoring poorly enough in both mathematics and literacy to

be labeled in year two of school improvement (2004-2005). This poor showing motivated Principal A to feel a sense of urgency about finding how to turn the school around. Principal A describes what she thought and some of what she did in response:

It was time for <School A> to really have a facelift. I mean, we were not achieving. We (central office administrator, Principal A, and several teachers) visited schools. We went to <a middle school that was doing well>. We let these teachers make some road trips. We did everything we could to make them understand this is what we're going to do and it worked. It was such a gradual thing and we had so many changes to make but it seems like at the time the people that came along and the programs that came along we just were able to buy into it. We just worked on the positives, I wouldn't let them talk about kids in a negative way. It's just a mindset. (PRIN-A/6)

Principal A credits attending a PLC (Professional Learning Community) Conference (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2010) as the catalyst that caused her to realize the value of using the data - to determine what was working and what was not, to aide in making decisions, to motivate herself and her staff. One of her first key realizations that arose from analysis of the data was that School A had a large number of students whose reading skills were significantly below grade level. Since this was a middle school, there were English classes, but there were no reading classes and thus, reading skills were not being taught in any course. Convinced that her students could make only limited progress academically unless their reading skills were strengthened, she decided convention would have to be abandoned and a way created for reading to be taught in her middle school. Of this, she said:

We started with literacy because I think we all agreed because of an assistant superintendent named <this researcher>, that if they couldn't read they are not going to be successful in math. (PRIN-A/2)

At that time they were teaching English, not reading, no reading and that went against my grain because I knew I had kids over here that could not read. So we changed our literacy program. (PRIN-A/3)

Her answer for this was to jump fully into training and implementation of the Smart Step

Literacy Lab Classroom Project (Harding University, 2014), often referred to by practitioners simply as Lit Lab. This program was introduced to educators in 2001 when the Arkansas Department of Education called for the creation of an intensive program of teacher staff development to address mid-level literacy in the state of Arkansas by creating models of exemplary comprehensive literacy instruction in reading and language arts, appropriate for young adolescents (2014, Harding University).

Lit Lab is not an add-on or supplemental program but is meant as a total replacement for the traditional structure and curriculum in middle-level English classrooms. Its strategies and approaches are not meant for use in the literacy classrooms alone, but for all content classrooms as well and supports the notion that reading can and should be taught “across the curriculum” in all content areas. If implemented with fidelity, a good deal of training over two years is required along with significant changes in classroom instruction and teaching strategies. Principal A described how it began:

With our literacy, and you will remember this, we also all joined up on the Lit Lab train. We joined the literacy lab concept and had all of the PD - every literacy teacher, including me, the building principal/old math teacher. We bought into Ken Stamatis at Harding and we got every bit of Lit Lab that we could. (PRIN-A/3)

We didn't only educate or encourage our literacy teachers to do Lit Lab, we also got everybody on board. We took our social studies, we took our science, so I think that was the beginning because we changed the academic environment. (PRIN-A/3)

Immediately after making this statement about adopting the Lit Lab Project, Principal A, speaking excitedly, commented about the changes School A initiated in mathematics by saying:

So, we threw out the traditional math program at <School A>. So we changed our literacy program and our math program and I mean like that (snapping of fingers), we revised our schedule. <Assistant Principal>, he nearly had a nervous breakdown because we ran two schedules, we had a six bell schedule for math/literacy, we have a seven bell schedule for the others. You know, my mind works that way, and I kept saying “It'll work, it'll work.” Well, we made it work. So that was the first big change ... (PRIN-A/3)

Well then we did the same thing in math. We started CMP-II (Connected Math II) (Connected Mathematics Project, 2014). We had the extended learning times for math and literacy and that is what they needed. I mean, they need those 85-90 minutes to do everything they needed. (PRIN-A/4)

Principal A and her assistant principal spent the summer of 2004 working on a modified block schedule so that students had double time - the equivalent of two periods of time - for math instruction and for literacy instruction. The unfortunate trade-off was that the students had to give up an elective period. Principal A says of this:

So, also we went from two electives at the middle school to one. I nearly got hung a couple of times and I know you remember this, because the students had always been able to chose two electives. That is a big deal in <name of town>. We have a wonderful band program, but, they had to chose one. So, I had to get out of the box a lot of other ways and I can tell you later how we did that, but I did everything I could to make it work and I had <names superintendent and assistant superintendent>. They all supported me. (PRIN-A/3)

Instead of letting it go, Principal A initiated another outside-the-box plan so that students who were willing to meet certain criteria could still have an opportunity to take two electives:

When they did the extended time on math and English and it was really causing heartbreak, because they (the students) went from being able to choose two electives to only getting one. The way that she made that happen for those that were willing to stay the extra hour, she (Principal A) created 8<sup>th</sup> period. So, science became a class that you could take from 3:00-3:50, allowing you to take two electives, but she's kind of held their feet to the fire. They have to be passing, if they are not passing they get pulled out of it and there is always a waiting list every year. (TCH-A2/12)

The modified block schedule continues to be used in School A.

Because she believed deeply that racial or cultural deficits should not be used as an excuse to restrict the learning of some students, Principal A sought and found a way to make of the most comprehensive and controversial programming changes that has ever been made at School A. All core classes – math, science, literacy, and social studies – would convert into Pre-AP (Advanced Placement) classes. At the time she became principal, School A had in place

some Pre-AP classes from their days as a junior high school. These classes had become part of a system that promoted segregation within the school by race and socio-economic status. Most students in the Pre-AP classes were predominately filled with Caucasian students. The few African-American students enrolled in them were children of parents who could be classified as “professionals” – primarily teachers’ children and professors’ children. This “elitist” system was not a secret in the community and was, in fact, a point of pride for many. One teacher described during interview the system:

Before we had our doctor's kids and lawyer's kids and professor's kids were all in the Pre- AP classes whether they qualified or not and the others wouldn't even try. So, it was almost, if you live on this side of the tracks you went to these and if you lived on that side of the track you went to the other. (TCH-A1/2)

Using the individual student data she had become very familiar with by now, she realized that there were signs that there were many unrecognized and capable children that were not being encouraged or given an opportunity to enroll in pre-AP classes. Adopting the phrase “what is good for the best is good for the rest,” Principal A described her thoughts about moving to pre-AP classes for all students:

I said with Common Core state standards and with all the changes that we're making for college and career ready I am ready to go to all Pre-AP classes. I said well a lot of it is my data and I have watched these kids that have never been given a chance to be in a Pre AP class, they could have the chance to shine. (PRIN-A/12)

Although it was at first a very difficult and unpopular change for some in the community, Principal A and her staff persisted and since summer of 2011 has been operating as an all pre-AP school in its core classes. All of the teachers of these classes voluntarily completed Laying the Foundation training (Laying the Foundation, Inc., 2014) and thus, have met the Arkansas requirement to teach a pre-AP class and all have adopted and follow the rigorous pre-AP curriculum. Interview participants enthusiastically concurred that raising the rigor and



expectations for all students through pre-AP classes has played a significant part in changing the culture of the school and raising the school's overall academic achievement levels:

We lost the cliques. We kind of broke those apart. I think this was one of the things to get us off school improvement. Because if we didn't challenge these kids who weren't trying, if we didn't give them the opportunity to learn all that... (TCH-A1/2)

I had some Pre-AP classes and I had some regular classes and it was as different as black and white. You had all your goody two shoes in this class and then you had your little troublemakers in this one. We blended them all together and we don't have any bad classes, they're all good classes. (PRIN-A/13)

Another program change that Principal A initiated and lead was the adoption of a school-wide formative assessment system - The Learning Institute (TLI) – a testing service through which students could periodically be formatively assessed in math and literacy on attainment of the learning standards for their grade as they moved toward spring state testing. The administration of TLI math, literacy, and science assessments periodically throughout the year continues to be used to drive and fine-tune on-going instruction for both entire groups and individual students. At each administration, Principal A, with the help of the school's instructional facilitator, disaggregates and digests the assessment results and takes this back to the teacher teams. In principal-lead team meetings, with the data-wall in the background, teachers are expected to plan their instruction individually and collaboratively, based on the most current performance of the individual students they share.

Principal A keeps a close eye on the Special Education (SpEd) program. Another realization that heavily impacted her actions when she first examined the school's student data was the possibility that some students were being served in SpEd that might not be eligible for or need the services any longer. While she acknowledges that she is a strong advocate for serving students who are eligible and need such services, what she saw in the data in those early years was a number of students who were scoring proficient or even advanced on the regular

administration of the state exam, and yet remained on the SpEd rosters. She worked with the district's Director of Special Education and together they carefully reviewed all SpEd student records and called review conferences with the parents of those students in question. A number of students were dismissed from service, taken off the SpEd roster, and resumed a full schedule of regular education classes. She kept a close eye on the progress of these particular students while they were in her school to ensure that they did not begin to fall behind or fail. Since then, she acknowledges that she pays particular attention to her SpEd students, especially those she inherits from her feeder school, to make sure that they are not misplaced.

**Teacher Quality.** *Teacher Quality* is a major theme that developed as the data from School A was analyzed. The categories that fit into this theme covered two areas that overlapped somewhat - first, hiring and maintaining strong, effective personnel and second, developing the personnel on staff to their full potential. It is also impossible to separate many of the data pieces found in the *Expectations and Accountability* theme from those that form this theme of *Teacher Quality*. As I analyzed what I was hearing and seeing related to teacher quality in School A, I realized that the high levels of teacher quality that appears to have developed over time and now exist are due in some part to the system of structure and accountability that has become a part of the school's culture. While it is evident that part of teacher quality at School A is a reflection of the inherent good qualities of the people that work there, teacher and staff quality have been developed and enhanced by the existing structure that sets the expectations for their day-to-day performance and the accountability measures Principal A has in place.

A good part of the primary references to items that fell into the first category - hiring and maintaining strong, effective teachers and staff - came from the principal interviews, especially those comments that might be considered personnel issues. Several times during my sessions

with Principal A, she spoke of teachers that she has had some concerns about and sometimes struggled with during her 11 years of tenure. Although every teacher I spoke with during both formal and informal sessions spoke of Principal A with admiration and appreciation, there is evidence (lists that show personnel movement in and out of the district, personnel reassignments, inquiry to the superintendent) to show that Principal A is straight-forward and tough when it comes to giving her staff feedback if their performance or behaviors should become poor and unacceptable. Ever watchful and protective of the performance of her school, she may use student performance data or observations data she has collected from throughout the school as inspiration for conversations with staff. The “data don’t lie” and when necessary, she relies on the “brutal facts” (PRIN-A/ 9) the data may reveal to know when she needs to take on personnel performance issues. Examples Principal A gave of this are:

But it is brutal facts, it’s the data. It’s not me giving a biased opinion, when you lay that down and you say this is it, now why is this happening? (PRIN-A/9)

I was able to give them some feedback that I think in my mind was helpful and I was confident enough because I came out of the classroom. Then they respected me enough to do it. Now in time, some of the people that put their skids on were the old ones fixing to retire, the ones that are my age now. Because, they were burned out, they had been doing it that way all these years and I ruffled their feathers, made some quit, some went ahead and retired. But when you start telling teachers that okay, Ms. Jones, Ms. Smith over here ya’ll are teaching the same thing but her scores are a lot better. What is she doing that you’re not doing and teachers don’t like that. But again, it’s honest feedback. I had to learn to do that, you know, I like people but I was able to do it in such a way that you know, you need to get down there Ms. Jones and Ms. Smith is doing something really good. You always try to do it in a way that you don’t just tear them completely down and she might want to check with you. (PRIN-A/8)

Principal A cited another example of why and how she took a hard line with a teacher, that she believed had to change her behavior to improve the quality of her students’ performance. The teacher was not only exhibiting noncompliant behaviors by not showing up for data and team meetings and, at other times, leaving these meetings early. At the same time she was doing

this, her grade book showed a large number of students in her classes with failing grades.

Principal A determined that 65% of these failing students had scored proficient or advanced on the last spring's state exam. Even more concerning to Principal A was that projections on the formative TLI exams predicted that her students would miss the mark for required growth on the state testing that the students would take in the spring. Here's her account of the exchange that ensued (some comments have been excluded in this quotation but the salient points have been retained):

So, every day in her conference period she would ask to leave. I called her in and I had data. I said you have this many kids (making) making D's and F's and I did my homework. Now of these D's and F's, 65% of these kids were scoring proficient and advanced last year on Benchmark. They are not projected (on the TLI formative assessment) now to score that. I said, okay, let's see your communication log. I said alright, now this one. Where are their names here? Oh, well their parents, they aren't there (teacher saying she can't reach the parent) You know, it's always an excuse. I pulled out my book from the year before, which were those kids and I said, I can tell you every time these parents were communicated with, every time. I mean it's a paper trail. I ask her, what are you going to do? I mean, you just lay it out there. Well, she squirmed, I made her mad and she cried. But when it comes right down to it, she was killing me. Well it rocked on and rocked on and I called her in, she got mad, she cried, she slammed the door. ... Well grades came out and I sent her an e-mail. I need to see you during your conference. There was a little improvement. I didn't have to say a word, she came in, she opened her notebook and she said, now this one's gone (doing better, removed from the failing list) ... that's exactly what I wanted her to do. (PRIN-A/17-18)

Well, that first one was ugly because more than half her kids were failing. I cleaned her clock. . I don't care if she thinks she's right or not, she's not the principal. It wasn't easy but when it got right down to it, those are my kids and I said what are you doing? I just excluded her for a while because she wasn't on my team. I don't like to do that, I don't enjoy doing that but I was PO'd and I said this isn't going to work. It's just like I told another 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher last year, you might want to check into <neighboring school district>. You know, it takes them back because they think they are irreplaceable. She was going to be the first one I was going to put on intensive plan and she is a national board certified teacher. I told her, honey my expectations are way higher than this. I said, you're national board certified, but this is the way we do it. My expectations are no different for her. I've come a long way in doing that. My first few years, I was still working with all the teachers I taught with and in time I've grown, I've matured but I've grown in my position, so I'm confident. But I thought you're not going to come in here and mess us up. Goes back to data, look here's your data. (PRIN-A/18)

I mean, when you lay that data out there they can't argue with it. But I rose to that level of concern. I pulled up that retention book, well this one last year we were here ... you know I don't just make this stuff up for them to do, it all comes full circle, but she made a huge change. It wasn't easy. I didn't like doing it but I can do it, you know. But boy, that changes the feeling and tone of everybody else. Then she started coming around. So now she has come full circle. (PRIN-A/18-19)

In the beginning of her tenure, as she was establishing new programs, expectations, and culture, there were more cases where she felt she had to address such personnel cases, but as she has developed and grown her existing staff and been very selective in hiring new ones, the need for confronting staff members for performance issues has grown less and less. Of her present staff, she says:

I would describe <School A> as a school that has seasoned, solid teachers. I have a wonderful assistant principal and an SR, which is school resource officer. Our staff is unique in that I feel like everyone here, for the most part, is here because of the right reasons. We have teachers that care about kids, everybody, with the exception of maybe just a tiny percent, is here for the right reason. If they are not here for the right reason I have run them off. Can I say that? (PRIN-A/2)

But I like to recruit my teachers so when I have an opening I start on the lookout because I look at them as my kids and only the best that I can find, that doesn't happen every time, but I feel that as a building administrator I do try to recruit and I think it shows because we were able to have a lot of fun with our kids, but then we follow them academically through data and that's what keeps things moving. (PRIN-A/2)

I have had some good strong, strong teachers. They're not in <name of school district > because of the pay but they're here and we are a real diverse community. But I had some folks, and I still do, we have some strong folks that helped and everybody was on the right page... (PRIN-A/4)

In discussing recruiting for quality, Principal A stated:

Something else that has shifted in these ten, eleven, twelve years every time I would have an opening, I tried to find a middle school teacher, a middle school certified teacher. I don't like secondary, my heart is with middle school students, but secondary teachers are different animals. They have the mentality that the bell rings, the kids leave and they stay at their desk. I have to spell it out, when the bell rings guys, I want you in the hall. They have gotten used to me and I have teacher expectations and I teach it to them in PD (professional development). They're my kids, just like their classroom management. They have really fought me the first couple of years, they were thinking she's a nut, but in time I always try to find middle school certified people. I mean, it's a calling. You

know middle schoolers are goofy, but I love them, I just love them, but the teachers - that has been a real shift too, because I've been able to hire my folks. (PRIN-A/10)

She commented further about recruitment and hiring by giving an example of a case where there was pressure from other administrators in the district to hire a particular teacher that she did not believe to be a good fit for the position she was trying to fill. She resisted the pressure, saying, "No, I'll start school without a teacher, my kids deserve better than that" (PRIN-A/11).

Teacher quality in School A is also a reflection of the professional development (PD) the staff has participated in. As a long-time practitioner, I can attest that it is not unusual to hear in schools and from teachers how negatively they view professional development. I got no sense of this in School A but instead witnessed enthusiasm about PD from the participants I interviewed and conversed with during my data collection visits there. As I listened and observed in School A, I reasoned that this was a reflection of the principal's enthusiasm for learning and her openly expressed faith and optimism that growth and improvement in student learning would arise from growing the adult learners on her staff. One comment from Principal A illustrates how strongly she feels about learning for herself and her teachers:

Well PD is the key... I make them sit on the front row ... I think just being open to learning and you know, when you stop learning you should be dead. You know. We have a lot of opportunities here. (PRIN-A/11)

New learning is expected of the teachers and staff at School A. Each of the programs that are named in this chapter's section discussing the *Instruction* theme, required significant changes at School A. Before they were implemented, Principal A, made the arrangements and secured all of the necessary resources to ensure every teacher and staff member involved received adequate initial and follow-up training. She didn't send teachers to training for these programs unless she went along too. She accompanied them on every visit they took to other schools to look at programs and implementation.

*Responding to Student and Parent Needs.* This theme, like the others identified during data analysis, does not stand alone. It too, is intertwined and overlaps with the other themes and categories identified and discussed in School A's story. Within the theme of *Responding to Student and Parent Needs* for School A, it became clear during visits and data collection at School A, the welfare of the students, of individual students specifically, was at the center of everything taking place in the school. This sentiment is clearly an echo of what Principal A believes and says. Teachers in the focus group made this apparent when they stated:

One thing that she'll (referring to Principal A) always say. Is it for the kids. That's what we're here for, we're for the kids. (TCH-A1/20)

And she'll tell us at the beginning of the year. It's all about the kids and if you're not about the kids then maybe you need to find something else to do. (TCH-A4/20)

Several teacher respondents made statements that seemed to indicate that this sentiment saturates the culture of School A and influences how the teachers think about their students as they go about fulfilling their responsibilities as teachers. Examples of this are:

I guess I see the child more now, kind of back to what you said. You know, middle school is such a quirky little time for these kids. Sometimes it is not about the math and it's about the kid and what they need and just digging a little bit deeper. Then I get into a whirlwind where I'm teaching the math, teaching the math, teaching the math and I'm like wait a minute, you know, let's stop and see what does this kid really need, how are they going to learn and just trying to seek different approaches to reach them and their needs. (TCH-A4/5)

The children we are teaching now are not the children we taught last decade or the decade before that. But we were still teaching the same way. When we got slammed with this, AHHHHHHHH and we all went into shock. What are we going to do? We did we had to do - re-evaluate our teaching styles. (TCH-A2/5)

Another point that recurred frequently in my interviews and conversations with both principal and teachers, was how Principal A holds individual and purposeful conversations with students and parents on a regular basis. Once again, data plays a key role in these conversations

and is used to raise and set expectations for both students and their parents. Examples of one teacher's comments are:

... we have had one-on-one conferences with students and explained to them where their progress is on the Benchmark, where they need to go, what they need to do to get there and that's been really great for the kids because no one ever does that with them. (TCH-A4/19)

<Principal A> handles the majority of that. Sometimes we'll have one of the core teachers in there, the counselors are in there, sometimes, we get their parents to come, it just depends on each situation. But that has been great. (TCH-A4/20)

Because she's (Principal A) involved, the parents are involved, the teachers are involved, the student is involved. A lot of times the kids will go OOOHHHH! So it's just another way of raising their level of concern, because hers, of course, was raised when we were on school improvement. Then it just kind of trickles down. And we've explained it to the parents and raised their awareness also. (TCH-A4/20)

Students are not allowed to get lost in the crowd of school and do poorly without the principal noticing. Individual students matter enough to be recognized and called out by Principal A at every possible turn:

She knows what every kid's status is. You know, it is so funny, she'll have them in her office and they'll be in trouble and she'll go and by the way did you know that you are not proficient and you need to be and you are only x amount, you know. It's just part of our culture now. (TCH-A4/4)

Through the examination of the data, Principal A sees to it that struggling learners are identified and that a plan and resources are developed and available to address their deficiencies.

... we were looking at kids really <researcher>. You have a Special Ed background, every kid has their individual plan. (PRIN-A/3)

We found that group ... we called them our bubbles, we courted them, we provided after school tutoring until they cut our finances... we took care of those kids. We met them before school, they had noon study hall, they had after school study halls. I know this 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher she came up here one morning at 8:00 on Saturday morning and she kept that identified group of kids until 3:00. Not every principal has that, I know that, but you just get people that they buy in because they are here for the right reasons. So we did a lot of things. We had before school and we took those kids to Pizza Hut. (PRIN-A/5)



Another recurring topic that surfaced during data gathering and analysis was the special things initiated by the principal and directed at the students to build ownership, belonging, and pride within the student body. One teacher respondent gave this example:

She's made the students like <School A>. She has purchased their T-shirts for them. They all got a T-shirt every year, just something to build morale in the students. (TCH-A1/6)

Another teacher described in detail how Principal A had decided to work on school pride by planning and leading a campus landscaping project to improve their "looked like a prison when you drove up" campus. With the help of a science teacher and a group of 6<sup>th</sup> grade student volunteers, the green space in front of the building was given a total makeover. School A continues to look nice and inviting.

### **The Case of School B**

#### **The School**

School B is a junior high school that includes grades seven and eight. Its enrollment was 181 students (55% Caucasian, 38% African American, 7% Other) during the 2012-2013 school year. It is located in the northeast quadrant of Arkansas in a section of the state that is thought of as farming country. Seventy-six percent of its students receive free and reduced meals. There are nine classified staff persons and 25 licensed staff employed at this school. Nineteen of those are classroom teachers. The small town in which School B is located had a 2010 census population of 7,879. Although this number is slightly more than it was in the year 2000, and the percentage of citizens between the age of 5 and 19 has remained fairly constant, school personnel state that the students enrollment for the school district has decreased significantly over the last few years. In the junior high alone the enrollment once hovered around 500 students and has now fallen to 181 students.

## Selection of the Site

School B was selected as a site for inclusion into this study because it is a secondary school (junior high) whose students failed for several years to score high enough on the state's annual spring assessments to meet the state's academic standards. Although the school did slow the progression of their improvement status by meeting standard in three single, isolated years (2004-2005, 2006-2007, 2009-2010), by the year 2010-2011, they were designated in year six of school improvement status. Once the accountability system changed for Arkansas (as was described previously, beginning on page 145 in the *Post-Proposal Adjustment in Rationale for Selection of Participating Schools* section of this chapter), School B was one of only eight secondary schools across the state that made significant enough improvements during both the 2012 and 2013 school years to be reclassified as an achieving school. Additionally, School B was also designated as one of only nine public schools in the state to be classified as "exemplary". They were awarded this designation by the Arkansas Department of Education because their students met annual measureable objectives in all subgroups and demonstrated high levels of progress for all students and a subgroup of students.

Principal B1 described the school's history with student achievement and improvement status this way:

We got down to state-directed year-six school improvement two years ago. From 2004 through 2011-2012, I guess we made test scores twice but we couldn't put them back to back and you know you had to make them two years in a row to get off of it. We made them two years I think in that seven year span but we just never could put them back to back. We'd make them and then not make them for a couple and then make them again and not for a couple. (PRIN-B2/5-6)

He explained the subgroup portion of the exemplary status as follows:

We got it for closing the achievement gap. Our minority kids outscored our white kids in literacy last year for the first time in the history of the school. (PRIN-B1/32)

Table 4.4, assembled from information taken from multiple Arkansas Department of Education (2014) status reports, illustrates the accountability designations for School B between 2004-2005 and 2012-2013.

Table 4.4

*School B's Academic Accountability Status for Years 2003-2012*

Year	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12	12-13
Status	SI-2(M)	SI-3	SI-3(M)	SI-4	SI-5	SI-5(M)	SI-6	Ach(NI)	Ach

SI = School Improvement (M) = Met Standards Ach = Achieving NI = Needs Improvement

**The Principals**

When I contacted School B's central office to ask the district's superintendent for consent to conduct a study in one of his schools, I determined that the principal of School B had been in place for just five months. Because the purpose of my study was focused on the leadership of the principal who had had been in place during the change and time of improvement, I was about to reject School B as a study site. Conversing further with the superintendent, I learned that the principal who had been at School B during the critical time of change and improvement was indeed available for interview and could be found at the high school where he is now principal. I also learned that the present principal had served as half-time assistant principal at School B for 4 years prior to moving into the principal's position, and therefore, she could also be a relevant source of information for this study. Both individuals consented to participate in the study.

The ex-principal of School B held that position during the previous two years – the years that the significant improvements were shown – and was the leader I focused on for this study. He (PRIN-B1) served at School B as Dean of Students for 6 years prior to becoming the principal. Describing himself as a “local”, all of his experience in public education has been in one district, where he has been employed for 31 years. Prior to becoming the Dean of Students at the junior high nine years ago, he was a health and physical education teacher and athletic coach.

The current principal is also from the town where School B is located. She has accrued 33 total years of experience as an educator. Twenty-one of these were spent as a high school science teacher. She then moved into the counselor's position for a number of years and four years ago became an assistant principal split equally between the high school and junior high school campuses.

### **Collection of Data**

**Principal B1 and B2 Interviews and Conversations.** Data were collected through direct contact with two principals at School B, the newly appointed current principal (PRIN-B2) and the previous principal (PRIN-B1) who held the assignment during the 2 years the school showed significant improvement. My exchanges with Principal B2 were more extensive since it was reasoned that information he could provide would be more relevant for answering the questions posed by this study.

Principal B1 and B2 were interviewed together initially during which the questions found in Appendix D were used for guidance and focus. This interview took place in Principal B2's office over a period of approximately 90 minutes. The interview was interrupted several times when Principal B2's phone rang, she answered it, and carried on a conversation while remaining at the table. Two times, the interview was interrupted by students and staff who entered the room needing her attention. In each case, Principal B1 continued to respond to the interview topic. Because Principal B2 remained at the table during these interruptions, I found it difficult to stay focused on my conversation with him at times but was able to cleanly separate this out in transcription. Subsequently, I exchanged emails with Principal B1, asking clarifying questions of him and then went for a second site visit during which I held an unstructured conversation with him of approximately 45 minutes. The formal interview was recorded and later transcribed.

During and following the unstructured conversation I kept notes, using my field journal. All email exchanges were logged as documents.

**Focus Group B Interviews and Conversations.** The arrangement I made with Principal B2, the current principal, for the initial interview with the teacher focus group was that she would talk with them about my visit, including setting the time and place and make sure each had a copy of the cover letter, consent form, and interview question that I had forwarded to her so they could be given to the teachers. This did not occur. Instead, on the day of the interview the principal offered to try and find teachers who would be willing to meet with me immediately after school. I agreed to this, and four teachers from School B consented to participate in the study.

This initial interview lasted approximately 50 minutes. Because they had not received any of the preparatory information or materials, I used a significant amount of time at the beginning of the interview to share the context and purpose for my study and obtained their consent. Each of the participants lived out-of-town, were members of a car pool, stated at the beginning that they could not stay long, and glanced at their watches throughout the interview. I began the interview using the questions in Appendix E but abandoned this and combined several of the formal questions into one to try and get as much information as I could in the short time allotted. Although useful information was obtained during this interview, the thoroughness and depth of the data collected fell short of what I had hoped for. A second site visit to the school was conducted and I had unstructured conversations with three individuals from the original group interviewed. These conversations were not recorded but notes were taken using my field journal and these were entered into the data for School B.

**Observations and documents.** During my second site visit to School B, I was permitted to observe in hallways and classrooms throughout the building. Relevant documents were examined and when possible, they were copied. Those that I was not permitted to copy were examined and notes taken to document their salient contents.

### **Presentation of the Data**

*The Presentation of Axial Codes (Major Themes).* Axial codes emerged as the data collected from School B, including my encounters with Principal B1, Principal B2, and the focus group teachers were analyzed, and from this five themes were identified. These were (a) climate and culture, (b) expectations and accountability, (c) instruction, (d) responding to student needs, and (e) interacting with parents and community.

The axial codes or themes developed during analysis of data collected for School B are shown in Table 4.5. Beneath each axial code are examples of open codes identified during analysis that supported development of the theme. The open codes are reflective of principal traits, behaviors, processes and actions.

Table 4.5

*Axial Codes and Sample of Open Codes for School B*

Climate & Culture	Expectations & Accountability	Instruction	Responding to Student Needs	Interacting with Parents & Community
Respect for Principal	Discipline Posted/ Communicated	Increased Time for Literacy/Math	Discipline Posted/ Communicated	Resources/Rewards for Students
Relationships	Student Expectations	Good Hires	Relationships	Open Door
Responding to Teacher Needs	Basics Expected in Every Classroom	Help from Outside	Equitable Treatment & Enforcement	Principal's Reputation & Traits
Motivation	System Change - New Ideas to Principal First	Teams & Collaboration	Performance Rewards	Respect for Principal
Establishing Expectations for Students/Teachers	Gentle Reminders			
Organization				
Discipline				
Open Door				



## The Themes

The themes that emerged from analysis of the data collected at School B were (a) climate and culture, (b) expectations and accountability, (c) instruction, (d) responding to student needs, and (e) interacting with parents and community. Data from multiple sources - interviews, conversations, observations, and documents – were triangulated to validate and support these themes.

**Climate and Culture.** Early in the first interview with Principal B1, he credited the turnaround in School B that led to their increase in academic improvement to a “change in the climate and the chemistry” (PRIN-B1/7). Throughout the interviews I conducted with the principals and the teachers, responses referred both directly and indirectly, to changes in the school’s climate and culture time and again. Completion of the analysis process confirmed this.

My first interview with the teachers revealed their belief that changes in the school’s climate and culture, influenced by Principal B1’s personal traits and the actions and programs he initiated, were significant factors that contributed to the improvements they were able to bring about in student achievement scores. The assignment of their new principal (Principal B1) appeared to be the catalyst that ignited these significant changes. When he assumed the position, the staff was already very familiar with him because he had worked in the school as the Dean of Students for a number of years. The appreciation and respect they held for him was both stated and inferred throughout my conversations with them. When asked why and how their school had changed so much, one teacher described the environment prior to his taking over this way:

We’ve talked a lot about this just among ourselves. ...the school climate here was, it was, I would call it disorganized. Their expectations were not clear, teachers, I mean, the organization was poor. (TCH-B1/2)

This same teacher went on to describe what happened once Principal B1 took over:

... he had been the vice principal (official designation was “Dean of Students”) so he understood, you know, the things that needed to change and you know, we set out from the very beginning with our expectations and we just kind of on our own developed a discipline plan that went across the school. All the teachers agreed on what to do. The school climate changed. It went from chaotic and unorganized to, you know, things flowed nicely in the hallway, kids were, I’d say, well behaved. You know, we had a few discipline issues but as a whole the school climate was really good. (TCH-B1)

When I asked the focus group to tell me more about what significant changes lead to their improved academic status, one teacher responded by giving Principal B1 much of the credit as he talked:

I just feel like it all goes back to <Principal B1’S> attitude. When he came in, the attitude he had of professionalism, respect for us, you know, we already respected him because, like the three of us, we had worked with him the year before (as Dean of Students). We knew what kind of person he was, we already respected him as a person and as an administrator because he was there already. I think it all goes back to the attitude of everyone involved when he came on board as our principal instead of just being our Dean of Students he was the principal and, I mean, the attitude of everyone I think made the big difference. (TCH-B3/6)

Principal B1 attributed his own motivation for initiating the changes that influenced climate and culture to the status of the school when he took over. At that time, its improvement designation had reached state-directed, year six. Because of the serious academic deficits this indicated, personnel from the Arkansas Department of Education were assigned to work directly and on-site with School B1. He described why and how his motivation to change the school arose from this:

So we actually had the State Department in our building once every three or four weeks, in here talking to us, recommending this that and the other. Anyway, I made a vow to myself, I said I appreciate those people but we can do this, we can take care of ourselves. I want to get us off improvement where they don’t have to come suggest to us and tell us what we need to do. I felt like I knew this building, I knew our kids, I knew our parents probably better than what somebody from the State Department and I don’t mean that to be mean, but that’s just kind of how I felt ... That was an incentive, too ... I wanted to get them out of the building. (PRIN-B1/5-6)

Principal B1 again referred to this in the interview by saying:

I just went to them (the staff at the school) and told them look, here is what we need to do y'all. We're on school improvement, y'all do not want state department people in your classrooms. Oh no <Principal B1> we don't, so what do we need to do? Well, we've got to identify kids, we've got to study our data, we've got to just figure out what areas we need to work in. (PRIN-B1/9)

From the beginning of his tenure, Principal B1 expressed confidence in the teachers' abilities and skills, both with words and actions. He expressed praise for them freely:

He complemented, he was very complementary. Like I said, he would come in your classroom, he would stick his head in, he would, you know, visually look at your classroom. He would come in and sit two or three minutes and, you know, he might say things like wow, that was amazing, that discussion or whatever. He was very complementary. (TCH-B1/8)

This positively influenced how the teachers perceived their work environment and increased their professional self-confidence. Numerous times during my interviews with teachers, they talked of how this improved feeling tone in the building, improved the overall climate, and motivated them in their work:

One thing I will say about <Principal B1>, I'll never forget this. He told us at our first meeting, you're teachers, you know job, you know what you're supposed to do and I expect you to do that. It wasn't, I'm going to come in here and make sure you're doing it. It was I expect you to do it. I think that goes back to his honesty. That was our first day of in-service. He just said, you're a teacher, you know what your job is, I expect you to do it. He didn't come to our room everyday opening the door to see if you were doing it, he expected you to do your job. And I think, part of it, maybe it's in the respect that goes back to him, you wanted to do your job because not only was he expecting it from you, it goes back to that respect for him maybe. Just the way he put it, I'll never forget that first day. You know your job, do your job, I'm going to let you do your job. (TCH-B3/4)

Another described how Principal B's demonstrated professional respect for teachers this way:

Yeah, he let us be professionals. We're professionals and we're trained to do what we do and we shouldn't need babysitting. ... he didn't micromanage, he, how shall I say this, I don't want to say he depended a lot on his teachers, but he let us make decisions. He would throw things out there and say what do you guys want to do. So, he never, we were always able to talk to each other and work things out ... He let us do our own teaching style. (TCH-B1/4-5)

To further make this point, this exchange compared him to a previous principal they felt had been detrimental to the climate and culture of the school:

(TCH-B2/5): There was a principal here several years ago ... and she wanted them to follow a certain teaching style ... he (Principal B1) said that everybody has their own teaching style and he allowed us to do that.

(TCH-B1/6): I think that was huge. I think that's really, really big. Because I have taught in a lot of places and one of the things that hurts professionals is when you put them in a box and everybody has to teach the same way, do the same thing, that's just not the art of teaching. So, he let us be free to do.

(TCH-B3/7): We went from being under the microscope and micromanaged, where we had no freedom to just do our job under the principal before, to <Principal B1> with the attitude of you know your job, do your job, I'm happy with that. I feel like the principal our first year here to <Principal B1> was night and day. I think that made all the difference.

Teachers related throughout their responses how their workplace satisfaction increased because of Principal B1's responded to their needs. One described it this way:

... he was very supportive of anything. I feel like anything we needed or wanted he was very supportive of that. Anything we were doing that would support the kids, he is 100% whatever is going to support the kids, whatever is going to help the kids learn better, do better in class, that's what he's for. (TCH-B3/6)

In this exchange, the teachers described how Principal B1 responded to both their material needs and their emotional needs. It illustrates how provision of these resources improved the climate and influenced their work performances:

TCH-B1/9: ... he did work hard to give us what we thought we needed to help us get the job done. That automatically boosts morale. If you have all the tools you need to get your job done, you're going to want to do your job every day.

TCH-B2/9: For me he is just very complementary.

TCH-B1/9: You felt valued. He was, you are highly valued here.

TCH-B2/9: He even said, he doesn't take any of the credit, he should, but he says I don't take this credit for the test scores, he give us the credit for it.

This demonstration of respect for and trust in their professional skills and abilities lead them to appreciate and enjoy their work environment much more than they previously had. They related how this also motivated them to take on the harder work of meeting Principal B1's

challenging goal of improving the students' achievement levels enough to make the Department of Education leave their building. I ask Principal B1 this - about teacher efficacy, whether they were willing to own the problems in the school, what he did if this did not happen, and how he created a climate so that teachers wanted to do the hard work. This is how he and Principal-B2 responded:

I guess my teachers just came to me and they kept telling me, <Principal B1> you just, you are good to us, we believe in you. What you tell us is the truth, you stand behind us, you back us, you're genuine, we know what you tell us. That's the truth. (PRIN-B1/15) I mean when you have a boss that supports you, that you feel comfortable with, you can go and talk to them about any issues they might have had in their classroom and he genuinely listens. This is what I think a lot of people like about him because I know this is what I like about him. If he doesn't know, he'll say well you know what I don't know but I'll find out for you and he really does. He don't forget, he'll find out for you and he doesn't mind saying I don't know. I think the teachers embrace that with, to have a boss that doesn't know. His personality is such it makes you want to do well for him. It makes you want to do the best job you can. It's just, like he mentioned early on, the changing of the whole school climate ... it was just that closeness that the teachers had for one another. (PRIN-B2/15)

The preceding response contains a common thread that I witnessed throughout my interactions with School B personnel and during data analysis. Principal B1 skillfully developed relationships with and among his staff and relied heavily on this to motivate them. Improved relationships became the primary impetus for driving the changes that led to the school's improved climate and culture and eventually, the improvement in student achievement status. Here is another example of how his behavior showed positive regard toward his teachers which in turn, he expected would motivate and inspire them:

...my first year here, I had some ideas. One of the big things I felt like we had to change was the chemistry of the building. Constant turnover with staff, people in and out and I just think a lot of them were here - seemed like just for a job and I'm sure that's at lots of schools. I made it a point to, when I became the principal, to go see every one of them and make them feel important, tell them what I wanted to do, where we'd been, you are important and everything. I don't care if you're the PE teacher or whatever, you can help us. We can do some cross-curricular, we do some math skills in PE, and we can do some literacy skills, we can write in PE in class. We did a lot of that... (PRIN-B1/6)

Principal B stated how he deliberately took measures to improve relationships among the staff:

The first year I was principal if I knew of a problem between a teacher or two teachers we brought it to the office and we didn't let it go two or three days and we sat down I'd just say ya'll know what the problem is, ya'll talk to me and we'd walk out of there in ten minutes time and have it fixed and then everybody would be... I can't remember anybody in the two years, you know, holding on to something, say I can't get along with them. It was just everybody just pulled for each other and everything. (PRIN-B1/15-16)

The teachers talked of how Principal B1 encouraged and facilitated team work among the staff, saying, "team players... there is no dissension in the staff. We all get along. That's important, I think we all work together" (TCH-B1/4).

Students too, were caught up in the changes that transformed the school's climate and culture. Just as Principal B1 found ways to show respect and develop relationships with the teachers, he also worked with his staff to do the same with students. Principal B1 and Principal B2 describe how this was done:

PRIN-B1/6: ... made our kids feel important too. Just lost of different things we did for them. Like I said, made our kids feel important too. Just lots of different things we did for them. We started a mentoring program with teachers. They would pick out a kid or two and we would identify kids walking down the hallway with their head down, wouldn't speak to people. So, we gave each teacher a couple of kids and we start calling them by their name, ask them how they were doing, anything we could help them with. In two weeks time you could see those kids change. They'd come down that hallway and...

PRIN-B2/6: Holding their head up, smiling.

PRIN-B1/6: They'd start looking, their heads would be up and they'd be smiling and they were looking for the teacher, you know, how are you doing Susie and before it was, you might say hi, how are you. But we would start calling them by name and it just, the kids mentality changed, it was like they really do care about us around here. I thought that was a major....

PRIN-B2/6: Turn around.

Along with these efforts to improve relationships with students a new discipline system was adopted school-wide (discussed further in the next section, *Establishing and Monitoring*

*Expectations*). As a result, the behavior incidents and referrals in the building began to diminish significantly – by 2/3 in the first year of implementation (PRIN-B1/6). This positively affected the work environment for the teachers and the learning environment for the students.

As will be discussed further in the *Interacting with Parents and Community* theme section for School B, Principal B1 practiced an open-door policy to facilitate communication with students, staff, and the community and improve the culture in the school and in the surrounding community. This is one example where he referenced this:

I think our communication is good ... any questions or if you don't understand anything the office is open, call me or come by and see me. Once again, if you don't understand let me know and we'll fix it. If I don't understand I'll find and I'll fix it. (PRIN-B1/28)

The teachers also felt Principal B's open-door policy improved the school climate, expressing that this practice gave them "comfort". One described it this way:

He's always told the kids as well as us that he has an open door policy. We can come to him at anytime, you know. He told the kids that numerous times, even ones that would get in trouble, and hey if you need to talk to me my door is open. We knew that, that we could go to him ... (TCH-B2/5)

**Expectations and Accountability.** In the preceding section, *Climate and Culture*, it was noted that prior to Principal B1's taking over as principal at the school, the participants saw the school as disorganized with unclear expectations. Throughout the interviews, a number of examples of how Principal B1 raised and clarified expectations for both staff and students were given and thus, *Expectation and Accountability* was identified as a theme during the axial coding process. During analysis I noted there were few references that included expectations specific to setting academic expectations for students. Most of what was volunteered during interviews had more to do with expectations related to order and the environment.

I asked Principal B1 about whether there were expectations and standards that he looked for when he visited classrooms and if so, how were these communicated. He answer did not

address classroom standards at first but instead, he described the teachers' need for clarity in day-to-day procedures - something that he believed prior administrators had been lax about.

I'm glad you brought that up. That is another thing that we went years here with our pre-school workshops where we just didn't give our teachers enough information. New teachers would come in and they wouldn't even know where to park. They would not know where to park in the parking area. What time are we supposed to be here? Again, that is some of those things that I probably should have told the principals (referring to when he was the Dean of Students and tended to keep quiet). These are things you need to go over, but ... even the teachers have to be told, but we did, during our pre-school workshop in August, we sat down like you said at a meeting and we would go over from the time they had to be here to where they parked, to where their duty was, what they were expected to do at duty, where you are between classes, procedures for checking in and out if you left campus. Just everything. Everything we could think of. They really appreciated that. (PRIN-B1/20-21)

Later in othe interview when I asked Principal B1 again about whether there were standard performance expectations for his staff. He indicated there were. Principal B2 described some of the standard expectations Principal B1 had in place before she replaced him as principal five months earlier. She said:

I told them (the staff) after <Principal B1> had moved up, you know, I don't expect too many things to change because we have got something good going on here. I said, so we are going to maintain you're turning in lesson plans on time, we're going to maintain standards framework, number, relevance, objective being on the board. Those are the kind of things when I walk into your classroom, I want to observe. Bell-to-bell teaching. Five minutes before that bell rings, if I walk by a classroom and those kids are standing up at the door raring to go, then me and <teacher> is going to have a talk. It's those kind of things. Like I said, I was blessed ... he's made my job a lot easier being a first time ... (PRIN-B2/18-19)

She stated that these were also clearly communicated in the teacher handbook that Principal B1 had developed for his teachers and gone over step-by-step during teacher orientation.

Principal B1 expressed the importance of setting and clearly communicating expectations to staff so they would feel more comfortable and secure as they worked. When the established expectations were not met, both principals and teachers indicated that Principal B1 would follow up with appropriate actions to get things back on track. The following quotes Principal B1,



describing how he typically responded when staff did not meet expectations, and one of the focus group teachers who described a personal experience:

... I think it goes back to what we were talking about just a few minutes ago. They (the staff) trust us, they know we're going to tell them and if they make a mistake and it's an honest mistake I'm not going to jump down their throat...Hey, here's what you did and let's get this fixed. (PRIN-B1/21)

... he felt something I was doing was not what needed to be done and he called me in and said you know, you're doing this, why are you doing this and we talked about it and in the end he said okay, well I think you need to do this. I mean, I feel like he was one of those people he just, he called you in, you talked about it, he told you what was wrong, he told you why it was wrong, that he expected you to change it and maybe it goes back to that respect thing, you just had enough respect for him that you wanted to change it. (TCH-B3/4)

This issue of responding to non-compliance arose later in my interview with Principal B1 when I asked about flexibility in his leadership practices. He responded:

People ask me all the time, do you ever break any school rules and I say I've never broken one in my life but boy I can sure take them and bend them. And my philosophy is, you can't treat everybody the same. You can have policies and procedures and things but then something comes up that goes against the norm ... Yes ma'am, I do, I do have to change. I just think that goes back to being able to communicate with people. Because you have to. Just like the teacher, and know your kids, you have to know your teachers. I know some of them need that sit down, pretty good talking to, and there're others you kind of have to.... (unfinished sentence). Behind closed doors, I'm not a holler'er and a screamer. I get aggravated. That's just when, you know, when you tell an adult something once and they don't do it and then the second time, I don't want to tap again and when it does, then you have to talk to them...behind closed doors every now and then you just ... (unfinished sentence) (PRIN-B1/27-28)

Student behavioral expectations had not been developed, communicated, and monitored consistently in the years leading up to Principal B1's assignment as principal. This was causing significant problems during the time that Principle B1 was still Dean of Students. Referring to the high number of referrals that were sent to the principal's office during that time, he said, "We were having, you know, three or four years ago, we were having hundreds and hundreds of referrals a year" (PRIN B1/19). A school-wide discipline plan was not in place during that time

that established and communicated behavioral expectations and consequences to the students. Additionally, teachers were given no expectations and little guidance about how they were to respond when student discipline incidents occurred in their classrooms. The principals and teachers described how the discipline consequences that were doled out to students were often inconsistent and perceived as unfair.

Unclear expectations for classroom instructional practices may have contributed to discipline problems during this time. Principal B1 alludes to this and mentions an instructional expectation that became standard for the school once he became principal as follows:

I know this is, you hear this everywhere, but if kids are engaged they do not get in trouble and that's about as true a fact as I've heard. If you keep them busy and keep them engaged then they are not going to be cutting up in class so we pretty much taught bell-to-bell... (PRIN-B1/6)

Principal B was also concerned about the implications for students of missed instructional time when sent out of the classroom for discipline infractions. To make this point he said:

Of course, during that time too we had teachers that, you know, kid would whisper something to somebody and they would say you go to the office, you go to the office, you know. I told them that, as soon as I became principal. Y'all, we're wasting instruction time, handle that. Handle that yourself ... I certainly don't mind seeing kids. As a matter of fact, I like talking to them, but you know, even for discipline issues I think I'm good at dealing with them and helping them, but I would rather them stay in that class (PRIN-B/20-21).

Because Principal B1 and the staff realized that student discipline was a serious impediment to students' academic success and had to be dealt with, development of a school-wide student behavior plan took place in the summer before his first year as principal began. Two primary reasons motivated their efforts: (1) the high number of referrals to the office had become too difficult and time consuming for the principal to manage, and (2) students sent to the office were missing crucial instruction time in the classroom. Focus group teachers described how the plan was developed and disseminated:

TCH-B1/2: ...we set out from the very beginning with our expectations and we just kind of on our own developed a discipline plan that went across the school. All the teachers agreed on what to do. The school climate changed. It went from chaotic and unorganized to, you know, things flowed nicely in the hallway, kids were, I'd say, well behaved. You know, we had a few discipline issues but as a whole the school climate was really good ... we started off with the expectations so that every kid in the building knew what we expected and it was posted in all of our rooms.

TCH-B2/2: We all had the same expectations. We had the same consequences, same expectations, we spent the first week if not longer, every teacher said this is what we expect. It just made everything flow.

Principal B1 also shared his role in communicating procedural expectations for student behavior:

The first morning of school we have an orientation session with the kids and we get 50-60% turnout, but that first day of school when everybody's here, I have a meeting with the students and I go over expectations with them. Here's how we're going to behave in the hallway, here's what we can do between classes, here's when you can go to the restroom, but you have to communicate. (PRIN-B1/20-21)

With implementation of the new system, the discipline referrals to the office dropped drastically, allowing Principal B1 more time to be outside of his office and visible in the school, particularly in the hallways.

... our discipline, the first year I was principal was cut by 2/3 the first year. We had a little five step program that we used in the classroom, steps that you had to go through before you would send a child to the office. That seemed to help tremendously too. (PRIN-B1/6)

Principal B1's practice of being visible around the school, particularly in the hallways, was identified by the teachers as one of the most important daily practices he exercised. He described the practice as his most reliable way to monitor for compliance with the performance expectations he had established for both staff and students:

I spent a lot of time up and down the hallways. Not necessarily going in and sitting for fifteen or twenty minutes at a time. I do a lot of that (referring to the hallways). ...it's almost routine for me ... almost every period. I was just watching to see if everybody's engaged, is that teacher up, sometimes I would look in, as we mentioned, I want to make sure I can see that objective on the board, that it is written, that they are working towards something that period. A lot of times, I will just open that door and step in. <Teacher>, how's everything going today, you know. The kids go hey <Principal B1>. It interrupts for about a minute and I didn't like doing that, but I just felt it was good to show the

teachers I was there and visible. The teachers that I knew were going to be alright, I didn't have to spend as much time. I knew they were going to be up, I knew they were going to take care of their business. I knew when I went by there, like with a minute to go in that class, about a minute left, they'd say okay we're through now you can start gathering your things, not five minutes before. (PRIN-B1/31)

The teachers expressed appreciation of Principal B1's visible presence, with one describing it this way:

...every time I came out in the hallway between classes we had to monitor, I look for <Principal>. If <Principal> was there I felt better. You know, I just knew there was somebody looking out, somebody cared, somebody was hanging out, I don't know. Maybe it is a sense of security that I need personally to be able to do my job. (TCH-B1/12)

**Instruction.** The first theme presented in this section was *Climate and Culture*. That section illustrates how Principal B1 recognized his teachers as the experts in their classrooms. They in turn, believed that this approach and his allowing them the freedom to practice their personal teaching styles was cause for positive changes in the school's climate and culture and contributed to eventual improvements in student achievement. Interestingly, a related point that was made by the teachers and may have influenced why he left a large part of the classroom and instruction decisions to the teachers, was his self-admitted, limited expertise of curriculum.

During my exchanges with him Principal B1 hardly used any vocabulary and educational jargon that is commonly used in today's educational literature and training. Admittedly, as a fellow practitioner with many years focusing on curriculum and instruction, this was unexpected. Because of this, early in my first interview with him, I found the absence of such vocabulary and language to cause me to question his expertise and ability to influence teaching and instruction. Deliberately putting this bias aside, I listened during interviews, analysis of the interview transcripts and other data sources, not for particular words, but to the content of what was said by Principal B1. I wondered if he might have more knowledge and skill in this area than either he

or the teachers realized. Analysis of the data revealed a number of examples where Principal B1 made decisions or took significant actions related to teaching and instruction that did influence the academic gains made by the school, thus supporting the development of *Instruction* as a theme for School B. The findings that are reported in the remainder of this section describe how both he and his staff questioned his expertise in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, but it also provides examples to illustrate ways in which he positively influenced these areas during his tenure as principal.

Prior to Principal B's being chosen to lead School B as their principal, there was doubt expressed among the staff about his limited knowledge in the areas related to instruction. This was described by teachers:

TCH-B2/6: I'm just going to be honest and say that there were people, there was one teacher that even said that she would leave if he became principal because he knew nothing about curriculum. He'd been a coach, you know. There were teachers who expressed that concern and I can't say I wasn't one of them. I didn't say anything out loud, but there was a little concern there.

TCH-B3/6: We all had those thoughts I think. I mean, love him to death but curriculum is not his strong point and he will tell you. He knew that, he recognized that.

Throughout his tenure as principal some continued to express their belief that he had limited knowledge and skills in this area. However, they also expressed that they did not believe this was a hindrance to their efforts at improving student achievement. One way the focus group made this point was by saying even if Principal B1 stepped back and had no involvement in curriculum and classroom instruction, they would continue to perform well. To this point, one participant pointed out that Principal B's role in curriculum and instruction was still crucial in another way:

TCH-B1/12: But you need some kind of encouragement. You need to know you're doing a good job, you gotta have some feedback somewhere. At least I do. I have to know.

TCH-B2/12: But we would still do the same thing that we've been doing.

When I asked Principal B1 if he knew as much about curriculum, instruction, and assessment as his teachers did, his simple response was, “no ma’am” (PRIN-B1/22). He continued by explaining that he did not need to be an expert in math content to know if a teacher was being effective in its delivery to students. Numerous times he expressed his belief that he could recognize good instruction when he saw it and could judge good instruction simply by observing whether the students were demonstrating understanding of what was being taught.

Although as stated earlier, Principal B does not use formal jargon and expressed doubt about his own expertise in this area, he seemed to have used observation and experience from the years he has been a Dean of Students and worked with a number of principals as a guide for his own practice in the principal’s office. Having seen leadership practices and instructional approaches come and go gave him a basis for making judgments about what to implement – what might be successful and what would not. He also sought out the advice other professionals:

Like I say, I call principals at other schools and talk to people all the time. You know, what is working for you, what’s not working, why. (PRIN-B1/23)

PRIN-B1 shared during interview that he had spent years as Dean of Students, not feeling qualified to make decisions or speak up when he saw something that did not seem right or beneficial for students. This, he reasoned was because he was not a licensed administrator, and therefore would be overstepping the bounds of his position. He seemed to sincerely regret this:

...looking back now I wish I had been more active as the Dean of Students because, you know, I saw things that it didn’t sound like the teacher understood, or the kids didn’t understand for whatever reason. And I kept thinking, I’m not going to do that if I ever get to be the principal. I can remember times when, I can remember sitting in a faculty meeting and we were looking at data years ago and somebody saying well these kids are so low they have no chance of making it, so we really don’t need to worry about those kids. I’m sitting there thinking please don’t write off a kid. I don’t care if they’re, we can move them, we can show a little growth with them even if they’re, the worst kid in the school can learn something. There’s something they can learn. And I’m a believer in that and I can remember sitting there and that kind of thing being said in a faculty meeting. (PRIN-B1/14-15)

With what I interpreted as sincere modesty about taking credit for positive outcomes, when Principal B1 was asked about what he did or how he influenced the improvement of student achievement, he would often express in some way that he was not sure of how it had happened. When asked what changes were made specific to academics and the classroom instruction that contributed to the improvement in their student assessment scores, he responded with a message that was repeated in some version or other throughout my conversations with him:

A lot of it the things from my ideas, when I became a principal, and of course this as elementary as it can get, all the years, like I said that I sat around here, I had decided that you identify the problems that you are having, you identify the kids that are struggling and you fix it. Then you have to find out how you're going to fix it. We went years and years and we wouldn't help the kids that were needing that. (PRIN-B1/8)

In contrast, during several exchanges with the focus group teachers, that they claimed full credit and took ownership of both the development of ideas and the implementation of many of the changes that lead to their school's academic improvements. Since the data clearly indicates Principal B1's active role in the conceptualization, initiation, and implementation of many of these changes, it is likely that their perceptions and feelings of ownership arose as a result of his use of the leadership strategies described in the *Climate and Culture* section – developed relationships, expressed almost unbounded respect for their expertise, and promoted means to ensure their significant input into developing key decisions for operating the school and their classrooms. Clearly, he was quite comfortable giving credit to his staff for the successes the school experienced. A teacher expressed Principal B1's generosity this way, “He even said, he doesn't take any of the credit, he should, but he says I don't take this credit for the test scores, he gives us the credit for it” (TCH-B2/9).

There were changes in teaching and instruction in School B that Principal B1 was

responsible for initiating and helping to implement. The first was to double-block literacy. He indicated that school's mathematics achievement scores had historically been better than their literacy scores so that became their first target for improvement. As mentioned earlier, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) sent in consultants to work with School B because the achievement test scores students had earned in the spring before Principal B was assigned had the school ranked at state-directed year six of school improvement. This required, with help and oversight from an ADE consultant, the development of a 45 to 60 day plan to address the deficit areas that existed. Fortunately, the school was assigned a consultant whose hometown was the community where School B is located, making the experience more palatable and meaningful for the principal and staff. Poor literacy achievement was the most significant deficit that was identified and thus, the plan that was developed and implemented when Principal B1's first year as principal began was to double-block literacy. As a replacement for a single period English class where the teacher was expected to cover instruction in both reading and writing, every student was scheduled for two periods of literacy – one for reading and one for writing.

Mathematics achievement had historically been much higher at School B than literacy achievement but there was still concern that it too, needed a boost. There was not enough time in the student schedule to double-block math but they were able to set aside one extra period, one day per week to provide students with extra instruction in math with a focus on the skills the data showed as weakest.

Specialists from the local education cooperative were brought in to provide on-site literacy training for literacy teachers and for content teachers. All teachers were provided training that enabled them to create and use effective standards-based lesson plans.



At the same time the instructional time for math and literacy was increased, the district provided the resources to hire instructional aides for every mathematics and literacy classroom. Whole-group instruction was provided by the licensed teacher for the entire class at the beginning of each session but during the last 15-20 minutes, the struggling students would be pulled to the back of the room to work on targeted skills. Principal B1 described this and the success that came from these changes:

...it was instrumental in helping pull them up. Again, it just everything it seemed like we tried worked, you know, from the mentoring to the one-on-one. Like I said, my philosophy was so simple it was just identify what's wrong, what areas are these kids struggling in, identify them, pull them out and fix it. It just, we had kids that had never made test scores before, you know, even back in elementary, that all of a sudden were becoming proficient. (PRIN-B1/8)

There were some references to use of data to guide and improve instruction throughout the interviews. I asked how the school accomplished formative assessments throughout the year. They (principals and teachers) had used and liked the system provided through a contract with The Learning Institute (TLI) until three years ago. They (the principals) expressed frustration that their district's superintendent had, without input from the staff, cancelled the contract with TLI and had replaced it with the services of another provider. The teachers continue to be disappointed with this decision because they find the new formative assessment system much more difficult and time-consuming to use.

Because teacher quality directly impacts teaching and instruction, Principal B1 was asked for information about the quality of the teachers in School B, whether there had been any need for improvement, and if so, how did he address the need. Both principals shared, in light of the challenges that came with state-directed year six of school improvement, a fortunate circumstance occurred during the year just prior to Principal B's taking over. A large number of

their licensed classroom teachers left the district and were replaced by new personnel. Here is how this phenomenon and its implications were described:

PRIN-B1/8-9: We went 18 to 20 years, if I'm not mistaken, and I think 3 people left in like 18 to 20. ...we were all <town > people and they came to Jr. High and I can remember when I first started. When I first started I can remember sitting back in faculty meetings and hiding 'cause of all the veteran teachers, but they stayed and they stayed and they stayed ... We lost 11 teachers the year before I became the principal, 11. We only have 19 so we had a whole bunch of new, young people.

PRIN-B1/25: ...most of them, for the most part, they're so young that they're still, they want to. They want to learn.

Over the years, most of the training and professional development that teachers in School B received for improving instructional quality and skills is provided by the local educational cooperative during the summer months. Little of it is directed or targeted at formally identified needs but is left to the choice of teachers. The superintendent does choose and provide some district-wide training, mostly at the opening of school. The principals and staff are unclear about how this choice is made.

As was mentioned earlier in this section, some training is delivered on-site and directed toward specific needs and purposes (example: cooperative literacy specialist to train literacy and content teachers more effective literacy-specific teaching strategies). If Principal B1 became aware, through observations or self-reporting, that any teacher was struggling, his primary way for providing assistance to improve their quality and skills was to look for expertise inside the school that could be shared. He described this:

I've just taken some of our better teachers and told them I'm going to have <names two teachers> come in and sit down and talk to you about instruction or classroom management or whatever the case may be. Some first year teachers obviously, you know they're going to struggle. Some of them are great the first year. And they have a mentor that first year. We have them really depend on their mentor a lot. I help any way I can. (PRIN-B1/22)

**Responding to Student Needs.** The fourth theme identified for School B was *Responding to Student Needs*. A good deal of the data that substantiates the identification of this theme intersects with the data supporting other themes, but none more so than the *Climate and Culture* theme. This section will describe activities initiated and lead by Principal B1 that relate to student needs and contributed to the school's improved academic outcomes.

He deliberately considered the students, looked for what they might be lacking or needed, and found ways that he and his staff could respond to fill some of those needs. While this certainly benefitted the students, it also provided advantage to the school.

As was described in *Climate and Culture* he initiated a program at the beginning of his principalship in which every staff member was assigned a set of students to mentor and develop relationships with – to know who they were as individuals, their names, something about their families, and their academic standing – and extend them positive attention and respect at every encounter. The students' attitudes and behaviors improved significantly very soon after this program began and improved the environment for both teachers and students. Principal B2, assistant principal to Principal B1, described the individual care and positive attention extended to the students – not only emotionally, but academically:

We tried to develop relationships with these kids, tried to get to know everyone of them through those test scores and looking at all the data. We knew which ones were needing that extra help. I just kind of think it was the fact that most of their parents or brother or sister knew <Principal B1>, knew <Principal B2> and these came out here, we voiced our expectations, we told them you can do this, there's no doubt in my mind, so I kind of think we made them believe in themselves. They wanted to impress us because they liked us. But anyway, I think all of that works together, relationship building, the going above and beyond, keeping kids up here for tutoring, I'll take you home. <Principal B1> took a little boy home and he wasted crackers all in his brand new car ... Those are the kind of things we would do the extra, you know. If somebody needed a notebook or pen or paper we got them stocked up here. Honey, no problem, that won't keep you from learning. Come by my office if you need a pencil. (PRIN-B2/33)

Teachers viewed the mentoring program initiated by Principal B1 as having been very beneficial to the eventual success of their academic improvement efforts. They also credited the positive changes in students to the personal traits he was known for, all of which satisfied students' needs. Examples of these attributes are:

TCH-B1/3: I would add to that I think before <Principal B1> came into the position as principal, he already had a reputation in the community and I think that the reputation that he had and still has is one of fairness. If I could describe him in one word the thing I think that stands out about him everybody feels is that he is fair. That means a lot to kids this age. Fairness is huge, it means a lot to parents.

Researcher/3: What do you mean by fair?

TCH-B1/3: Everybody's treated the same. That the expectations are the same for everybody ...

Another example:

He was very much who it didn't matter what race you were, if you were the richest kid in the school or the poorest kid in the school, he treated every kid, he treated every single child with the same level of fairness. There was no, it didn't matter who you were, who your parents were, he didn't care. He took every child on that child, as that kid. (TCH-B3/3)

Realizing the power of extrinsic rewards for motivating students, especially when they come from poorer socioeconomic family circumstances, Principal B developed the use of rewards to inspire increased effort from the students.

PRIN-B1/7: The week before Benchmark, my secretaries and some of my teachers, they go out into the community and they get gift bags and we give out a gift bag everyday during Benchmark testing. After Benchmark is over with, that afternoon we give them a gift bag and once again it was just a little incentive for them to do well. Ninety-nine percent of the kids really appreciated it. You're always going to have one or two that, well, what did you give me this for, but most of them appreciated it.

PRIN-B2/7: Um-hum, they appreciated it. I think it was just the attention being paid to those students and it made those kids realize, hey this test is important and they're doing all of this for us so we are going to try our best. That was what I saw. I just loved Jr. high last year when I came in here and this room was filled with gift bags, literally, they had little chips, candy, little bracelet or something. Community was involved, that was a good thing. Then not only that, we had little drawings at the end of the week too, like \$50 gift certificates or \$100 so that made those kids really want to try hard to get that attention. At the end of the Benchmark <Principal B1> let them have a half a day after lunch, took them out to the park and fed them ice cream.

**Interacting with Parents and Community.** It was pointed out earlier during the description of School B, the community in which this school lies had experienced significant changes over the last decade. This correspondence from Principal B1 illustrates:

... we lost two major factories sometime in the late 90's. This was the major hit for the school. Also the decline of the family farm has really affected our community. Individual farm owners employed dozens of people at their farms. As far as population goes, our census shows that we have 7,000+ people in <town where school is located>. This is very misleading as this figure includes 1500 inmates located in our state prison here in <town>. Why they are counted, we certainly do not know! It is generally agreed that we actually have about 5500 people in the city limits. 1000+ students in 7/12 grades several years ago. Now we have less than 600! Very similar stories in the delta schools southeast of <town>! Sad situations and many schools use this as a reason for lack of academic success. However, I think we proved that if you can get a group of teachers, staff and students to believe, you can still achieve wonderful results. (DOC-B1)

As was alluded to by Principal B1, there appeared to be a similar, common impression held by most of the participants interviewed. The depressed economic situation which had developed over time in their community had likely affected the outlook of its citizens and students adversely. It was difficult to motivate students and community members to dream or work toward something they were sure would ever be real for them.

At the same time there was economic decline in the community, there was an unfortunate phenomenon that was occurring in the school-community relationship. This was best described by Principal B1 as follows:

I'm going to tell three or four years ago, our board and our previous superintendent, they go back for ten years. It was kind of widely known out in the community that we didn't want parents in the school. And we didn't want business leaders or community leaders up here. It just was bad. I mean, and there got to be some resentment toward the school. I think in the last three or four years, us current administrators have worked on that and we have tried to make our parents feel welcome. (PRIN-B1/29)

Recognizing the harmful effects of such a stance, efforts were made to change this by welcoming parents to the school. Although not always as successful as they had hoped, examples of things they did are:

A year ago we did a donuts for dad morning up here one day for the Jr. high dads, and we did a muffins for mom. I think that's pretty common people do. We did that and they were semi successful. We had eight, nine, ten. (PRIN-B1/29)

We just, we've had, we do an art show that brings parents in, we've had a math night, a science night, just anything that, if the kids are doing projects or something and we can show them off. That's another way we try to get the parents involved and up here. (PRIN-B1/29)

Once Principal B1 became principal, his own actions set an example and raised the expectations among the staff persuading them to increase their own contacts and involvement with parents. I asked him if the teachers were obligated to contact parents and if so, whether they followed through when students were not doing well. He responded:

Most of them, yes ma'am, do and it was not in our policy, but when I became a principal here we sent out a letter to every parent, whatever child was failing. You know, contact me or if you want to have a conference with the teacher and that kind of thing and we'll sit down. Because we are struggling, we are here to help and do whatever we can, too. But, again, yes ... we've had kids that make C's and D's. We try to contact them. The teachers do, matter of fact, I don't. They've got a phone log right now when the teachers come in. When they make a call they document it, who they talked to and for what reason. (PRIN-B1/29-30)

Parental contact became so important to the leadership in School B that the log teachers keep to document calls to parents is now one of the artifacts that has become part of the teacher evaluation system for the staff.

## **The Case of School C**

### **The School**

School C is located in the southwest quadrant of Arkansas. The town in which the school lies had a 2010 census population just short of 30,000. It is the only junior high school in the

district and serves grades seven and eight only. Its 2012-2013 enrollment was 611 students.

Sixty-one percent of its students qualify to receive free and reduced meals. Fifty percent of the students are African American, 43% are Caucasian, 3% are Hispanic, and 3% represent the two or more races category. The remaining 1% of the students are Asian and Native American.

School C employs 58 licensed and 25 classified individuals. Sixty-five percent of these are Caucasian and 34% are African American. Included in this number are a principal and two full-time assistant principals. The principal and one assistant principal are Caucasian and one assistant principal is African American.

### **Selection of the Site**

School C failed to meet academic benchmarks standards from the time the state's measurement and ranking system was created until 2010-2011, when it reached state-directed, year eight of school improvement. Under the rules of the Arkansas's Comprehensive Testing, Assessment, and Accountability Program Act of 1999 (ACTAAP, 1999), in its sixth year of school improvement it was labeled a state-direct school. These rules stated that any school in school improvement for five or more years was to become and remain a state-directed school until adequate improvements were made. As a result of meeting the five year milestone, the first step ordered by the Arkansas Department of Education was to send a team into the school to conduct a scholastic audit. A scholastic audit, defined by the State of Arkansas as:

...a school improvement audit process that requires an in-depth review of school performance based on research-based criteria. It is a comprehensive review of a school's learning environment, efficiency, and academic performance. The purposes of the audit are to analyze strengths and limitations of the school's instructional and organizational effectiveness and to make specific recommendations to improve teaching and learning. (Arkansas Department of Education, 2013c)

was completed during the 2008-2009 school year.

Using the results of the audit findings the team from the Department of Education determined the type and level of support they believed would lead to continuous improvement in student academics in School C . From the data gathered during this study, this appears to have inspired the school staff, both negatively and positively, as renewed efforts were made to improve School C's academic standings and stop the progression toward more years of failure.

Three years later, by the end of the 2011-2012 school year, there was enough growth in mathematics and literacy scores on the state assessments to designate them achieving. The following year, 2012-2013, improvement in both continued and School C was named as one of only eight secondary schools across the state to be reclassified as an achieving school.

Table 4.6 shows the progression by year of School C's school improvement status.



Table 4.6

*School C's Academic Accountability Status for Years 2003-2012*

Year	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12	12-13
Status	SI-2	SI-3	SI-4	SI-5	SI-6	SI-7	SI-8	Ach(NI)	Ach

SI = School Improvement (M) = Met Standards Ach = Achieving NI = Needs Improvement

**The Principals**

My initial contact with School C was with the district's superintendent. She granted permission to contact the principal but also shared that the person who was presently serving as principal had only been there a year and a half – just one of the two years that the school had been achieving in math and literacy. Expressing that this would not satisfy the goal of my study - to interview and study a principal who was in place before and during the change process – she told me that the person who had been principal of School C two years before and during the first achieving year (2011-2012) was now an assistant superintendent in the district and would likely be willing to participate and tell her story. The person who had been principal at School C for the second successful year (2012-2013) was now in her second year there. Unsure of whether it would be possible to piece the two stories together effectively for a thorough accounting of the changes made that resulted in School C's academic improvements, I arranged to interview each of them. Once these interviews were completed, I reasoned that the combined data collect from the two of them would be relevant and appropriate for answering the study's research questions and helping to achieve its purpose. Ultimately, I concluded that interviewing staff members who had experienced two different successful principals in quick succession could and did make insightful observations comparing and contrasting the two and thus, added richness to the data.

I began by interviewing the previous principal of School C (Principal C1). She is presently serving her second year as Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education in the

district. She has served the last 15 of her 33 years of professional experience in District C. Over her career she has been a teacher, coach, counselor, principal, assistant principal, and assistant superintendent. Immediately before becoming School C's principal, she was principal at an elementary school located directly across the street. She was principal of School C for three years, from 2009-2010 through 2011-2012 (the first year the school had achieving scores) before applying for and receiving a promotion to the central office position she currently fills.

Principal C2 is the current principal. She became principal of School C in 2012-2013 (the second year the school was designated an achieving school. Over the 25 years she has been an educator, she has been an elementary teacher, a coordinator for gifted and talented programs in grades K-12, a junior high assistant principal, and a middle school assistant principal. During the five years prior to her taking the principal's position at School C, she served five years as an elementary principal in District C. During her service as elementary principal the student enrollment increased from 246 to 312 students. She also lead her staff and students in raising the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on their state exams from the upper 40s to the upper 80s. After experiencing notable success as an elementary principal, both the district superintendent and her family expressed surprised that she was interested in taking on the challenge of moving to be junior high principal. She explained her readiness for change:

I began to feel like I had accomplished everything I could and I was beginning to feel very complacent, which is where some principals would have stopped and said okay it is now easy. I've worked hard to get it to the point that it's easy to come in every day and do the easy part and the fun part now and I began to feel very complacent. (PRIN-C2/1)

While being interviewed for the positions, she shared that she'd explained her motivation to the committee this way:

I want that job. I want it because it is the black eye on our district and I think something can be done over there and I believe we can see test scores rise and to be honest I am beginning to get a little bored with this position. (PRIN-C2/1)

## Collection of Data

**Principal C1 and C2 Interviews and Conversations.** Data were collected through direct contact with the current principal (PRIN-C2) and the previous principal (PRIN-C1). Principal C1 was the school's site administrator during the first year the school was rated as achieving in both mathematics and literacy (2011-2012) and during the two years leading up to this successful first year. Principal C2 is the current principal and held the position during the second year the school was designated as achieving.

My interview with Principal C1 was prearranged via a phone conversation approximately one week before it took place in her office at the district's administration building. The interview continued for 45 minutes and we were interrupted once. Principal C1 stated at the beginning that she did not have much time due to another meeting that would be starting within the hour. At the opening of the interview she expressed some hesitation about the conversation being taped. After we discussed my obligation to protect her identity and I reminded her that she could stop the interview at any time, she signed the participant consent form, allowed me to turn on the recorder, and we completed the interview. Because of the short time allotted, the encounter felt rushed. Once I reviewed the transcript of the interview, I followed up with Principal C1 by exchanging emails and phone calls with her in which I posed clarifying questions.

My first conversation with Principal C2 was by phone. After discussing the purpose for my study and the protocol for collecting data, she expressed her willingness to be interviewed and a date and time were set. She volunteered to make arrangements for a focus group of willing teachers to interview on the same date but voiced concern about the timing of my visits for data

collection. By this time, two other schools that I had approached about being a case site for study had declined my request for the same reasons that gave her pause. Because administration of the state assessments was imminent, all time and efforts in the school during the spring semester leading up to the second week in April, were intensely focused on ensuring the students were prepared for exams. I reminded her that I was a longtime practitioner myself, understood the importance of this time of year, and would conduct my visits as unobtrusively as possible.

Upon arriving for the first interview with Principal C2, I found that she had forgotten her appointment with me, had not spoken to any of her staff about being part of the focus group, and suggested that I come back on another day. Ultimately, she suggested we go ahead with the interview that day and an informative exchange of approximately 70 minutes was completed. At the end of the interview she stated that she would contact me before the week was out to make arrangements for a second visit that would include an interview with the focus group, observations, and the collection of relevant artifacts.

Principal C2 did not contact me as she had indicated she would so I made numerous attempts to initiate further contact her (via phone and email). During this interim and because of Principal C2's unwillingness to respond to my calls and emails, I became concerned that I would not be allowed to return to School C to collect more data. Three weeks later Principal C2 called and invited me to come back with some stipulations attached to the visit. She stated that the only teachers she could make available for interview, with a 30-minute time limit, were four non-core subject teachers working on a special project the day of the visit. She stated that I could walk freely around the school and observe but that I should take care not to engage the staff in any way that would distract them from their assigned tasks. Although not ideal and somewhat limiting for the data I hoped to collect, I agreed to the arrangement.

I did converse with Principal C2 intermittently during the second visit to School C. She walked me around the school, pointed out significant features, and brought specific attention to displays she had spoken of in her interview. She pointed out several documents and described their origin and use.

As follow up to both on-site visits with Principal C2, I did have a number of email exchanges with her in which I asked clarifying questions and for details to help insure that my reporting of the data were correct.

**Staff Interviews and Conversations.** On my second visit to School C, I was not given access to the four teachers working on the special project as had been prearranged. Principal C2 introduced me to them when I arrived but stated later in the day they were on a productive roll and she did not want to disturb their momentum. Instead, she arranged for the school librarian (LIB-C) and one of the assistant principals (AP-C) to meet with me for approximately 30 minutes each.

The librarian had been employed at School C for five years and had experienced the changes that occurred leading up to the school's academic improvements. She had also served under both Principal C1 and Principal C2 and thus, had witnessed both their roles in facilitating the changes that lead to the improvements.

The assistant principal had been employed in her present position at School C for just this current school year. However, she had served as instructional facilitator at School C during the 2011-2012 school year. During the year in between (2012-2013), she was assigned as instructional facilitator at a middle school in the district. This limited and intermittent pattern of time employed in School C limits her direct knowledge of what occurred prior to the school's improvement. As instructional facilitator during the first successful year, however, she was

directly involved and witnessed Principal C1's role in implementing changes that contributed to improved academic outcomes for students. Although she was away during the school's second successful year (2012-2013), now that she has returned to School C, she has directly witnessed Principal C2's leadership and its implications for continuing the school's success.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> visit to School C, I walked about the school and did have opportunities to converse with staff members that were on hall duty during passing periods. The content of four of these exchanges were related to this study and thus, were included for review during analysis.

**Collection of Documents and Observations.** During the second site visit to School C a number of relevant documents were examined and when possible reproduced for collection. During the time I was there I was permitted to observe in hallways and in classrooms. Field notes were recorded during these observations when activities relevant to this study were seen.

### **Presentation of the Data**

*The Presentation of Axial Codes (Major Themes).* Axial codes emerged as the data from my encounters with Principal C1, C2, and staff members were analyzed. These axial codes became the basis for the development of three themes. These themes reflect what the data reveals about how the principals' leadership and actions in School C likely influenced improvements in student academic outcomes. The themes are: (a) expectations and accountability, (b) leadership and support of instruction, and (c) responding to student needs.

Table 4.7 shows the axial codes that emerged and beneath them examples of the open codes that were found in the data collected during my visits to the school site.

Table 4.7

*Axial Codes and Samples of Open Codes for School C*

Expectations & Accountability	Leadership & Support of Instruction	Responding to Student Needs
State Directed Involvement	Analysis & Reflection	Low Expectations & Poor Student Culture
Poor Staff Attitudes	Vision & Mission – See it, Talk it, Live it	Discipline & Attendance Issues
Ineffective Instruction	Outside Providers	Shifted Accountability
Poor Fit – Move On Dealing with Non-Compliance	A Team to Help	Student Voice
Teacher Quality	Meetings, Collaboration & Schedule to Support	Use/Share Data with Student to Develop Instructional Goals
Establishing & Communicating Expectations – Three Steps	Prescriptive Professional Development	Activities for Every Student – Finding Their Interest
Establishing Procedures – Staff and Students	Morale & Appreciation	Celebrate & Believe in Themselves
Use the Data - Own the Problem	Peer Pressure	Incentives to Motivate
Tools for Communicating	Risk Taking	Alternative School Options
No Excuses	Support from Central Office & Board of Education	Facilities & Grounds

## Themes

The themes that emerged from analysis of the data collected at School C were (a) expectations and accountability, (b) leadership and support of instruction, (c) and responding to student needs. Data from multiple sources - interviews, conversations, observations, and documents – were triangulated to validate and support these themes. As has been described earlier, one principal (C1) served as leader at the school during the first year of improved status and the two years before. The second principal (C2) lead the school during the second year of improved status and is currently serving there. The way in which the data for School C was collected and analyzed enabled me to clearly delineate between these individuals when determining whose actions and behaviors was associated with particular changes that likely produced improvements in student academic status. Generally, as each theme is presented, data related to Principal C1 will be given first and Principal C2's will follow.

**Expectations and Accountability.** When asked to describe what the principal did at School C to influence the improvements in their academic test scores and their standing with the State of Arkansas, whether they were referring to Principal C1 or Principal C2, every single staff member I talked with used the word “accountability” in their responses. An example of this, describing both principals, came from LIB-C, “both of them came in with very high levels of structure and very high expectations” (LIB-C/8).

“Expectations” was a descriptor word used almost as frequently by respondents. Some participants used the terms interchangeably as if they meant the same thing. Although heavily interconnected, there was evidence to show the establishment of both. Expectations were created to define acceptable levels of performance and behavior and accountability measures were put in place to monitor for compliance and ensure that expectations were met. The combination of



these two weighed in as perhaps the most critical element in causing the improvements that came about in the school and thus, *Expectations and Accountability* was identified as the first of four themes for School C.

Just as lack of expectations and accountability for staff in School C were contributing to School C's poor performance when Principal C1 began working there, data showed that low expectations and lack of accountability for student performance and behaviors played a negative role too. While it is clear from participant witness accounts the two were interdependent, with each having significant implications for the other, expectations and accountability for students will be addressed as a piece of School C's third theme, *Responding to Student Needs*. The remainder of this subsection will only address the expectations and accountability for staff.

***Setting the Tone: Principal C1.*** At the time Principal C1 was assigned to the principal's position (2009-2010), the school was labeled by the Arkansas's accountability system as being state-directed in year seven of school improvement. Upon becoming principal, the first thing she did was to revisit the results of an Arkansas Department of Education Scholastic Audit that had been completed for the school in 2007-2008. "We dissected it and we looked at what we needed to do," she said.

One of the first and primary things she determined from analyzing the audit results was there were employees at the school whose attitudes and instructional practices were not acceptable. She clarified what she meant by this by saying, "they didn't do a whole lot of reflection. It was "this isn't going to matter anyway" type attitude" (PRIN-C1/2). She explained to me a possible explanation for why the staff had come to have such a defeated attitude by adding, "I think it was just after being eight or nine years on school improvement how low the morale had gotten. We just didn't see any daylight ..." (AS-C/5).

As Principal C1 made plans to begin the improvement process, the attitude of many of the staff was a significant concern for her. She feared that they might not be willing to rise to the occasion and be an asset when it came to making significant changes necessary for improving student achievement. Toward the goal of minimizing this barrier to improvement, she focused heavily on improving the quality of the staff during the first year she was principal. For those who seemed to exhibit characteristics that suggested they were poor fits for what was ahead, she and her staff counseled them to consider moving on. This is how she described the process:

The very first thing that we tried ... working with those staff members that we immediately saw some problems with. We were successful in helping some move on because they saw that things were changing and it was not going to be business as usual but that was the very first thing that we had to work on. We basically did that by conversations with the staff. Personal conversations, I had two assistants at that time, and just being what I call on the ground every day in those classrooms, having conversations with those people. We counseled and when they saw that they were not a fit, they chose to do that (move on), which, I think, was good. ...we had some that really, in my opinion, were not junior high school teachers and they chose to seek other opportunities. (PRIN-C1/2)

For those that chose to stay, she described how she and assistants worked to take them where they were and set the new expectations:

So we really had to start there and I guess you'd say build them up and got them to the point that yes it does matter. We're here for the kids, this is your job, this is what you are expected to do. We worked a lot on expectations and requirements. (PRIN-C1/2)

Beginning concurrently with Principal C1's tenure, because it was a state-directed school, the district was required to contract with a state-approved outside provider to work with the staff on-site. Hearing this, I wondered about the principal's and the outside consultant's (OC) respective roles in leading and implementing changes that eventually lead to improvements in students' performances. If the principal was only a figurehead and the OC acted as the campus or instructional leader, that could significantly impact the story to be told about Principal C1's influence on school improvement. I asked Principal C1 about this. She explained that the OC

did meet with her leadership team to address school improvement strategies, but that the bulk of the OC's on-site assistance was working in classrooms, directly with teachers, to improve instructional strategies. Leadership of the school, including setting expectations and holding staff accountable, was clearly Principal C1's role and responsibility. Staff comments confirmed this.

As a basis for the expectations she established and held the staff accountable to, Principal C1 used a three-part statement that she conveyed by both word and actions throughout her tenure as principal. She explained this:

In order to convey those expectations they had to realize that this was: number one, a sense of urgency; number two, it was not going to be business as usual; and number three, we were going to inspect what we expected. Once we got that on board things sort of fell in place. (PRIN-C1/5)

Interviews and short informal conversations I had with staff members were all consistent in describing that Principal C1 established expectations and raised accountability where there had been little in the past:

She came in with a mindset of structure where there was no structure. To me she kind of revamped and streamlined so that there was an accountability... She was very authoritative but sometimes you need that when there have not been boundaries in the past. So she kind of really focused on structure. (LIB-C/2-3)

Expectations were set and in place from the beginning of her tenure and staff were held firmly to them as long as she remained principal. These two comments from one participant, describes this:

There was no accountability piece. That everybody was kind of doing their own thing, in their room, with their door closed, doing their own thing. When <Principal C1> came ... everybody had to be doing this. Math teachers had to be doing these and they were checking and they were doing walk throughs so that accountability piece of this is what you should be doing and I am going to make certain or monitor to make sure you are doing this. I think it made them kind of get rid of the twenty year old lesson plans that we do every year. If it's not important we're not going to do it any more. (LIB-C/2)

You know, where as you used to do your own thing, now we are looking at this, this is where we're low and this is where we need to be. So she kind of set the expectation that we're not staying here. You know, yes we have been here six years but we're not staying here. (LIB-C/3)

Another means of establishing expectations during the first semester she was principal was to revisit the vision and mission with the staff. She described how this was done and used to communicate expectations through a set of common ideas and beliefs:

When I first got there we looked at our vision and mission again and we tried to revise that. That was some ongoing work that first semester that we did. All of the staff was involved in that, yes. It wasn't quite a daily affirmation but we expected to see it in the classrooms, we expected to hear teachers talking about it, communicating it with students and that became more of a listening for it. Of course, they all had it posted in their classrooms. We wanted to see how the instruction could tie back to the mission and a lot of that was just in conversation when we met with them and while doing our walk throughs. (PRIN-C1/8)

Described by the staff as quiet and professional, it was clear that each participant I spoke with who was working in the school during this time credited the school's first year of improved status (2010-2011) to Principal C1's leadership and actions, particularly those related to expectations and accountability.

Principal C1 was never able to bring the entire staff around to complying fully with her expectations. Tension existed at times because of the rigor of the increased expectations, and the staff continued to turn over, but, "she just stuck with the expectations (and said) this is here to stay" (LIB-C/3).

Principal C1 was not hesitant to address noncompliant staff and described how she dealt with such issues:

They had a personal conversation with me. Sometimes it was not only with me it may be with the other assistants who were also evaluating. We called them in and gave them, again, what we expected and if they did not meet those expectations. Now some we had to help, but then there were some that were just not going to do it and we had to move in the area of write ups and that sort of thing to get them on board. (PRIN-C1/5)

Later in the formal interview with Principal C1 when was asked about her leadership style, she touched again on her willingness to address troublesome issues and hold staff accountable:

Well, I tried to be a servant leader but there were some staff members that you couldn't be a servant leader with. You just had to take a stand and you couldn't back off. It's not a comfortable place to be but as I say you have to rise to that occasion. (PRIN-C1/7-8)

***Defining the Expectations and Accountability: Principal C1.*** Setting the tone for School C arose in part from Principal C1's establishing and communicating that there were specific behaviors she would be looking for from her staff along with the means she would use to hold them accountable for meeting these expectations. Using the results of the scholastic audit and the information she got from talking with staff at the district and school level, she judged that the greatest chance for improving student achievement lay with improving classroom instruction. Therefore, the expectations she established for the staff were aimed almost exclusively at improvement of instruction.

The results of the scholastic audit mentioned earlier in this section, revealed that very little alignment existed between what the Arkansas standards required be taught, what was actually being taught, and the instruction being delivered in the classrooms at School C. Principal C1 stated that she believed her prior work experience in elementary was very helpful as she set about tackling these issues and the OC helped with providing a critical resource. Curriculum maps and pacing guides by grade and course were provided to help ensure the teachers' content and instruction was aligned with state requirements. Along with training them to use the maps and pacing guides, teachers were also taught how and expected to analyze student performance data for use in determining group and individual student instructional needs. With this in place, Principal C1 and her team began to focus their efforts on improving teacher performance as they engaged students in the classroom. The OC and administrative team began

a system of classroom observations to look for the research-supported instructional strategies and teaching behaviors they had established as critical for improvement. Individual feedback was provided to each teacher after they were observed. Feedback was carefully planned as seen as in-place professional development training for the teaching staff. In these two quotes, Principal C1 described how the team approached classroom observations:

I put together a real strong team of assistants. I had some real strong instructional facilitators. So we were a team. I mean we met weekly, we mapped out strategies, we were in those classrooms meeting with those teachers. As I said, we were on the ground, so it was truly a team effort. (PRIN-C1/4)

Daily (how often?). We tried to set aside at least an hour a day to be in the classrooms and more if we could. We had a schedule for that. Being in a school, that sometimes didn't always work but we did try to carve out time, all of us, to be in those classrooms. I think I probably played that role (of instructional leader) more because my assistants were young and new, so I had to take a hands-on approach and actually be in the classrooms with them. We did joint walk throughs because it was actually a system of training them also. (PRIN-C1/5)

As was mentioned earlier, not all of the staff responded positively to the raised expectations at School C and particularly to the increased presence of the instructional leaders in their classrooms. Some were especially antagonistic about having the OC on the team. In making this observation about the positive value of the OC in the improvement process, one participant described how others were not accepting of their presence:

<OC> did a wonderful job with our staff. ... worked a lot with our teachers, stayed in the classroom with us (principal and two assistant principals) a lot with walk throughs and so forth. Had a lot of good strategies to offer. At that time, like I said, morale was kind of low and I think some of the teachers felt, you know, we've got this outside person coming in telling us what we need to do and she doesn't know our kids so there was a little bit of resistance there but she really did have some good strategies and techniques to share. (AP-C/6)

Many of the specific behavioral and performance expectations that Principal C1 set for her staff, including those they looked for during classroom observations and throughout the school, can be found in this response she gave when I asked her to describe things she was

responsible for changing that she believed eventually resulted in the school's improved academic status:

We worked a lot with the instruction. Being in the classroom, classroom walk throughs, teacher evaluations, as I said, just being there in the classroom made a difference. We worked a lot with teachers on lesson planning, we had some that liked to just walk in and go off the cuff. Well, that doesn't serve your students. We took a look at the makeup of our classes. Had the teachers do that data analysis of students in their classes and look at what they needed. We used data walls, I had instructional facilitators there in math and literacy and they kept a data wall of the whole school. We eventually drilled that down to the teachers where they kept their own data walls and they knew where the gaps were and soon figured out this is what I need to do to fill in those gaps and to move those students. Once they grasped that concept, it was pretty successful and it was eye opening for some. We have a student here, the student is almost proficient, it just takes a little more help in this area to get them over and we really just tackle math and literacy, that's where our main focus was at that time. (PRIN-C1/3)

Although the expectations and accountability for staff focused heavily on classroom and instructional behaviors once Principal C1 came, there were nonnegotiable expectations and rules the staff was expected to comply with. She listed some of these expectations and how noncompliance was addressed:

Yes, you know, you were expected to turn in those lesson plans weekly, it wasn't just a page number. They had been trained. ...we were expecting those prescriptive lesson plans, we expected them to be in the hallways (duty between passing periods). We expected them to be where they were supposed to be. If they had duty we expected them to be on duty and be on time. We expected them to be at work on time. You didn't leave work early. You left at the correct time. I have to say a lot of those teachers stayed, they stayed beyond that 3:45 time limit. We had a campus handbook along with the school handbook, yes. We would give them that at the beginning of every year. We would go over it and if there was an infraction, a pattern or something, we would pull that handbook out and address it with that person. (PRIN-C1/8-9)

A teacher handbook already existed when Principal C1 became principal. The staff did not remember its contents changing significantly when Principal C1 became their leader but they remembered how it was used definitely did change. Of this, one participant said, "It was already there but it became our (emphasis on our) document at that point. We always had it but it was on a shelf" (LIB-C/4).

**Principal C2.** During my interview and conversations with Principal C2 I was struck by the energy and enthusiasm with which she talked about her school, her teachers and her staff. Evidence to indicate that she is determined do whatever it takes for the school to improve was revealed in both her words and in her demeanor.

Described as “very structured” (LIB-C/4), every staff member I asked about Principal C2’s role in the school’s improved status talked about expectations and accountability. An example of this, similar to descriptions I heard from others during interviews and in hallway conversations, follows:

I have always believed that the principal sets the tone for the entire campus. If the principal holds himself or herself accountable and the teachers and staff see that, they will rise to the occasion as well. With <Principal C2> for example, we know she is dotting those i’s and crossing those t’s all the time and she is keeping us on our toes. ...we are trying to be accountable to ourselves, to the district, to them and they are going to be accountable ... because <Principal C2> has set that precedent for them. I do very much believe that it all has to do with the leadership. (AP-C/2)

AP-C continued and describes how Principal C2 established and communicated expectations and monitored for staff compliance:

A lot of times it’s verbal. You know, this is what I’m going to do and they see that she follows through. This what I’m going to hold you accountable for and they know they are going to be held accountable for just that because she is going to check, she is going to have us double check. She is not going to let them just kind of skate by when there are expectations that she expects for them meet and they know that she expects for them to meet them. ...she follows up however she says she’s going to handle it, she does handle it. If she says you will receive an e-mail from me to remind you... they know to expect that if they don’t ...there is always going to be a consequence for it. She does hold all of us accountable and they in turn, hopefully, will extend that to their students and hold their students accountable...it’s like a snowball effect...we’ve been told, this is what I’m (Principal C2) responsible for and this is how you will need to contribute that so in order for me to answer to my bosses I need you to... it kind of progresses to that level. (AS-C/2)



Principal C2 was neither timid nor restrained throughout our formal interview in expressing how strongly she felt about the importance of accountability. These are examples of some of her comments that reflect this:

I told them up front when they met me, I'm all about growing and changing and learning - myself included. I model that often by what I'm reading or what I'm doing or when I say this is something that I think I need to improve this is what I'm doing. So I try to model that... (PRIN-C2/8)

...so I had a tone to set for the building ...what is the old saying, you have to inspect what you expect? They learned up front that I was going to give them time to do it but I was going to inspect it. (PRIN-C2 /9)

When we have a problem we don't make excuses for it, we own it. We own this problem and we're going to take care of. So the big thing I think with me is that they've learned we don't sit around and whine or complain, we figure out what our next plan is going to be. If plan A doesn't work you better have a plan B in the background. (PRIN-C2/10)

Principal C2 is fully aware that the expectations she has set for her staff is pushing them to their limits but in being aware, she shared many examples of how she also tries to protect and support them emotionally. Of this she said, "...I'm always, always, always, going to try to take care of my teachers, that is something I believe in" (PRIN-C2/8). Although an accounting and description of the things she does to provide emotional support and protection might just as well fit in the discussion of the theme that follows – *Leadership and Support* – they are so interconnected with *Expectations and Accountability* it is appropriate to include more about this category of support within this theme.

It is the high level of academic outcomes that have been set for this school and the responsibility Principal C2 places on the staff for reaching these outcomes that makes it necessary for her to take measures that protect and support them emotionally. An example of this I witnessed firsthand was her insistence on protecting their professional and personal time from me. Because of its being the stressful state exam season, she was firm in not allowing me

to keep anyone late after school or to take away their preparation or free time during the school day to conduct interviews. Also related to the increased expectations that come with testing season, she described how she addressed some of her staff about their obviously amplified stress levels and its adverse effect on students and their classroom behavior. Of this she said, “Sometimes they just need a reminder”, to raise their awareness and put things into perspective and described plans for addressing this issue in an upcoming staff meeting:

...this coming week we'll be talking about school morale. We'll talk about we're all tired, we're getting tired, let's talk about school culture again. The plan is to discuss how are we reacting to kids? Are we helping improve the outcome or are we escalating the negative outcome that we're getting? And, we're just going to remind each other what that means and how to speak to kids because this time of year teachers get tired and sometimes they just need a pick me up and a reminder. (PRIN-C2/6)

Principal C2 and her staff described various things used throughout her tenure to boost teacher morale and “...keep them motivated, keep them going” (AP-C/5). In this passage, she describes several of these activities:

I try very, very hard to praise them when I can. In fact, we send out at least weekly and sometimes more than that, shout-outs and they are genuine, I mean genuine from the heart. I saw so-and-so doing such-and-such today. I don't praise every teacher every week. I didn't from the very beginning because I wanted them to feel like they were genuine things that the administrative staff and I saw. My administration goes through and they'll come in and they'll say I just saw a fantastic lesson in Ms. so-and-sos room, she deserves a shout out for trying ... If they work really hard on a program and they all come together I give a very specific thank you for taking care of the music. I know you spent hours after school doing... I just sent out one ... they spent a lot of their own time ... and they weren't required things but they took them on. We do a lot of praise here. (PRIN-C2/11)

She arranges holiday and just-for-fun events for Valentine's Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas and gave an example of an up-coming staff activity aimed at building community and morale:

We're doing paint with a twist at night for any of the people who want to stay and we're only charging them the cost of the canvas and the paint. We just are going to have snacks and stay and paint <mascot> so everybody has a <mascot> for their room or their office. (PRIN-C2/11)

She listed other examples and gave reasons why she felt this was important:

We just try to do things that make people feel like they're wanted here. I am very, very good at writing thank you notes for the simplest little things or if I know their mother has been sick or I know you have got a colonoscopy coming up. You'll come in and find maybe a mini candy bar and a note that says I'm praying for you. I know this is tough time, you know, that kind of thing...We do a lot of things like that to make teachers know we care about them, they're human. (PRIN-C2/12)

Another example of how teachers may be recognized and supported for good work was included in a description of how staff meetings, routinely held every Tuesday and always related to instruction, are conducted:

We always start out by celebrating a teacher who is nominated by their peers for what we call the essential piece award and they get this nice little glass trophy and I always read off what they've written. Then we give an opportunity for the teachers to celebrate any big gains they have made with students or a particular child that they've been working with and then we go on into something. (PRIN-C2/6)

As was discussed earlier a number of the staff left School C when Principal C1 took actions aimed at improving teacher quality there. With the continuation of high expectations and accountability from Principal C2, others chose to leave School C. A number of teachers from the elementary school she had transferred from and others from the district's middle schools, familiar with her prior work and leadership style, chose to move into these vacated positions. She believed these teachers were motivated by their desire to work hard and experience successful progress like she had lead during her tenure in her last assignment as elementary principal, explaining it this way:

... several of them joined me this year because after I left all the things that they thought were hard work, and they were hard work and they wanted to complain about, some of those very people have now left elementary buildings to teach with me because they missed the progress that they were seeing. Because even though it was hard work, all of those structure pieces or processes ... those are what keep a school moving and without those and without that accountability piece, only the people who believe in it intrinsically do it. They found that there were fewer on the staff than they really imagined and so at the end of this year, four came from the middle school with me and three came from the elementary to come work with me. They will tell you, if the elementary people were in

here, they will tell you it was not because it was easy to work for me but they found out all those things I did were important ... I believe in learning and growing ... so when you get used to that and you see the benefits you don't want to stay in that environment long. (PRIN-C2/15)

Reflecting on the present quality of her teaching staff, Principal C2 stated:

We have a culture here and when you interview my teachers you'll get this and it won't embarrass me because it is what it is. Because it's where we are at this point in time, it may not be if you come a year later or if you'd been here even a year before, what you would have gotten. We have more and more buying into the positive, rigorous atmosphere that we're trying to achieve. I keep taking them back to that mission statement. ...if you are not living this our kids aren't living it. If everything we do doesn't go back to that then we shouldn't be doing it. We have a few who are tired and they will tell you, I mean, they've checked with retirement people, they would love to go home but they financially couldn't because this school business is hard and it's getting harder and I'm not backing down. I've told them we will not stop until I'm ready to apply for schools to watch ... (PRIN-C2/17)

Only two times during her 11 years as a principal before coming to School C had she been involved in recommending teachers for non-renewal or dismissal. This year, she has dealt with four dismissal situations. About dealing with questionable teachers she said:

Our board would be very angry if I left a teacher in place that should not be there, but they also expect us to support them. We always start out in the role of support and we provide loads of support because my job is to help teachers improve, not to get rid of them unless you do something really stupid. So unless you put your hands on a kid or curse a kid or something, you know, if you're making some effort and some growth we're going to support you. (PRIN-C2/12&20)

Although reasonable support was provided in each case to try and help, adequate corrections and progress were not made and, "...four are gone. Like disappeared. One day they were here and the next day wasn't here" (LIB-C/6). In these cases, Principal C2 stated the community and district supervisors supported her actions, and would expect no less of her. Of the staff, she said:

Teachers get it. They know when you're not doing your job or when you're struggling or when you're doing insane things that are unprofessional. All of us want to be respected as professionals and we know as long as those people are around you're missing out, you're, I mean, you know, those situations probably gave us a black eye. So and so's kid had a teacher that said so and so at <School C> and we have to fight that reputation. It puts us a step behind. (PRIN-C2/20)

Procedural expectations in School C are set and communicated as part of their procedural manual. Principal C2 described the manual and how expectations are set or modified:

We have a very thorough procedures manual that is specific to us. ... the leadership team works on it at the end of every year and we talk about it so they have some input, but we have a procedures manual and it talks about everything. Then any processes that we need like how we're going to dismiss from classes to the gym for a performance or if we have something that comes up that we've never completed before then the instructional or that leadership team will come up with those processes. (PRIN-C2/13)

As the formal interview neared the end, Principal C2 was asked what was the most important advice she would encourage secondary principals to do if they were trying to emulate an effective principal. Her answer reflected how strongly she believed effective leadership includes *Expectations and Accountability*:

Accountability, systems for accountability. I just think that the systems we put in place, if we really believe it, whether it's reading the data, it's posting grades, it's student achievement, it's monitoring a particular set of students, unless there is an accountability piece and there's a system in place for that you can talk about it, you can have great ideas, you can even implement great ideas, but if you don't hold yourself or the people you asked to implement it accountable it will not happen. If it does it will be a watered down version. So, accountability systems for me I think would be one of the number one things. It is sometimes the hardest because people don't like you to have your thumb on everything but if it's important you're going to do that period. (PRIN-C2/20)

**Leadership and Support of Instruction.** From the analysis of the data for School C, another axial code that emerged was *Leadership and Support of Instruction*. Admittedly, it was difficult to isolate components of this theme from those that support the *Expectations and Accountability* theme because many behaviors and actions the principals used for one can contribute to the other. While the principals' actions that set expectations and held staff members accountable for reaching them clearly fell into the previous category, doing so may also be considered an element of leadership. Workers may feel more comfortable and supported when a system of clear expectations and accountability are communicated to them, especially

when resources for reaching these expectations are readily available. What each of these two principals did to provide resources, and thus support, for staff is shown in this section.

*Principal C1.* As was discussed in the previous theme, Principal C1 used her leadership position to focus heavily on teacher quality and improving classroom instruction. By raising the performance expectations, some who could not or did not choose to meet them, were counseled to move on and leave the staff. For those that did remain, rigorous and urgent expectations for improving student academic performance became the impetus for making the improvement of classroom instruction the focus of Principal C1's leadership efforts.

During her first semester as principal, she led the entire staff in collaborative meetings in which the vision, mission, and goals of the school were revisited. These components were posted and talked about regularly and used as a guide to help determine what might be appropriate for implementation in School C. As classroom observations were conducted and follow-up conversations were held with teachers, one required component was that the content and instruction had to always be tied to the vision and mission of the school.

Several times during my formal interview with Principal C1, she referred to the critical role of reflection in changing the status quo, for understanding how and why the school was performing as it was. Because the staff "didn't do a whole lot of reflection" (p. 2), she used her leadership role to model and teach them to engage in reflection, describing it this way:

I became more reflective and that was a goal that we wanted the teachers to be able to do, was reflect upon you daily work, reflect upon what you were doing in the classroom. Over the course of that, you know, trying to get the teachers to do that, I learned to do that as well, you know, reflect upon what's happening in the school, what's happening in the classroom and you know, when you start reflecting and you're working with your team you learn to change what's not working real quick and go forward with what is. We did quite a bit of group reflection through PLC's (team meetings). We held lots of PLC's. We held those weekly. We did many book studies on reflective strategies and other areas that we were seeing problems with. So, the PLC's were a strong vehicle for

us and it was small enough that, you know, it included everybody but it was more personal than just a big staff meeting. (PRIN-C1/4-5)

With improving instructional quality as the focus, the teachers needed resources to support the changes they would be required to make. Their performance was assessed regularly as classroom observations were conducted by Principal C1 and her team of two assistant principals, the outside consultant, and an instructional facilitator. Using what they observed, the team planned and delivered prescriptive training that targeted individual teacher needs. A large portion of this was delivered through the conference feedback sessions the team had with each teacher following observations, but teachers were provided with whole-group staff development as well. Principal C1 described this:

We tried to bring in staff development on what they needed. Also if they needed to go somewhere, for instance, I'm thinking I had some that were struggling with classroom management and I found workshops for them to go to and for them to come back and start practicing. Lots of staff development. They had to become comfortable with what was happening in the classroom, the changes that were taking place, so lots of training. (PRIN-C1/7)

When Principal C1 arrived as principal, using team meetings to improve instruction had not been a practice at School C. Once she came, teams were established and assigned to meet on a regular basis:

When we first started it was strictly by conference period. We tried to look at personalities and tried to match some of that up. We were pretty much tied, since it was during the day, tied to the conference periods. Which gave us really a good mix across the curriculum and instruction. We included coaches, we tried to put everybody into those <teams>. We held lots of meetings. We held those weekly. We did many book studies on reflective strategies and other areas that we were seeing problems with. So, the <team meetings> were a strong vehicle for us and it was small enough that, you know, it included everybody but it was more personal than just a big staff meeting. (PRIN-C1/4-5)

Team meetings became a vehicle that gave the staff a voice and a chance to collaborate and support each other. Principal C1 described how this eventually led to increased staff confidence, both individual and group, and a willingness to try new ideas:

You know what, it did (improve their comfort with collaboration and sharing). At first it was like a little hesitant on the part of some but then what happened was, when you have most of your staff embrace that, I mean they were collaborating and helping each other and going into each other's classrooms, which we did encourage, it brought along some of those that didn't feel as secure in doing that. It really did improve, yes, yes. We tried to open, that was one of the things I tried to do was have an open door policy, nonthreatening, that you can come in and talk to me and tell me. Now I may not always agree and I always let them know that. I too have someone to answer to but we can always have a conversation about it. They were very freely doing that, it was a nonthreatening manner. (PRIN-C2/8)

As principal C1 described the hard and often stress-inducing changes that she implemented during her time as principal, I asked if she struggled with keeping the staff motivated and optimistic. She responded by comparing their needs for incentives to the needs the students had:

We tried to just pretty much give them incentives too. Not monetary, and it's amazing what a pat on the back will do, little notes in their boxes, or if I go in the classroom and I see something I would write a post-it and leave it on the desk. In some cases we fed them too. Gave them little lunches. It's just being personable with them and letting them know that you do see and you do appreciate, lots of that. (PRIN-C1/7)

*Principal C2.* Just as it was with Principal C1, a good many of the activities Principal C2 led that were given credit for improving student achievement were described previously as part of the *Expectations and Accountability* theme. Setting expectations, communicating them, and holding people within the organization accountable are leadership behaviors. Activities related to *Leadership and Support of Instruction* that were not adequately covered in the previous section are communications and collaboration. Data collected from School C showed that Principal C2 increased the frequency of both significantly once she became principal.



About School C, AP-C shared, “there is good communication for sure” (p. 4). She mentioned “Monday Memos” and shared how the staff depended on them. Principal C2 described this method of communicating to staff:

I send out Mondays memos every Sunday night, which consist of the dates for that week, what to remember, your web page needs to be updated on so-and-so, they will speak to us about so-and-so college, or on this day the kids will take the Explorer exam, that kind of stuff. Very date driven. Whether we’re have an advisory day, what schedule we’re on, etc. Not only that I’m always at least a month, like right now I’m already putting April dates out there that are big so that they can be thinking ahead, like field day and that kind of stuff. (PRIN-C2/14)

Most of the increased communication that participants spoke of came as a result of the collaboration that occurred during the frequent and varied meetings held in the school. One participant described this connection:

We do have regular communications about where we are and where we want to be. I know <Principal C2> does that all the time. She opens up. We have quite a few meetings. We have more meetings now with her than we ever did. I guess because she comes from elementary. She keeps everything before us. (LIB-C/7)

The importance that Principal C2 placed on the various meetings being held in School C was evident. She described them and their purpose at length during our formal interview and referred to them numerous times in follow-up conversations. She described her perception of the way in which meetings had been conducted before she became principal to contrast them with the meetings they hold at School C now:

Before I came they were meeting with their core groups sporadically and there was not a lot of teacher learning going on. It was just meeting to say they met kind of thing. They might look at their <formative assessments> data and then they would go on back to their rooms. (PRIN-C2/4)

Principal C2 described one of the regular collaboration and training meetings held at School C as a “rotation that I think has been very beneficial” (p. 4). Each group meets every Wednesday during their planning period. Because the master schedule is arranged so that

departments have a common planning period, the planning for the meeting agenda can be altered to meet department and subject needs. Here is her description of the rotation, some of the activities associated with the meetings, and why she believes the activities to be helpful:

...we've gone over every single Marzano (Marzano, Pickering and Pollock, 2001) strategy, we've spent a year long very interactive study with project-base learning because of Common Core and every Wednesday our teachers meet with us. One week they work on their project-based learning, one week they look at data and reflect and talk about their kids and what they need to do. We use a tool that I think has been very beneficial called the Instructional Analysis Tool where they look at each strand that was tested and talk about was it in the red because it wasn't taught, is it in the orange because of core group of kids, 4 kids in my room didn't get it or is it in the green because we did a great job on it. One week our teachers actually do peer walk throughs and they use the classroom walk-through form and we have something we focus on, we don't use the whole form, we give them something we're all focused on. Is the objective clear? What instructional strategy is being used? Was technology incorporated in the lesson, etc? We send them out and then they come back and reflect, not by name but what things they saw. We're finding that they love that and that more things are happening there because the pressure is on number one, you want to do well in front of your peers and we find the more we're out and about the less discipline problems we have and the higher kids score because kids and teachers both do better when they're being watched. So that is just an added thing where they learn from each other and its added pressure to get out there and do it. (PRIN-C2/4)

Other team meetings, all with a different purpose and focus, and made up of differing groups of staff members are held regularly. Each Thursday morning there is a meeting of the Instructional Leaders Team made up of the principal, the two assistant principals, the two counselors, and the instructional facilitator. One important function of this team is to analyze the most current student data into a format that can in turn be shared with the teachers to guide their instruction.

There is an all-staff meeting every Tuesday (except 5<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays) after school that Principal C2 always leads. Teachers must attend and they receive state-required professional development credit for their time. Instruction is always the basis for the topic covered in these

meetings but they do celebrate successes and recognize a teacher for good work at each one.

Principal C2 described these meetings:

It's not logistics at all, it's not calendar. ...it's always instructional-based and I lead it. If there is something big coming up, I may throw the date out briefly but I don't spend time on that. We always start out by celebrating a teacher who is nominated by their peers for what we call the "Essential Pieces" award and they get this nice little glass trophy and I always read off what they've written. Then we give an opportunity for the teachers to celebrate any big gains they have made with students or a particular child that they've been working with and then we go on into something, like this coming week we'll be talking about school morale and we'll talk about we're all tired, we're getting tired, let's talk about school culture again. (PRIN-C2/6)

Principal C2 meets once each week with a teacher leadership team which is made up of 12 teachers – one to represent every group of teachers on the campus. The primary purpose for this meeting is to prepare each of them to lead their respective rotation meeting held during their planning periods each Wednesday.

In conversation with the staff, it was evident that they feel supported, informed, and a part of the team because of the collaboration and sharing that comes from these meetings. When I asked one of the respondents to tell me about morale, she described work that was being done during collaborative meeting sessions that seemed helpful. She also described how Principal C2 lead by allowing the teachers to take the reins, something Principal C2 (p. 10) talked about deliberately doing at times to allow them to learn to take risks, try new things, learn from their mistakes, adjust, and move forward:

...there are teachers that are still feeling overwhelmed, a lot of them feel overwhelmed at this point, but they kind of keep each other recharged ... very good about helping each other out. You know, trying to make things easier. We had literacy and social studies department working together on a research project within the last couple of weeks in team meetings. Just kind of collaborating a lot with each other, what can we do to help you guys, what can y'all do to help us, this is what we need from you. So that kind of keeps the morale high. She (Principal C2) let them get together and collaborate and decide this is what we want to do and this is what we would need to do it. She just kind of made sure everything was in place for them to go ahead and go forth with that. A lot of that she is allowing them to take the initiative, I mean, they're in the classrooms with

the kids and they know what they need, they know how to present it to them. So she's given them some leeway with that. She will oversee and she describes herself as a micro manager but she's got to know what's going on, on her campus. (AP-C/4-5)

Principal C2 is a determined leader. She is not reticent about stating her purpose and level of determination for improving School C. This was evident in a quote she shared with me that she had said to members of the school board who were visiting her campus:

Our scores are in the 60's, they are not impressive. I don't find that impressive at all. I said to our board when they visited us in October this is not impressive to me. This is where we are and yes, are we making gains and yes, has it been enough so far to keep the state off our backs yes, but when 68% of your kids are functioning in literacy is that okay for the other 32% to be left out there, no. (PRIN-C2/17)

Near the end of the formal interview with Principal C2 I asked what would happen if she were to abandon the leadership of the school now. How much do you keep going? What is your real role in its success? Would it continue if you walked away? She replied:

A lot of it would not and I'm going to tell you why. It's because some of it is work and it's hard work. If I'm not either rolling up my sleeves and doing that hard work myself or I'm not having a meeting that's, like my instructional team meetings that holds everyone accountable, this is your job for this week, this important to our school and this is why, who is going to do ... If I didn't hold those, if I didn't check grades every Tuesday afternoon, we take our clipboards and check. I have a third of the staff and each of my assistants have a third. If we didn't do those kinds of things, if they didn't know, I start sending out a week and a half in advance on checking web pages, reminder web pages are due, ... If I didn't do all that stuff...all of those structure pieces or processes if you want to, those are what keep a school moving and without those and without that accountability piece, only the people who believe in it intrinsically do it ... I say sometimes I'm a control freak, probably more of it than I would like to think because I'm one of those people that think if you've really done your job when you walk away, it exists, but sometimes it doesn't. There is a lot of work that goes on here. I will tell you that there are probably people that you could interview and it's like I wish she'd quit this or you know, but I find that when we quit it, we go back to a way of chaos and no purpose, you know... (PRIN-C2/14-15)

**Responding to Student Needs.** Both Principal C1 and Principal C2 believed focusing on determining the needs of the students and finding ways to respond to those needs was a critical component to improving their academic achievement. Throughout my formal interviews

with both, supportive data were collected to identify and support and establish *Responding to Student Needs* as an axial code or theme for School C.

*Principal C1*. Principal C1 stated perhaps her heightened awareness for seeing and responding to student needs was due in part to her training and experience as a school counselor, “I was counselor for a long time, so student interest has always been a driver for me” (PRIN-C1/4). Just as was noted when she first came into the principal’s position that there was a problem with teachers’ performance and attitude, she realized the same was true of the students. The poor academic performance of School C’s students was significantly influenced by both lack of motivation and ineffective instruction in their classrooms. She also commented about the undesirable appearance of the building when she came to School C and described how and why she set about to change it, stating:

We changed the look of the building as much as we could. We tried to paint and update, make it student friendly. We tried to change as much as we could the physical aspect of the building to make it more student friendly. (PRIN-C2/9)

Another respondent, addressed Principal C1’s efforts to improve the atmosphere in the building so student would like being there and said:

<Principal C1> took out the lockers. When we got here it was lockers up and down all the hallways. So, she took out the lockers and kind of opened it up and had paint and you know, just start renovating the building a little bit at a time. (LIB-C/5)

Recognizing that student motivation was poor when she became principal, Principal C1 described how she began work to improve it:

Student motivation was a problem also. So, it was getting the kids to believe in themselves. We tried to do that by just letting them experience some successes and celebrating those successes. Lots of celebrations. (PRIN-C2/7)

Likely related to low levels of motivation, poor student attendance was also a significant problem. She described the measures she took to try and increase attendance:

We had to work on attendance. We tried to give within the school incentives for attendance. We worked with the parents. We had many parent meetings to get them to understand that it was important that they got there on time and sharing some of that data with the parents about their child. That was eye opening for some of the parents. Lots of conversations about that, about getting the students there on time. As I said, we tried to offer those students incentives, just whatever we thought worked. We would give them a dance, may have a treat, it was some things like an extra ten minutes of recess or you may have a little longer with lunch and you could eat with a lunch buddy. Sometimes we brought in pizza for those that had achieved a certain rate. Just whatever we could think of that would work for the kids and we did go to the kids to find out what they thought was important for them to work for. Of course, it's always something tied to time and lunch, food. (PRIN-C2/3)

Progress has been made in this area. Principal C2 affirmed that poor attendance is no longer a problem across the student body but that they “do have 17 students that we have filed a FINS (Family in Need of Services) and are working with the court system” (PRIN-C2/Doc1).

While Principal C1 was putting measures in place to increase student motivation through activities meant to raise their self-worth and belief in themselves and to increase attendance, she was also pushing and leading the teaching staff to raise the effectiveness of their instruction (as is shown in the data associated with the two previously discussed themes). Under Principal C1's leadership general improvements in instruction were not all she aimed for. Instead, instruction was to be responsive to the individual needs of each student – to be prescriptive. She described how her experience at the elementary readied her for this approach:

I had the background of elementary and that was a tremendous help because I knew where the kids were coming from and I think that was an advantage for me as opposed to others who had never seen that. Of course, you know, elementary when you look at the remediation and being a little more prescriptive and hands on that was every easy for me to transfer that. (PRIN-C1/7)

Principal C1 proceeded to explain more about how prescriptive instruction was implemented:

We worked a lot with the instruction, refining and identifying those students, for lack of a better term, our struggling students, our bubble students. We took a look at the makeup of our classes. Had the teachers do that data analysis of students in class and look at what they need. We eventually drilled that down to the teachers where they kept their own data walls and they knew where the gaps were and soon figured out this is what I need to

do to fill in those gaps ... We have a student here, the student is almost proficient, it just takes a little more help in this area to get them over ... We felt we shouldn't adopt a particular (instructional) program because we were trying to use prescriptive instruction for those students and a program we didn't feel would just address every student. You know, we wanted the teachers to look at those students individually and come up with those prescriptions that those students need. Now they had all kinds of materials and supplies, so if a teacher felt that they needed a certain maybe software... (PRIN-C1/3-6)

There were other instruction-related measures that Principal C1 lead that addressed student needs. Because the student data showed there were many were inadequate readers, this need was addressed by arranging a double-period literacy block for those who were struggling.

During Principal C1's first year as principal she sought resources from the district that allowed her to provide after-school tutoring for students needing extra help in math and literacy. Transportation was an issue for many so participation was poor. After this arrangement failed the first year she was there, she altered the daily schedule so struggling students could receive prescriptive tutoring during the school day.

Just as Principal C1 raised the expectations for teachers, the behavioral expectations for students were raised. LIB-C described the status of student behavior and discipline and some about the teacher's role in the beginning of Principal C1's tenure:

I would think with the teachers being accountable and if I was graded on what my students did then I needed to make sure that they were doing it. I know we had a lot of fights when I first got here, we had a lot of kids out in the hallway, we had them put out and she (Principal C1) kind of said there will be no more kids in the hallway. This handbook is the rule. You don't just send them out. It went back to a lot of expecting them to manage their classroom. She was very authoritative but sometimes you need that when there have not been boundaries in the past. So she kind of really focused on structure. (LIB-C/3)

This respondent went on to say before Principal C1 the student discipline handbook had not been followed consistently. A student's discipline would often be determined by a pronouncement from a teacher and some students were favored over other. Principal C1 changed this and adhered strictly to the provisions of the handbook.

*Principal C2.* As was described with the previous two themes for School C, Principal C2 is responding to student academic needs by raising the instructional expectations and accountability for the teaching staff and by providing the leadership and support to increase the effectiveness of classroom instruction. When I asked AP-C what changed for the students that contributed to the increase in the school's academic achievement levels, she responded with:

I think it has to all boil down to accountability. They know that the expectation is higher than it has been for them in the past and we are going to push them, we're going to challenge them, we're going to expect more from them. They are expected to rise to that. Once again we have some that are not going to rise unless we push them, we have to prod them along sometimes. (AP-C/5)

LIB-C made this observation about Principal C2 and students, "I really do think, you know, that she is good leader and she has got good vision. The kids are always number one, you know" (LIB-C/8).

As data were collected related to Principal C2's leadership and the changes that have contributed to improving student achievement, both she and other respondents expressed their belief that meeting the emotional and instructional needs of students has been almost as important as improving teachers' instructional skills. "One of the things that we battle here more than anything, if I had to tell you one our top five things that we're battling, would be student motivation", stated Principal C2 (p. 18). Implementing changes that focus on meeting their physical, emotional, and social needs has become her countermeasures for pushing against their lack of intrinsic motivation.

There are several examples of things she has initiated to make the school a safe and fun place where students want to be because they know that good things can happen to them and they feel they belong. An example that LIB-C gave was:

<Principal C2> has built in a lot of incentives and programs and recognition for the kids. We have got so much going on. If you do this, you'll get this. If you do this, we are



going to have this program for you. She has put in the dance team and the cheerleaders standards changed where they don't have to tryout. If you want to be a cheerleader, you're a cheerleader. So, they got a whole lot of extra stuff to get involved in instead of just certain kids. We do a lot of art, dramas, production and everything we try to involve the kids in more and more ... Next year we are doing a dance team, I think a key club so she is just opening up all kind of things to keep the kids involved ... an opportunity to find their niche. (LIB-C/8-9)

Another example she gave of Principal C2's focus on meeting students' needs by making school a good place to be was:

She's got ideas for outside. Like we built a patio outside and the kids get to eat in the patio outside. It's their choice. They can go out there every day. They don't have to eat in the lunchroom. If they bring their lunch they can just go out there. It's their time, they're monitored and just enjoy. I think it's kind of making it this is your place. I know we're supposed to be remodeling the library to make it kid friendly where they can plug in their iPods and whatever and charge stuff. <Principal C2> is more what can we do for kids. (LIB-C/5)

To give the students a formal voice, Principal C2 has established a principal's advisory group made up of 12 students that meets with her two times monthly. When I asked for more information about how students are chosen for the group, she said:

They are submitted by their teachers. I ask that it not be all student council members or all straight A kids. I ask them to send me some of your rugged, little tugged kids who are wreaking havoc in our school. I want to know why. I want them to see what it means and I want them to feel like they have some voice. That's when they discuss what they want to see in their school. (PRIN-C2/7)

She described some of the activities the students have undertaken that have been beneficial to both the students and the school. While observing, I noticed that multiple "big tablet" pages (PIC-C/1) showing listings of input from students on the advisory group were still posted on the wall of the conference room. These were the work product for this activity the group completed:

He (adult leader) came in and he said (to the principal advisory group) what do you think good teaching looks like? Kids know what good teaching should look like. Then he said to them, what does good learning look like? What does it look like when you're really engaged and you're doing your part? They were very honest and we went back and shared that with the teachers. (PRIN-C2/7)

Since becoming principal at School C, programs aimed at responding to specific academic needs of students have been implemented. Principal C2 stated that she does not typically like to use commercially developed programs but that there are two (Reading Plus and Reading Coach) that she has adopted since becoming principal that are specifically meant to meet the needs of struggling readers. She initiated a program called STARS that she described as, “a true alternative learning environment where kids and parents get to apply” (p. 4). Another program, called “About Face”, housed on School C’s campus, has been developed for students that before would have been suspended out-of-school for discipline infractions. The program is housed on the school campus so rather than sending students home, they are kept close, but isolated during their suspension from regular classes and the general population. This allows their teachers to check on their students and help them keep up with their work.

In an effort to shift the responsibility to students for their grades, teachers at School C are required by Principal C2 to post a spread sheet with up-to-date grades on or by their doors. It is a district policy that every student must have at least two assignments graded weekly and added to the grade book (DOC-C1). Principal C2 described the practice of posting grades this way:

The other thing that we’ve done, which made a big impact in our building beginning last year, is that we require them (teachers) every Tuesday by 4:00 to post their grades for their students on their door. They post them by student ID number. So on Wednesday morning at 8:00 if you’ve got a 1<sup>st</sup> period class you know how you stand. You know if you’re missing assignments, you know if you haven’t turned in homework, you know if you’re grade is slipping, if you’ve been working to bring it up have you brought it up. So when a parent calls me I can say I can walk down with my phone right now and tell you what your child is doing and so could they today because its posted on the door. The parents are saying you’re kidding me, my kid walked by this every day and knew that this assignment was missing and didn’t do anything about it. Yes ma’am that is what I’m telling you. So it shifted the accountability a little bit. (PRIN-C2/6)

Once a quarter, she encourages the teachers to contact the parents of every student in their class who is in danger of failing. Working together with her assistant principals and counselors, students on the “F-list” receive personal attention:

...we have gone through and talked to every single kid and their parent and we’ve sent a letter saying this is what has to happen. I’ve tried to hand call every parent between three administrators. My counselors took the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade and they had a conference with all of them. So we’re looking at our kids that are failing immediately. (PRIN-C2/5-6)

Just as it was under Principal C1’s leadership, behavioral expectations for students are in place and the handbook followed. One participant shared that “her expectations have changed stuff the kids used to get away with. She holds kids accountable for their actions...following the handbook ... to bring structure to the classroom” (LIB-C/8).

As a result, “...discipline is less than 50% this year to where it was standing, in fact, we’ve see a loss every single year I’ve been here,” according to Principal C2. She and other study participants gave credit for improved student behavior to the principal’s constant visibility around the school, saying that both she and her two assistants are out and about in the hallways during class changes and in classrooms throughout the day. She explained why she believes this is helpful in keeping everyone on their toes:

...the kids never transition that all three of us are not in the hall. We’re very hands on, we’re very involved. I think that we’ve had our issues here and there like everyone. You know, I’m not going to tell you we haven’t had a fight, they are far and fewer and fewer in between. I believe that is what set the tone is we’re there so the teachers are there where they’re supposed to be because they know we’re going to be there and so when the teachers are there and the principals are there you’re going to do what you’re supposed to do. When we’re not there the teachers get more relaxed with it and so we just try to make it a point of sometimes it’s not what you say it’s what you practice and so that’s kind of been my goal since I’ve been here. (PRIN-C2/9).

When visiting in the school during passing periods, I observed students being somewhat noisy, but still at acceptable levels for junior high students. Sometimes alone and other times accompanied by Principal C2, I observed hundreds of students over the day but saw no

misbehavior or malingering. Teachers were standing outside most every classroom door and most spoke to and greeted students as they came nearby.

### **Cross-case Analysis of Three Schools**

My first goal for this study was to complete an intra-case study and analysis of all the relevant data sources for each school site to try and determine the principal's role in improving their school's academic status as measured by the Arkansas Department of Education. The previous sections of this chapter report findings for each in narrative story form. The following section illustrates the cross-case findings from the three schools, compares them, and looks for patterns that show what these principals did and how they did it to influence school improvement.

#### **Method for Cross-case Analysis**

*Rationale for Method Used.* To complete this section, careful consideration was given to the data and findings from the three school sites as extrapolated from interviews, conversations, observations, and documents. Because the data from each school was analyzed and reported as a unique case, the axial code and theme names differed somewhat from one school to the other. Table 4.8 provides a visual comparison of themes by school.

Table 4.8

*Visual Comparison of Themes by School*

SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
	1. Climate & Culture	
1. Data as Driver		
2. Expectations & Accountability	2. Expectations & Accountability	1. Expectations & Accountability
3. Teacher Quality		
4. Instruction	3. Instruction	2. Leadership and Support of Instruction
5. Leadership		
6. Responding to Student/Parent Needs	4. Responding to Student Needs 5. Interacting with Parents & Community	3. Responding to Student Needs

The open codes, or supporting elements for the axial codes, used words and phrases that came straight from the data and thus, different language and vocabulary were sometimes used by various participants and other sources to describe the same or similar phenomena or concepts.

Comparing only the axial codes between schools showed some were common to all schools and some were shown in only one or two schools. For example, *Expectations and Accountability* and *Responding to Student Needs* were a common theme for all three schools. *Instruction* emerged as a theme for Schools A and B, while School C's similarly named theme was *Leadership and Support of Instruction*. *Data as Driver* was a theme for School A only.

*Data as Driver* emerged as a theme for School A because the study data collected was filled with references to the pervasive the use of data in the school and its influence on most of what the principal does. Open coding of Schools B and C study data also revealed local data usage by their principals. However, when these codes were included among those identified, sorted, and categorized to identify axial codes, *Data as Driver* was not identified as a theme in either school. Because of their significance to principal's behaviors, they were included as indicators in other themes identified for B and C.

A collective review of all of the themes and the sample indicators for the three schools pointed to many similar overlaps like the one just described. A method for mapping the all of these components was created and a cross-case analysis began to emerge. This step required that careful consideration be given to ensure the intended messages of the participants or other data sources were not altered in my interpretation of meaning among the differing words and vocabulary used to describe the same or similar phenomena. Prior to completing this step, I also thoroughly reviewed and considered the implications of findings in previous research literature as presented in Chapter Two.

### **Presentation of Cross-case Findings (Selective Codes)**

During the mapping process inductive and deductive analysis was used to reorganize and cluster the themes to form five categories. Once completed, all of the indicators were reexamined for meaning and assigned into one or more of the five categories. Table 4.9 represents the map that was developed during this process.

Table 4.9

*Cross-case Map of Themes and Sample Indicators for Schools A, B, and C*

Theme(s)	Indicators
<p>1. Expectations and Accountability (A, B, C)</p> <p>Teacher Quality (A)</p>	<p>School A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data does not lie.</li> <li>• Procedural Handbook – Their Bible</li> <li>• Procedures are Locked Down</li> <li>• Classroom and Inside School Observations</li> <li>• Constant Monitoring</li> <li>• Work in the System or Move On</li> </ul> <p>School B:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishes Basic Expectations for Staff</li> <li>• Structures and Organizes Procedural Expectations</li> <li>• Gentle Reminders</li> </ul> <p>School C:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State-Directed Involvement Impetus for Improving</li> <li>• Poor Staff Attitudes/Ineffective Instruction Raised</li> <li>• Expectations</li> <li>• Poor Fit – Move On</li> <li>• Counsel Non-Fits Out</li> <li>• Dismissed Non-Compliers If Improvement Not Shown</li> <li>• Teacher Performance Quality IS Expected</li> <li>• Communicating Expectations: Three Steps</li> <li>• Establish Day-to-Day Procedural Expectations</li> <li>• Use the Data to Own the Problem</li> <li>• Own the Problem Out Loud</li> <li>• Do Not Give or Accept Excuses – Find an Answer</li> </ul>

Theme(s)	Indicators
<p>Responding to Student Needs (A, B, C)</p> <p>+ Parents (A)</p> <p>+ Interacting with Parents and Community (B)</p>	<p>School A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Seeks to Improve Parent/Community Support</li> <li>•Principal Knows Every Student’s Status</li> <li>•Teachers are to Know Every Student’s Status</li> <li>•Principal Converses with Students – Knows Something Personal</li> <li>•Principal has Conversations with Parents When Student Struggles</li> <li>•Has Developed a System for Student Recognition</li> <li>•Sets High Academic Expectations for Students – pre-AP</li> <li>•Set it High and Students will Rise to Expectation</li> <li>•Find Ways to Foster Parent and Community Support</li> </ul> <p>School B:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Established 5-Step Discipline Process to Keep Kids in Classrooms</li> <li>•Follows Handbook Consistently = Everyone Treated Fairly</li> <li>•Student Expectations Set High and Communicated</li> <li>•All Students Have an Adult Mentor Who MUST Get to Know Them</li> </ul> <p>School C:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Establish Day-to-Day Procedural Expectations for Students</li> <li>•Prior Culture Low Expectations/Problem has Become Priority</li> <li>•Discipline/Attendance Prior Problem/Incentives for Good</li> <li>•Posted Grades – Shifted Accountability to Students</li> <li>•Principal’s Student Advisory – Student Voice</li> <li>•Use/Share Data w/Students to Develop Instructional Goals</li> <li>•Increase Extra-Curricular Offering – Every Kid a Niche</li> <li>•Celebrate Success With Students – Grow Belief in Themselves</li> <li>•A Lot of Incentives</li> <li>•Expanded Alternative School Options</li> <li>•Attention to Building/Grounds: Kid Friendly</li> </ul>



Theme(s)	Indicator
<p>Leadership (A)</p> <p>Leadership and Support of Instruction (C)</p>	<p>School A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Principal is Expert – Research-Based</li> <li>•Intellectual Stimulation – Book Studies</li> <li>•Gain Respect from Staff, Students, Community</li> <li>•Reflect Energy, Enthusiasm, &amp; Hope</li> <li>•Gain Central Office Support</li> <li>•Keep Promises – Always Follow Through</li> <li>•Regular and Frequent Collaborative Team Meetings</li> <li>•Seeks to Improve Community Support</li> <li>•When you need it, she finds a way</li> </ul> <p>School B:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Personal Respect for Principal</li> <li>•Development of Relationships at Top of Priority List</li> <li>•Responds to Teacher Needs with Resources</li> <li>•Much Positive Regard for Teachers Motivates Them</li> <li>•Maintains Open-Door Policy – Available to Respond to Needs</li> <li>•Gentle Reminders</li> <li>•Good Hires</li> </ul> <p>School C:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Communicate and Be Transparent</li> <li>•Communication Tools</li> <li>•Vision and Mission – See it, Talk it, Live it</li> <li>•Recognition of Good Work to Boost Morale</li> <li>•Encouragement and Support to Try New Things</li> <li>•Works to Have Support from Central Office and Board Members</li> </ul>

Theme(s)	Indicators
Climate and Culture (B)	<p>School A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Reflect Energy, Enthusiasm, Hope, Optimism</li> <li>•School Shirts for Every Student</li> <li>•Student Led Projects – Exterior Landscaping</li> </ul> <p>School B:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Significant Personal Respect for Principal</li> <li>•Development of Relationships at Top of Priority List</li> <li>•Responds to Teacher Needs with Resources</li> <li>•Positive Regard and Respect for Teachers’ Skills</li> <li>•Honors Teachers Position – Gives them Much Autonomy</li> <li>•Structures and Organizes Procedural Expectations</li> <li>•Student Discipline is Significantly Improved</li> <li>•Maintains Open-Door Policy – Available to Respond to Needs</li> </ul> <p>School C:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Morale Building Activities</li> <li>•Pats on the Back</li> <li>•Recognition of Staff as Individuals</li> <li>•Use of Peer Pressure to Encourage Harder Work</li> <li>•Works to Have Support from Central Office and Board Members</li> </ul>

Theme(s)	Indicators
Instruction (A, B)  Leadership and Support of Instruction (C)  Data as Driver (A)	School A: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Recruitment of Good Teachers</li> <li>•Care in Hiring</li> <li>•Matching Talents to Classroom/Assignments</li> <li>•Regular and Frequent Collaborative Team Meetings</li> <li>•Data Meetings</li> <li>•Formative Assessment</li> <li>•Common Planning for Learning and Collaboration</li> <li>•Classroom Observations to Look at Quality of Instruction</li> <li>•Classroom Observations to Provide Feedback</li> <li>•Constant Monitoring of Student Data and Changing Status</li> <li>•Principal as Expert – Familiar with Latest Research</li> <li>•Reading is Key – Teach Reading, Not English</li> <li>•Connected Math II, Literacy Lab</li> <li>•Encourage and Expect Cross-Curricular Instruction</li> <li>•Principal Monitors SpEd Students Particularly</li> </ul> School B: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Structured Schedule - Increased Time Blocked for Math &amp; Literacy</li> <li>•Good Hires</li> <li>•Help from Outside Providers – Co-op/Other Principals</li> <li>•Enables/Encourages Collegial Help from Within</li> <li>•Enables Teams and Collaboration Time</li> </ul> School C: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Analyze and REFLECT Always to Find Solutions</li> <li>•Help from Outside Providers</li> <li>•All Administrative Team Trained/Assigned to Help with Instruction</li> <li>•Many Collaborative Meetings – Instructional Focus</li> <li>•Master Schedule Arranged to Enable Teams</li> <li>•Proscriptive Professional Development</li> <li>•Use of Peer Pressure to Encourage Harder Work</li> </ul>

The five categories that were developed as a result of this mapping process were (a) expectations and accountability, (b) leadership, (c) responding to student needs, (d) climate and culture, and (e) instruction.

Throughout this process the goal was to collect data that would first, answer the research questions. Secondly, the study would enable me to develop a theory about what and how effective secondary principals lead their schools in the improvement of their students' levels of academic performance and to better standing in the state's accountability system. The final analysis conducted of the data – the cross-case analysis – resulted in five major trends, or selective codes sifted from the collective data. These selective codes became the basis and justification for the grounded theory that is presented in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five defines the grounded theory that arose from this study, explains the findings, compares them with research findings from previous studies as reported in Chapter Two, and uses the selective codes and indicators to answer the study's research questions. Implications for how the findings may be used by practitioners will be presented as will recommendation for future studies.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusions and Recommendations

There are many public secondary schools in the State of Arkansas in which students are failing to meet academic standards at adequate levels to be considered achieving schools and are ranked by the Arkansas Department of Education as needing improvement. Historically, schools that fall into this category have a difficult time overcoming it, particularly if the failing trend persists more than one or two years. The purpose of this study was to identify three public secondary schools that had reversed their failing trends and made gains enough to be reclassified by the state as achieving or meeting standards and determine what the principal of each school did to contribute to the school's improvement. The research questions used to focus and guide this study and for which answers were sought were:

1. To what leadership responsibilities and behaviors do school principals in three achieving Arkansas secondary schools attribute their success in moving from school improvement status to a school meeting standards?
2. What were the processes these principals implemented within their leadership roles to which they attribute their success?

Multiple visits were made to each of the three school sites and additional conversations and correspondence were completed via telephone and e-mail. The primary sources for data collection were by means of formal interviews and conversations with the principal and selected staff members at each school. In each case, formal interviews were recorded and transcribed. In two of the three schools, both the current and former principals were interviewed to ensure that the accounting of what occurred in the school was complete. During each site visit additional data were collected to add thoroughness to the data and meet triangulation. This was

accomplished via observations in the hallways and classrooms and from occasional brief, informal conversations with available staff. Students were not interviewed. Relevant documents from each site were examined and when possible, copies collected. In other cases, pictures and descriptive notes were taken of documents and other pertinent artifacts that I observed while in the schools. Email and phone exchanges were used to ask follow-up and clarifying questions of the participants.

Using the purpose for the study and the research questions to guide the process, the entirety of the data for each case were first evaluated using a “process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.11) and then analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding. Chapter Four presented the data for each case as a narrative story along with the results of a cross-case analysis of the three cases.

Chapter Five describes the grounded theory that arose from this study, explains the findings, compares them with research findings from previous studies as reported in Chapter Two, and in doing so, answers the research questions. Implications for how the findings may be used by practitioners are presented as are recommendation for future studies.

### **Grounded Theory**

This study sought to generate theory about the what principals did to change secondary schools rated as failing into schools where student achievement levels improved enough to be rated as achieving or meeting standards. To accomplish this grounded theory methodology was used. According to Strauss and Corbin (1994) "Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection" (p. 274).

There are numerous research findings in the literature which list and describe the traits and characteristics of effective principals and some that even enumerate the effect size of principal leadership on student achievement. Few of these describe “how” principals go about affecting this. Many studies conclude by stating there is a need for further research to explore the question of “how”. A preponderance of the existing research that examines the connection between leadership and student learning is focused on elementary schools, leaving what is known about this connection in secondary schools limited. The goal of this study was to develop theory to expand and enrich the current research by defining and describing what three successful Arkansas principals did to positively influence the levels of student achievement in their respective schools.

Intra-analysis of each the three schools revealed nine differently named axial codes or themes among them. Each theme was supported by indicators taken from their school’s data which reflected a trait, behavior, or process used by the principal. Using the themes and the indicators for them, a cross-case analysis was completed from which five selective codes were revealed as follows: (a) expectations and accountability, (b) leadership, (c) responding to student needs, (d) climate and culture, and (e) instruction.

What this process and its outcome showed was that principal behaviors and actions related to all five of these themes or categories were in place in all of the schools studied. This is illustrated in Table 4.9. Comparison of the indicators that supported each theme showed trait and behavioral variations between schools. In some cases the particular principal traits and actions in a category were the same or similar and while others differed entirely between schools. The five selective codes revealed through cross-case analysis became the basis for development of five categories of theory that emerged from the data. Each theory represents a category of

responsibilities and behaviors exhibited by three successful secondary principals in Arkansas to which they attribute their success in moving from school improvement status to a school meeting standards. What follows is a discussion of each of these.

### **Theory One - Expectations and Accountability**

The first category of leadership behaviors that was evident in all three schools was expectations and accountability. Table 5.1 shows the lists of indicators associated with the category/theory found in each school.



Table 5.1

*Theory One: Expectations and Accountability*

Indicators	
<p>School A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data does not lie.</li> <li>• Procedural Handbook – Their Bible</li> <li>• Procedures are Locked Down</li> <li>• Classroom and Inside School Observations</li> <li>• Constant Monitoring</li> <li>• Work in the System or Move On</li> </ul> <p>School B:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishes Basic Expectations for Staff</li> <li>• Structures and Organizes Procedural Expectations</li> <li>• Gentle Reminders</li> </ul>	<p>School C:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State-Directed Involvement Impetus for Improving</li> <li>• Poor Staff Attitudes/Ineffective Instruction</li> <li>• Raised Expectations</li> <li>• Poor Fit – Move On</li> <li>• Counsel Non-Fits Out</li> <li>• Dismissed Non-Compliers If Improvement Not Shown</li> <li>• Teacher Performance Quality IS Expected</li> <li>• Communicating Expectations: Three Steps</li> <li>• Establish Day-to-Day Procedural Expectations</li> <li>• Use the Data to Own the Problem</li> <li>• Own the Problem Out Loud</li> <li>• Do Not Give or Accept Excuses – Find an Answer</li> </ul>

A strong factor that motivated the principals in the three schools to set high expectations and hold staff and students to them was the state's accountability system and its assignment of performance labels. Both Principal B and C described how being state-directed meant outside providers had been assigned to their schools to assist. They expressed their determination to do whatever it took to raise and keep their scores high so no outsiders would need to come back and "tell us how to run our school". All three of them came across as determined fighters when talking about staying above the failure line. Not one of them expressed blame or ill feelings toward the state's system or blamed the students for the schools' poor performances but each gave indications they hold themselves responsible for their school's success. Each of them credited their concern for their students, especially of those traditionally left behind, as reason for improving their schools, but it was the state accountability system that appeared to stir and

motivate them most to establish and hold themselves and others accountable to high expectations.

Directly tied to this was their use of student data to call attention to their status at all times. They never worked blindly toward their goals but each had systems in place to regularly check their achievement status, using the data. At School B, the principal relied mostly on the teachers to keep up with individual and group student status through monitoring of grades, observations, and results of formative assessments. However, A and C were both personally involved in crunching the numbers and communicating them to their staff regularly, both to celebrate gains and make adjustments when there were no gains. At School A, a favorite saying of the principal, echoed by several staff, was “data doesn’t lie”. Principal C similarly expresses that she uses the data to “own the problem”.

The principals of all three schools presented their staffs with a clear sense and set of directions and they consistently gave them feedback. All seemed to work from the personal belief that when they set high expectations, they were sending the message they not only expected them to meet them but were showing their confidence in them. Most of the staff responded to this positively, inspiring them to want to do their best. There was evidence the rigorous expectations of all three had caused some staff to leave and some continue to look for a way out. Principal A believed that after having been in place as principal for 11 years, she had developed a team that was like-minded with her where everyone had grown accustomed to, appreciated, and were dependent on her high expectations. Her staff confirmed this. Because Principal C has not been in place long enough to clean house of all of those who did not respond positively in an environment of high expectations, she and her staff were aware there were others who are looking for and will find a way to leave. In contrast to this, in School C there are those

who have voluntarily transferred into her school because they like and appreciate her rigorous expectations and structure.

Principals A and C both appeared to be very directive in setting and monitoring for compliance of high expectations. Similar language was used to describe them - micromanager, hand in everything, always checking, always knows everything. Principal B did not demonstrate a directive approach but believed establishing relationships and demonstrating his confidence in them was the key to getting anyone, whether staff or student, to want to do their best. This approach worked very well in his school's environment. Every participant encountered spoke of not wanting to let him down because he had placed such confidence in them.

Each principal expressed the critical importance of developing a highly qualified teaching staff. Particular attention was given to hiring the best possible replacements and weeding out poor performers. None were at all willing to let poor performers go unnoticed. Each described examples of situations where they had actively counseled and used personal conversations with staff who were not contributing adequately to their schools' success to encourage them to move on. A and C had both used their district's policies to recommend dismissal or nonrenewal of personnel and stated that their superintendents and boards had not only backed them in this process but expected this of them when personnel did not meet expectations.

All principals had procedural manuals in place to give structure and order to their day-to-day operations. In each case, time was set aside to communicate these to staff. Principals A and C monitored for compliance consistently while Principal B did not appear to have such a system in place but trusted his staff to do what they were expected to do. None of the three was timid about reminding staff if an expectation was not followed or of taking appropriate disciplinary actions if reminding and assistance did not correct non-compliance.

**Theory Two - Leadership**

Leadership is the second selective code that was identified when data from the three schools' were collectively and cross-analyzed. Table 5.2 lists supporting indicators by school. These are indicative of what and how the principal in that school influenced the school's improved academic status.

Table 5.2

*Theory Two: Leadership*

Indicator	
<p>School A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Principal is Expert – Research-Based</li> <li>•Intellectual Stimulation – Book Studies</li> <li>•Gain Respect from Staff, Students, Community</li> <li>•Reflect Energy, Enthusiasm, &amp; Hope</li> <li>•Gain Central Office Support</li> <li>•Keep Promises – Always Follow Through</li> <li>•Regular and Frequent Collaborative Team Meetings</li> <li>•Seeks to Improve Community Support</li> <li>•When you Need It, She finds a Way</li> </ul> <p>School B:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Personal Respect for Principal</li> <li>•Development of Relationships at Top of Priority List</li> <li>•Responds to Teacher Needs with Resources</li> <li>•Much Positive Regard for Teachers Motivates Them</li> <li>•Maintains Open-Door Policy – Available to Respond to Needs</li> <li>•Gentle Reminders</li> <li>•Good Hires</li> </ul>	<p>School C:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Communicate and Be Transparent</li> <li>•Communication Tools</li> <li>•Vision and Mission – See it, Talk it, Live it</li> <li>•Recognition of Good Work to Boost Morale</li> <li>•Encouragement and Support to Try New Things</li> <li>•Works to Have Support from Central Office and Board Members</li> </ul>

There are indications that the principals in all three schools continually modeled appropriate values and practices (Leithwood, 2003) and in turn were highly respected by their staff. In each school a consistent comment heard from staff was that they could always count on their principal. If he/she said they would do something, then they would follow through. All have gained respect for having quality contact and interactions with teachers and students (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) and being visible. It was noted that both A and C “roll up their sleeves” and work alongside the staff.

There is definitely a collaborative culture in each school. This is encouraged by each principal's willingness to arrange daily schedules to allow for collaborative meetings, to join in these meetings with staff, and to lead them when appropriate. This in turn is a vehicle for keeping the vision and mission in the forefront and for developing group goals. In Schools A and C the principals' own visions are so defined and sure that everything that occurs in the school is a piece of their vision. Principal B allows the teachers to lead much of the time but he acts as their biggest cheerleader.

A, B, and C all maintain open-door policies and are available to the staff. A and C are out of their offices and in other areas of the school most of the time, making an office visit difficult for staff. However, both were observed many times having business conversations about school with staff members in hallways and classrooms. By having an open-door policy, team meetings and establishing strong lines of communication with and among teachers all three principals built collaborative work cultures and created both formal and informal organizational structures that supported the work.

Principal B is driven by his belief that establishing and maintaining good relationships is the most effective form of leadership. He allows the teachers autonomy to organize and manage their classroom and openly tells them he will limit his intrusion into instruction because he respects their judgment and skills. All of the teacher participants enthusiastically expressed their appreciation for his approach to leadership. It was clear during the interview and conversations that they believed his leadership style was responsible for positively influencing the school's climate so drastically it was the biggest factor in improving the school's status. He does admit that he is not willing to ignore staff members who are not compliant or working well on the team

and can be tough if gentle reminders are not enough. This was affirmed by at one of the participants who described a personal experience he had with this.

Principal C recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments among her staff. She is adamant that any recognition for performance be genuine but searches for opportunities to pat her teachers on the back. She is just as adamant that she and her staff always be transparent, even when mistakes are made because she believes failure has to be acknowledged first before change can occur. Principals A and B both give frequent verbal affirmations to the staff. All three of them find ways to provide treats and enjoyable surprises for their teachers to show appreciation.

According to Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), a principal who provides intellectual stimulation for her staff by exposing them to up-to-date research as a regular part of the culture can influence student achievement (p. 43). Both Principals A and C do this by having regular book study sessions with their teams.

Another function of leadership that all three principals practiced was to find ways to connect the school to its wider environment by cultivating productive relations with families and the community. For B this was particularly important because there had been a long tradition at his school that kept parents and community from feeling welcome in the school. He arranged activities to encourage parents to come to school events and to get involved in their child's school. He approached the community for help with his incentive program for the students which he tied to academic improvement. Principals A and C both engaged in increasing their personal contacts with parents. Both used their personal familiarity with individual student data and worked with parents to collaboratively create individual plans with students. A and C both

deliberately worked to keep their working relationship with their central office and board a positive, productive one.

### **Theory Three - Responding to Student Needs**

Responding to student needs is the third selective code that was identified when data from the three schools' were collectively cross-analyzed. Table 5.3 displays the indicators by school which show what the data says the principal in that school did to influence the school's improved academic status. Responding to student needs was revealed during the intra-case study of each school as an axial code or theme, indicating that principal activities related to meeting student needs and its influence on the school's academic improvement had a strong presence in every school.



Table 5.3

*Theory Three: Responding to Student Needs*

Indicators	
<p>School A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Seeks to Improve Parent/Community Support</li> <li>•Principal Knows Every Student’s Status</li> <li>•Teachers are to Know Every Student’s Status</li> <li>•Principal Converses with Students – Knows Something Personal</li> <li>•Principal has Conversations with Parents When Student Struggles</li> <li>•Has Developed a System for Student Recognition</li> <li>•Sets High Academic Expectations for Students – pre-AP</li> <li>•Set it High and Students will Rise to Expectation</li> <li>•Find Ways to Foster Parent and Community Support</li> </ul>	<p>School B:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Established 5-Step Discipline Process to Keep Kids in Classrooms</li> <li>•Follows Handbook Consistently = Everyone Treated Fairly</li> <li>•Student Expectations Set High and Communicated</li> <li>•All Students Have an Adult Mentor Who MUST Get to Know Them</li> </ul> <p>School C:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Establish Day-to-Day Procedural Expectations for Students</li> <li>•Prior Culture Low Expectations/Problem has Become Priority</li> <li>•Discipline/Attendance Prior Problem/Incentives for Good</li> <li>•Posted Grades – Shifted Accountability to Students</li> <li>•Principal’s Student Advisory – Student Voice</li> <li>•Use/Share Data w/Students to Develop Instructional Goals</li> <li>•Increase Extra-Curricular Offering – Every Kid a Niche</li> <li>•Celebrate Success With Students – Grow Belief in Themselves</li> <li>•A Lot of Incentives</li> <li>•Expanded Alternative School Options</li> <li>•Attention to Building/Grounds: Kid Friendly</li> </ul>

As data were collected and analyzed for each school, one of the most supported (in regard to the number of behaviors and actions noted in the data) categories of actions all three principals put into place was associated with responding to student needs. Most powerful among these were those actions aimed at recognizing each student as an individual worthy of having respectful attention from the adults in the school. This was most prevalent for Principal A,

perhaps because she had been in place longest and issues that might distract a newer principal from attending to students were no longer were a problem. She appeared to know every student personally. Her teachers indicated that she knew something about the status of every one of the 465 students in her school, and of the struggling students with even more detail. Out in the hallways, classrooms, and cafeteria she was observed speaking to students about their progress levels, what they were struggling with, and what they were doing to try and improve. The students' awareness that she knew about them personally and would not let them hide appeared to cause anxiety in some, but during each observed encounter, she always added remarks of encouragement and confidence in their ability to improve which seemed to balance and put at ease most of the anxiety they might exhibit.

Principal B established a mentoring program to ensure that every student had a least one teacher who knew all about them, would greet them, and have personal conversations with them when encounters occurred both inside and outside school. This was credited by Principal B and his staff to have significantly influenced the climate inside the school. One teacher participant expressed his belief that the change lead by the principal in how the staff interacted with students was the most significant contributing factor for the improved academic performance of their African American students.

Each principal had developed a system of using individual student data in periodic personal conferences with students who were struggling with acquiring academic skills. Because of the large number of students in School C, the principal there shared this responsibility with two assistants. Principal A met with each of her struggling students. Principal B did some of these and expected teachers to lead the remainders. Every principal also had developed a system for routinely having parents of academically struggling students in to school for conference so

they could share specific information about their children's status and offer suggestions and resources for how they might help at home. Each also expected their teachers to regularly call parents about struggling students. At each school these calls between teacher and parent were to be noted and the documentation available for the principal to view.

Data were also used to guide both small and large group prescriptive instruction for students in each school to meet their specific needs. In School C, individual data in the form of up-to-date grades was posted outside classrooms each week so there was no mistaking where each student stood in regard to assignments and standing in class. Every school had an on-line system for checking student grades.

When they took the position of principal, each re-established the discipline system for students, by either re-writing it or dusting off what was already in place but not followed by the previous principal. A variety of methods were used to clearly communicate the content and importance of the behavioral expectations and the discipline consequences to students. Beginning of the year meetings were used, reminders of behavioral expectations were posted on the walls in the hallways, restrooms, and classrooms in each building, and principals, assistant principals and teachers were visible in the hallways and classrooms to remind them. When misbehavior occurred, it was dealt with right away and according to the consequences established in policy. Every principal and study participant affirmed that student discipline was significantly improved in their school because the principals had acted to raise student behavioral expectations and consistently held students accountable for them.

Principals A and C both developed and lead projects to improve the physical environment of their schools, both inside and out, to make them more attractive and student friendly – a place

students wanted to be. Both had applied for and been approved to have a school resource officer on campus.

Although students on all three campuses had access to extra-curricular activities, Principal C had gone to great lengths to expand her school's offerings so that every student had an opportunity to explore and expand their interests and experiences before they reached high school. Principal C was the only one of the three to have a student advisory group that provided the student body a "voice".

#### **Theory Four - Climate and Culture**

Another category of findings among the schools that support a fourth theory is climate and culture. This supports the theory that this category of responsibilities and behaviors, when exercised by these principals, contributed to their success in moving their schools from school improvement status to an achieving or meeting standards school status.

Table 5.4

*Theory Four: Climate and Culture*

Indicators	
<p>School A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Reflect Energy, Enthusiasm, Hope, Optimism</li> <li>•School Shirts for Every Student</li> <li>•Student Led Projects – Exterior Landscaping</li> </ul> <p>School C:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Morale Building Activities</li> <li>•Pats on the Back</li> <li>•Recognition of Staff as Individuals</li> <li>•Use of Peer Pressure to Encourage Harder Work</li> <li>•Works to Have Support from Central Office and Board Members</li> </ul>	<p>School B:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Significant Personal Respect for Principal</li> <li>•Development of Relationships at Top of Priority List</li> <li>•Responds to Teacher Needs with Resources</li> <li>•Positive Regard and Respect for Teachers’ Skills</li> <li>•Honors Teachers Position – Gives them Much Autonomy</li> <li>•Structures and Organizes Procedural Expectations</li> <li>•Student Discipline is Significantly Improved</li> <li>•Maintains Open-Door Policy – Available to Respond to Needs</li> </ul>

Although there is a large volume of research literature related to school climate and culture, there is no consensus about definitions. For purposes of this study, climate and culture may be defined as the way students and adults in the school feel about being at school where caring and respect between the individuals there are recognized as important and contributing components in the success of the organization (Gonder & Hymes, 1994).

In large part the actions that Principal B took, for which both him and the staff give credit for their school’s improvement, fall within what Yukl, Gordon, and Taber (2002) categorized as relations-behavior. In relations-behavior the primary objective is “to build strong commitment to the unit and its mission and a high level of mutual trust and cooperation among members” (p. 17). He did this by empowering his staff to make decisions and solve problems while he, always there and visible, provided support, resources, and encouragement.

Principals A and C encouraged risk-taking among their staff, especially for trying new methods and approaches to instruction, but neither relinquished their ownership of responsibility for making decisions about curriculum and instruction to the teachers. Principal C shared in conversation how difficult it was to be quiet and not intervene when her teachers were trying new things, especially when she feared they would fail. However, she believed that there were lessons for the teachers in failing and looking for better solutions so she did not typically intervene. Principal A also encouraged experimentation and risk-taking among her staff when they had ideas about how to improve student learning. Staff participants spoke about this and made it clear that they were encouraged to experiment and find new ways to do things better or more effectively but that they were always to talk with A before starting. They believed this was reasonable since she was very familiar with the “big picture” and possible implications for how one of their projects would affect other parts of the organization.

The staff of Principal A and C gave their principals credit, just as did B’s staff, for being an excellent resource provider when they needed something. Principal A’s staff spoke of her as if she was a hero for doing whatever it took to get what they needed.

All three principals were thoughtful and caring about their staff (and students) and found special ways (flowers to the hospital, notes and cards, a kind word, a group meeting to allow staff to vent frustrations) to give sympathy and encouragement when situations arose that were difficult or stressful. Several staff participants expressed that their principals cared about them as people. All of them had developed ways to recognize staff members for jobs well done or a particularly good lesson – a simple pat on the back, a note, a positive comment in front of their peers, a ceremony, a trophy.

In each school there was a least one staff member who made a point to say that they felt protected because their principal had their back, when outside influences or demands might distract them from their tasks in the school.

### **Theory Five - Instruction**

The fifth selective code or theory that arose from the results of this study is instruction. Table 5.5 illustrates the indicators for each school and refers to principal behaviors and actions revealed in the data that support instruction as a category of traits and behaviors practiced by the all of the principals and as contributing to their schools' academic gains.

Table 5.5

*Theory Five: Instruction*

Indicators	
School A: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Recruitment of Good Teachers</li> <li>•Care in Hiring</li> <li>•Matching Talents to Classroom/Assignments</li> <li>•Regular and Frequent Collaborative Team Meetings</li> <li>•Data Meetings</li> <li>•Formative Assessment</li> <li>•Common Planning for Learning and Collaboration</li> <li>•Classroom Observations to Look at Quality of Instruction</li> <li>•Classroom Observations to Provide Feedback</li> <li>•Constant Monitoring of Student Data and Changing Status</li> <li>•Principal as Expert – Familiar with Latest Research</li> <li>•Reading is Key – Teach Reading, Not English</li> <li>•Connected Math II, Literacy Lab</li> <li>•Encourage and Expect Cross-Curricular Instruction</li> <li>•Principal Monitors SpEd Students Particularly</li> </ul>	School B: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Structured Schedule - Increased Time Blocked For Math &amp; Literacy</li> <li>•Good Hires</li> <li>•Help from Outside Providers – Co-op/Other Principals</li> <li>•Enables/Encourages Collegial Help from Within</li> <li>•Enables Teams and Collaboration Time</li> </ul> School C: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Analyze and REFLECT Always to Find Solutions</li> <li>•Help from Outside Providers</li> <li>•All Administrative Team Trained/Assigned to Help with Instructional Improvement</li> <li>•Many Collaborative Meetings – Instructional Focus</li> <li>•Master Schedule Arranged to Enable Teams</li> <li>•Proscriptive Professional Development</li> <li>•Use of Peer Pressure to Encourage Harder Work</li> </ul>

The research literature findings cited in Chapter Two are mixed in their outcomes when they report the relationship between the principal's influence and student achievement (Reeves, 2009; Fullan, 2005; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). Most of those that found a correlation or connection at all between the two described it as an indirect relationship (Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, 1994). Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) reviewed both quantitative and qualitative research on principal influence and concluded that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors in influencing student learning. In large part, prior research findings show effective classroom instruction is influenced by whether other supportive factors are in place in the school – many of



which the principal may directly or indirectly influence through their leadership actions (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010; The Wallace Foundation, 2013). The findings of this study show a number of these supporting factors were in place in the three schools, most of which fall within in the previously identified categories presented in this chapter – expectations and accountability, leadership, climate and culture, and responding to student needs. This category was left to focus more precisely on those principal traits and behaviors directly related to influencing and changing instruction on each campus.

Ervay stated (2006), “there is no argument that students’ learning is the school’s only real purpose and, regardless of how that term is defined and assessed, the main responsibility of all educational leaders” (p. 84). As each principal was interviewed and observed over the course of this study, it was clear each saw and made decisions and choices based upon their clear understanding that student learning was indeed their schools’ real purpose. At the base of this was the unmistakable truth that interactions between teacher and students during classroom instruction was “where the rubber meets the road” (PRIN-A-FN/8). Data analysis supports a finding that these principals did play a key role in the delivery of quality instruction in their schools although the approach they took differed between schools. By acting as facilitator, guide, and supporter of quality instructional practices, each worked to ensure educational strategies were in place to support effective learning for all students. Both A and C played personal and direct roles while B’s role was mostly indirect.

Both A and C had an established system that put them in classrooms completing observations on a regular and frequent cycle resulting in a large portion of their time being spent observing teachers’ performance in their schools. Their purpose for doing this was to ensure that best practices, confirmed and supported by research, were being implemented consistently by

every teacher. What was found during observations was used to provide feedback and in-place training for teachers that either affirmed appropriate practices or prepared them to change inappropriate and ineffective practices. It also assisted the principals in making decisions about professional development their staff needed.

Both A and C were confident in their knowledge of effective instructional practices and were not timid or hesitant about being in classrooms, assessing what they observed, or giving feedback. Principal A credited this to her previous teaching history, participation in extensive professional development, and her total years as a reflective principal. Principal C expressed that her expertise came from being an elementary principal prior to moving to junior high and from extensive professional development and study of effective instruction. A and C read extensively and regularly took advantage of training opportunities to increase their knowledge of the latest research related to effective classroom instruction. In both Schools A and B, numerous participants expressed confidence in their principals' skills in helping them be better, more effective teachers. They shared they liked the principals to be in their classrooms because it affirmed to them that what they were doing was important enough to be monitored. Some also expressed their pleasure in "showing off" to the principal what was happening in their classrooms.

As has been described in earlier sections of Chapters Four and Five, Principal B was unsure of his expertise and knowledge in classroom instruction and as a result, he was hesitant to take on the role of expert. He believed that the greatest expertise in curriculum and instruction lay within the individual and collective knowledge and skills of his staff. As a result, that is where he placed the responsibility for establishing and maintaining effective classroom instruction while he focused on ensuring that other factors related to the school's environment

and structure over which he had control supported the staff. While observing in School B interactions between staff seemed to show there were particular teachers among the staff that were informally recognized by the remainder of the staff as the instructional leaders in the school, perhaps because in most cases they were perceived as the most skilled teachers because their students' achievement results were highest among the staff.

In support of effective instruction, all three principals manipulated the schools' daily master schedules to allow additional time for literacy and math instruction. Time for principal-led team meetings that supported teacher collaboration, reflective dialogue, and socialization were a regular part of the schedule in Schools A and C. In School B, the teachers lead similarly focused collaborative meetings.

### **Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the responsibilities, behaviors, and processes employed by the principals of three Arkansas secondary schools that were instrumental in their making sufficient academic improvements to be reclassified by the state as achieving or meeting standards. Data show that that successful secondary principals influence improvement in student achievement when behaviors and actions from five categories are enacted in their schools. These categories are: (1) expectations and accountability, (2) leadership, (3) responding to student needs, (4) climate and culture, and (5) instruction. Each of these categories is supported with open and axial codes from analysis and triangulation of the data, including formal interviews, unstructured conversations face-to-face conversations, phone conversations, email exchanges, observations, and examination of documents.

## **Interpretation of the Data**

Through an intra-case data analysis process that included open and axial coding, major themes were revealed for each school. Once all case studies were completed a cross-case analysis was completed that resulted in the development of five categories or selective codes under which all principal responsibilities and behaviors that had been identified during data collection could be classified. The five selective codes and the behavioral indicators supporting them are displayed in Tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, and 5.5. These tables and the discussion of each of the five emergent categories/theories provide answers to the research questions: To what leadership responsibilities and behaviors do school principals in three achieving Arkansas secondary schools attribute their success in moving from school improvement status to a school meeting standards? What were the processes these principals implemented within their leadership roles to which they attribute their success.

## **Recommendations to the Field**

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the responsibilities, behaviors, and processes principals in three secondary schools used to reverse their schools' failing academic performance trends and make gains enough to be reclassified by the State of Arkansas as achieving or meeting standards. The motivation for completing it was to add findings to the existing research literature which could benefit school leaders whose job responsibilities include the improvement of student academics performances in their respective schools. Secondary building principals were the primary audience, but other school leaders who could gain from these findings include district-level leaders such as superintendents, assistant superintendents, and directors. Those in higher education responsible for training principals for work in the field may gain insight from the study worthy of sharing.

Chapter Two provides an overview of the existing research literature that identifies and describes lists of factors - traits, behaviors, responsibilities, activities – exhibited by principals who make a positive difference in student learning. The existing literature and what is known is extensive. This then begs the question, if we already know what an effective principal looks and behaves like, then why are there still so many failing schools? The problem does not appear to be one of not knowing what to do but possibly a problem of not doing what is known to make a positive difference. This study highlights three principals who not only knew what to do but were committed, not just in thought or words but through actions, to carrying out those things that make the difference.

**Recommendations for Principals.** An individual licensed in the State of Arkansas as a principal has been trained to know what makes a positive difference. The possibilities for filling any gaps in knowledge are available in the form of research literature that can be read and studied, through a multitude of training opportunities available throughout the state, or by spending time with other principals that have been successful. Therefore, the first recommendation for principals is never to use not knowing as an excuse for not acting. The overarching and primary recommendation resulting from this study for principals seeking to improve their school's performance is to emulate the principals who were subjects of this study and become a committed "doer" of what is known to make a difference in students' learning, the school's only real purpose.

Schools that are most likely to improve performance are those where attention is paid and actions taken to strategically align every critical component of the organization along with its people so all are collectively rowing to deliver the boat and its cargo to the same destination. No other person in the school is more responsible for making sure this occurs than the principal.

Nothing can be left to chance or let go and therefore the second recommendation for principals is for them to do whatever it takes to become and remain as intimately familiar with everything occurring in their school as size and time will allow. In larger schools, if time and size are issues, a team may be designed to help but awareness should always be maintained by that one person, the principal, who must have knowledge of what is occurring throughout the system. This more nearly ensures that no one wastes the organization's collective energy rowing in a different direction or toward a different goal. Each of the principals in this study set examples for this as was evidenced by descriptive comments made by their staff members – “she’s everywhere”, “nothing happens that she doesn’t know about”, “she knows every kid and their history”, “he’s always there when I look up”, “she’s always ahead of us”, “she knows the data inside and out”.

The third recommendation arises from the question of what the critical components of the school organization are that the principal should include in this circle of awareness. The findings of this study, based upon descriptions of successful principals in three schools, answers this question and is the basis for the third recommendation for principals. Assess current practice to determine whether all five of the categories identified by this study receiving attention. If not in place find ways to fill gaps that may exist. The categories are the jigsaw pieces that when put together form a complete picture of successful and effective principal leadership. The pieces overlap and are interrelated with none being more critical than the other. However, the results of this study and the interdependence of the categories suggest a school is more likely to show improvements if all categories of principal traits and behaviors are in place.

Other specific recommendation for principals, all of which fall within the five categories of behavior identified by this study are:

- roll up your sleeves and work alongside the staff;
- remain current with the research in the field of effective secondary education practices to stay well ahead of those you are responsible for leading;
- become adept at analyzing, using, and communicating about student data to drive decisions and motivate staff, students and parents;
- be visible, be present, and be engaged with staff, students, and the community;
- communicate with transparency to staff and stakeholders continually;
- structure the school schedule to encourage frequent reflection and collaboration with and among teachers;
- strengthen relationships that satisfy both emotional and professional needs of staff and students;
- get to know the students personally, interact with them as individuals; and
- be the model for trust, dependability, fairness, enthusiasm, courage, determination, and optimism.

**Recommendation for Superintendents.** When principals of schools that have not been performing adequately become committed to changing the status quo as did those included in this study, if they are to be successful it is critical that they be supported by the district's superintendent and board of education. The first recommendation for the superintendent is to be prepared to extend reasonable levels of fiscal resources to support changes that may occur requiring training, additional personnel, programs, and equipment.

When change occurs, depending upon the culture of the community and the nature of the change taking place, it is reasonable to expect push-back from staff and/or community. It is critical to the principal's success that neither the superintendent nor the principal are blindsided

but both fully know and understand what the plan is, why it is being done, and have discussed fully the repercussions of what is being proposed and/or implemented. For these reasons, the second recommendation for the superintendent is to engage in regular communications with the principal to become and remain familiar with the principal's plans for change. The superintendent and principal must always reach consensus regarding what the superintendent can and will support both privately and publically, to include the Board of Education before any actions are taken by the principal. A system of regular updates should be expected from the principal so neither experiences any surprises as the change process progresses.

Being an effective principal requires courage, hard work, and making difficult decisions. Superintendents are encouraged to recognize good work and courage and give pats on the back when appropriate. A principal who knows he has district and board of education support finds himself more empowered do what must be done.

**Recommendations for Assistant Superintendents and Directors of Curriculum and Instruction.** Assistant superintendents and directors of communication are often in a position to provide the most consistent level of support for principals. The recommendation to central office administrators is that they visit the principal and the campus frequently – make yourself available. Listen to and collaborate with the principal. Be a liaison between them and the superintendent. A second recommendation for those responsible for curriculum and instruction at the district level is to keep an eye and ear on alignment across schools and facilitate the cross-district work that will ensure the students who come from lower grades and feed the school have been exposed to the proper curriculum and instruction before arriving at the secondary school.

**Recommendations for Higher Education.** The recommendation for those in higher education is to select more carefully where candidates in training for the principalship are placed.



If observations or internships are completed in schools where the principal is poor to mediocre, not all candidates will be mature enough to differentiate between what is good and what is poor practice. A second recommendation for higher education is to have successful principals like the ones described in this study present to classes of students interested in becoming principals.

What a difference it could make!

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study was limited to four principals who were able to lead their schools to improve student academic achievement levels enough to reverse their failing trends and made gains enough to be reclassified by the state as achieving or meeting standards. Further research is recommended as follows:

1. A study of three secondary principals at the middle and junior high level who have not been successful in turning their schools around would provide an interesting and useful contrast to this study. The findings of such a study compared to the findings of this study would shed light on the similarities and differences between the two sets of schools and possibly define further what traits and behaviors effective principals exhibit that ineffective ones do not.
2. No high schools were included in this study because none could be identified that fit the criteria for site selection. It is recommended that the principals of high schools when and where this occurs become a case for study.
3. There was some indication in this study that experience as an elementary principal was very helpful to two of the participant principals in preparing them to become a junior high principal. A study of principals in middle, junior high, and high school who have

had previous experience as elementary principals could result in useful findings that might be of use to other secondary principals.

## **Conclusion**

For all that is already known and shared in the existing research literature that identifies and describes lists of factors - traits, behaviors, responsibilities, activities – exhibited by principals who make a positive difference in student learning, too many schools, particularly at the secondary level are still failing. With all we know, why does this continue to happen? Perhaps taking a close and thorough look at the principals of a few rare schools where the school was once failing but is now achieving could shed light on this conundrum. That is what this study sought to do.

My goal in conducting this study was to develop theory to expand and enrich the existing research by defining and describing what three successful Arkansas secondary principals - a middle school and two junior high schools - did to turn their failing schools around and positively influence the levels of student achievement in their respective schools.

Extensive data collection and analysis revealed five categories of traits and behaviors common to each of the successful principals included in the study. In each case, these practices were not in place before the school began to turn around and improve. Therefore this study's findings suggests that if a principal wishes to turn a school around, they must ensure that each category of practice is firmly in place in the school - expectations and accountability, leadership, responding to student needs, climate and culture, and instruction. The indicators supporting each category provide a helpful what and how list of practical applications corresponding to each. The principal's story that is told in each case does the same in detail.

The value this study adds to the field is threefold:

1. While each of the five categories of behaviors can be found in previous research, the presentation of this particular combination of categories common to three different turnaround schools provides a recipe for those seeking to accomplish the same. Through presentation three different case studies, the telling of each principal's unique story fills a gap that is lacking in the existing literature. It answers the question of what they did and how they did it to turn their schools around.
2. All five of the categories are interdependent and successful turnarounds will be more likely if all are in place simultaneously.
3. These principals did not start their journey with more knowledge or skills than most other principals, but they are different. It is this difference that likely makes them successful when few others are. Each professes and demonstrates a deep personal conviction that the capacity to improve teaching and learning exists within their own leadership and school. They will do whatever it takes to prove it to you.

### **Study's Contribution to the Field of Education**

Researchers have long struggled to identify and describe what it is effective principals do to bring about school improvement and higher student achievement. Chapter Two summarizes a number of these studies and includes descriptions and lists of leadership responsibilities, traits, and behaviors associated with effective principals. This study took the question of what it is effective principals do to the principals and staff of three rare turnaround secondary schools and asked them to tell their stories of how this feat was accomplished.

The significant contribution this study adds to the field of educational research is its identification of five themes or categories of leadership implemented by the principal in each of the schools studied that were credited by the participants as causes for their schools' successful

turnarounds. These five categories – expectations and accountability, leadership, responding to student needs, climate and culture, and instruction – and their indicators were consistently identified by the participants in all schools as reasons why their schools were successful in improving student performance levels and each school's achievement status. Clearly, the five categories were interrelated and interdependent upon each other and thus, equally critical to the success the schools experienced.

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Appendix A  
IRB Letter of Approval

January 17, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: Anne Butcher  
Carleton Holt

FROM: Ro Windwalker  
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 14-01-386

Protocol Title: *The Relationship between Principal Leadership and Improving Achievement Status in Secondary Schools: A Multiple Site Case Study*

Review Type:  EXEMPT  EXPEDITED  FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 01/16/2014 Expiration Date: 01/15/2015

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<http://vpred.uark.edu/210.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

**This protocol has been approved for 18 participants.** If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

Appendix B  
Letter to Superintendent

Dear Superintendent and Colleague:

I am fellow superintendent and a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership graduate program at the University of Arkansas. The purpose of this letter is to request your approval and assistance in a research study that is part of my program. The study will examine principal leadership practices and how they were implemented to improve student achievement in Arkansas secondary schools.

For the study, I have used our state's version of the NCLB accountability system to select Arkansas secondary schools that have at some time been ranked as needing improvement and subsequently made significant enough gains to improve their standing in the system and be ranked as meeting standards or as an achieving school. Because there are few secondary schools in the state that can make this claim, those that have deserve a closer look so that others might learn from their example. The focus for this study is on the principal's leadership in the chosen schools. What is it they've done and how have they implemented the changes that brought about the improvements in their schools?

With your approval, I would like to contact the principal of school name and ask if they will be willing to participate in this study. If so, I will be conducting interviews with the principal and with a focus group of up to 5 teachers at their school. I will also seek permission from the principal to observe in the school and collect artifacts that are related to the school's improvement.

Any data collected will be analyzed and reported in a manner that will maintain the utmost of confidentiality. There will be no attempt to identify or report individual school, teacher, or principal information that is personally identifiable at any time. This study has been approved by my dissertation committee at the University of Arkansas and by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) office there.

Attached to this letter you will find a "Consent to Participate in a Research Study" that provides additional and more in-depth information about my study. If approved at your district's school, all participants will receive a copy of this consent and be asked to sign/date it before I begin working with them.

I am requesting that you grant me permission to conduct this study in your district. If you consent, I will need a letter of approval from you. The protocol for this required by my University is that it be on your institution's letterhead with an original signature from you. A copy of the letter may be transmitted to me either electronically or via regular mail. I also ask that you contact the principal of the school to inform them that you have granted consent for this study.

Your prompt attention is greatly appreciated to allow sufficient time for data collection. Thank you for your consideration and response regarding this study. My advisor at UAF is Dr. Carleton Holt. If you have any questions or concerns, contact me at [REDACTED] or by phone at [REDACTED].

Respectfully yours,

Anne Butcher

Appendix C  
Letter to Principal

Dear (Principal's Name):

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. I am conducting research for a dissertation study that is part of my program and would like your assistance. The study will examine principal leadership practices and how they were implemented to improve student achievement in Arkansas secondary schools. Your District Superintendent has given his consent for me to contact you about this.

For the study, I have used our state's version of the NCLB accountability system to select Arkansas secondary schools that have at some time been ranked as needing improvement and subsequently made significant enough gains to improve their standing in the system and be ranked as meeting standards or as an achieving school. Because your school is one of the few secondary schools in the state that can make this claim, I believe that your example deserves a closer look so that others might learn from your example. Since the particular focus for this study is on the principal's leadership, I am interested in learning what is it you've done and how you have implemented the changes that brought about the improvements in your school?

The data I wish to collect at your school site will come from separate interviews with you and a focus group of 3 to 5 of your teachers, observation of activities inside your school (example: team meetings), and collecting various artifacts (example: minutes of curriculum development meetings). I will plan to conduct up to 3 interviews with you with each being approximately 60 minutes in length. Details and arrangements for the focus group interviews, observations, and artifact collection can be discussed during our first and any subsequent meetings.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of The University of Arkansas. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Your responses will be kept confidential. Neither your name nor the specific name of your school or district will be published. The results of all respondents will be summarized and reported in whole.

If you decide to participate in the study, please read through the information that is included on the attached document, Consent to Participate in a Research Study. This provides more details about the study. Its final page (#3 of 3) includes a line for your signature, consenting to be a part of this study. An addressed/stamped envelope is also enclosed for returning the consent to me.

If you have any questions at all, please do not hesitate to contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Thank you in advance for your consideration to participate in this study. I hope to talk with you soon.

Sincerely,

Anne Butcher  
UofA Doctoral Student



Appendix D  
Principal Interviews  
Interview Questions

1. Please share your educational background.
2. Describe \_\_\_\_\_ School.
3. Innumerate the achievement of academic success at your school between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. As you reflect back to the time before this significant improvement in academic status occurred, what factors do you recall as being in place that contributed to the inadequate academic performance level of your school?
5. What personal realizations and changes in you lead you to make the changes in your school that explain its academic improvement?
6. What were your own characteristics or behaviors that changed which contributed to increased achievement and meeting standards?
7. What were the changes you lead and implemented in your school which contributed to increased achievement and meeting standards (personnel, curricular, policies, methods, etc.)?
8. Describe the strategies you used then and now and how you implemented them to create conditions that lead to increased student achievement?

Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, & assessment	9. Describe your knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. How does it compare to that of the teachers you lead?
Optimizer	10. How do you maintain enthusiasm and optimism within your school?
Intellectual stimulation	11. How do you keep your teachers engaged in learning new things related to research and innovation?
Change agent	12. How do you change the operating status quo of long held beliefs and practices among your staff? Describe the process of how you may challenge your staff to challenge themselves.
Monitoring & evaluating	13. How do you monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of your school's curricula, instructional practices, and the impact of these on student achievement?
Flexibility	14. Do you adjust your leadership style to fit the situation?
Ideals & beliefs	15. Is there a set of common ideas and beliefs about schooling, teaching, and learning among the staff and students in your school? How did these ideas and beliefs take hold and how are they articulated and made visible?

Culture	16. How have you built and maintained a culture of common language and willingness to share ideas?
Communication	17. How do you communicate procedures and routines so that staff and students have a sense of order and predictability?
Order	18. How do you ensure that communication to/from/and among the staff travels via clear & established lines?
Input	19. How do staff members have and share input into key decisions and policies?

20. What changes were you not able to implement as planned? Why?

21. Are there any additional comments that you would like to make?

Appendix E  
Focus Group Interviews  
Interview Questions

1. Describe \_\_\_\_\_ school.
2. Innumerate the achievement of academic success at your school between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
3. As you reflect back to the time before this significant improvement in academic status occurred at your school, what was happening (or maybe not happening) in your school that contributed to its inadequate academic performance level?
4. What personal realizations and changes in you lead you to make changes that contributed to your school's academic improvement?
5. What were the changes that occurred in your school that lead to your school's academic improvement?
6. What was the principal's role in causing or leading these changes that lead to increased achievement and meeting standards?
7. What are the strategies your principal uses to create conditions to promote increased student achievement?
8. How are these strategies and activities carried out?

Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, & assessment	9. Describe your principal's knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
Optimizer	10. Describe the enthusiasm and optimism levels within your school. Does your principal influence this? How?
Intellectual stimulation	11. How does your principal keep you engaged in learning new things related to research and innovation?
Change agent	12. How has/does your principal go about changing beliefs and practices among the staff at your school?
Monitoring & evaluating	13. How does your principal monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of your school's curricula, instructional practices, and the impact of these on student achievement?
Flexibility	14. Does your principal sometimes adjust his/her leadership style to fit the situation?
Ideals & beliefs	15. Is it clear to you that there a set of common ideas and beliefs about schooling, teaching, and learning among the staff and students in your school? How did these ideas and beliefs take hold and how are they articulated and made visible?

Culture	16. Is there a culture of common language that has been built among the staff and with the principal that enables and promotes a willingness to share ideas?
Communication	17. How does your principal communicate procedures and routines so that staff and students have a sense of order and predictability?
Order	18. How does your principal ensure that communication to/from/and among the staff travels via clear & established lines?
Input	19. How does your principal make sure that you have an opportunity and are willing to share input into making key decisions and policies?

20. What do you fear might get in the way of your school's continuing to be successful?
21. How do you think the principal should respond to keep this from happening?
22. Is there anything further you would like to tell me about student achievement in your building?
23. Is there anything further you would like to tell me about the principal's role in increasing student achievement?
24. Are there any additional comments that you would like to make?

Appendix F  
Permission to Use Materials for Table 2.1

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Title: A Hierarchical Taxonomy of Leadership Behavior:  
Integrating a Half Century of Behavior Research

Author: Gary Yukl, Angela Gordon, Tom Taber

Publication: Magazine

Publisher: SAGE Publications

Date: 03/01/2011

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Appendix G  
Permission to Use Materials for Table 2.2

E-mail dated 3-11-14 @ 8:33 a.m.

**FW: Permission to Adapt Materials for Dissertation**

Katy Wogec (kwogec@ascd.org)

To: Anne Butcher;

Cc: Donna Yudkin;

This message is High Priority, and is being Watched.

Dear Anne:

I apologize for the delay in responding. For some reason, I never received the forward of your original message. Please accept this as permission to use the referenced excerpt from an ASCD publication for your personal research purposes. Should you include excerpts or cite content in a paper or some other report form, please credit the source accordingly. If your research results in use of our content in a product or publication for commercial release, please contact me again to secure further rights to do so.

Thank you for your interest in ASCD and good luck with your dissertation.

**Regards, Katy**

**KATY WOGEC** · Sr. Paralegal

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Appendix H  
Statement of Permission for Materials Used in Table 2.3

**Division A of AERA**

*What We Know About Successful School Leadership*, prepared for the Task Force on Developing Research in Educational Leadership.

The task force was established in 2000 by Division A (Administration) of the American Educational Research Association, with the charge to promote and encourage high-quality research in educational leadership

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Leithwood, K. A., & Riehl, C. (2003). *What we know about successful school leadership*. Philadelphia, PA: Laboratory for Student Success, Temple University

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Appendix I  
Permissions to Use Materials for Tables 2.4, 2.5, and 2.5



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Anne Butcher



**Permission to Use McREL Material**

March 19, 2014

Permission is hereby granted to Anne Butcher to adapt in the dissertation that she is writing the following material which was published by McREL:

Figure 4.1: The 21 responsibilities and their correlations (r) with student academic achievement, pp. 42–43 from *School leadership that works: From research to results*.

Figure 6: Characteristics of first and second order changes, p. 7 from *Balanced Leadership: What 30 Years of Leadership Tells us About the Effect of Leadership on Student Achievement*

Principal Responsibilities and Their Operational Definitions, adapted from pp. 41–61 of *School leadership that works: From research to results*.

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Please send McREL a copy of the completed dissertation for our records.

Sincerely,

Maura McGrath  
Knowledge Management Specialist



Appendix J  
Permission to Use Materials for Table 2.7

**Copyright Clearance Center: RightLink  
SAGE PUBLISHING**

Title: Instructional, Transformational, and Managerial Leadership and Student  
Achievement: High School Principals Make a Difference:

Author: Jerry W. Valentine, Mike Prater

Publication: Bulletin

Publisher: SAGE Publications

Date: 03/01/2011

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