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# The Application of Servant Leadership by Selected New Jersey Public School Principals

Ross Kasun  
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THE APPLICATION OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP BY SELECTED NEW JERSEY  
PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

BY

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
Doctor of Education Degree  
in the Executive Doctoral Program  
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2009

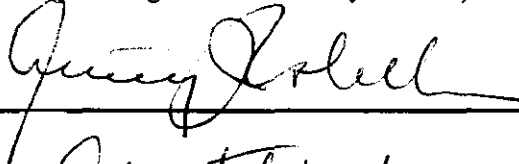
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Doctoral Candidate, **Ross Kasun**, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ed. D.** during this **Fall Semester 2009**.

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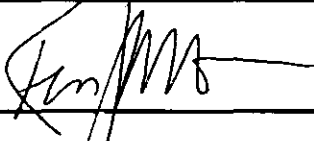
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## **Abstract**

Servant leadership is a leadership model that is gaining popularity because this model has been shown to be effective in both the public and private sectors. Although there is evidence that many of the most admired and successful organizations are now practicing the disciplines of servant leadership, there is a lack of substantive research into the examination within the field of educational administration. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the application of servant leadership practices by public school principals. This study used quantitative and qualitative research methods and was divided into two distinct phases. In the first phase, the Self-Assessment of Servant Leadership (SASL) was used to survey 70 principals in New Jersey public schools. The results of this survey were used to create a group of principals for further study, which was composed of the 15 principals who yielded the highest score on the SASL. The second phase included an examination of implementation of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership by these 15 principals. This analysis occurred through a semistructured interview process. The data from the SASL and the 15 interviews led to the conclusion that servant leadership provided by principals exists in New Jersey's high-achieving public schools. The one-on-one interviews provided an abundant amount of common themes regarding how these servant leaders apply the 10 characteristics of servant leadership in the principals' practice. The data also revealed these servant principals had a similar belief system and approach to leadership, which may have been a factor in the success of the school. This study represents an important contribution to the existing literature regarding servant leadership, as this study provides a framework for higher education institutions to use in course design. The themes can also be utilized to

create professional development opportunities for educational leaders, which can support principals in initiating, implementing, and sustaining outstanding schools. Further research that extends the servant leadership approach in schools by correlating servant leadership with student achievement levels and teacher empowerment would be valuable. These studies would reveal more information regarding the influence that servant leadership has on critical factors in schools.

## Acknowledgments

I am deeply thankful to many individuals who helped, who contributed, who sacrificed, and who supported me during this journey. This work could have never been accomplished alone, only with the guidance, understanding, and love of many. For all of those involved, I thank you for your “service” that allowed me to learn more about leading others.

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I appreciated the time and positive energy that the participants in this study gave to me for this study, and further for the time they give each day to strive for excellence in their schools. I learned so much from the participants, and it was clear that they strive to lead first and then serve.

Finally, I want to thank current and past colleagues from Colts Neck, Summit, and Millburn who have influenced my life and approach to leadership. Your efforts to do what is best for the students that we serve provided the initial inspiration for my dissertation. John, who previously studied servant leadership, I am indebted for your feedback, recommendations, and direction that helped make my dissertation stronger.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) raised the level of accountability for those who serve in public education. Under NCLB, school administrators are faced with accountability and assessment, ensuring student success in core content areas, providing a safe school, managing special education needs, meeting state mandates, and protecting the rights and interests of the school community. In addition, school administrators are responsible for enhancing teacher quality by addressing recruitment and evaluation and providing professional development. These demands coupled with overwhelming situations of increased diversity, poverty, and conflicting social values impact no one more than the school principal. School principals need effective and dynamic leadership skills to meet the challenges of today's schools.

Michael Fullan (1998) described the pressures of the public school principal in an article regarding leadership:

The job of the principal or any educational leader has become increasingly more complex and constrained. Principals find themselves locked in with less and less room to maneuver. They have become more and more dependant on context. At the very time that proactive leadership is essential, principals are in the least favorable position to provide it. They need a new mindset and guidelines for action to break through the bonds of dependency that have entrapped those who want to make a difference in their schools. (p. 6)

There is a need to search for more effective leadership styles and models of successful leadership for school principals. Although leadership has been researched, numerous principals rely on practices that focus on management rather than leadership. However, Sergiovanni (2001) found that staff members in schools systems are hungry for a leadership model that places service ahead of management.

One effective leadership model is that of servant leadership. Greenleaf (1977) initially defined servant leadership as follows:

Servant leadership is the natural feeling that one has of desiring to serve others. It seeks to develop individuals who ensure that other's needs are met, and advocates a group-orientated approach to decision-making as a means of strengthening institutions and society. (p. 13)

Servant leadership was first introduced for use in business and religious organizations. There are multiple examples of business effectively following the servant leadership model. Several of the top 20 companies ranked in the 2001 issue of *Fortune* magazine's 100 Best were servant-led organizations. Southwest Airlines (fourth), TDI (sixth), and Synovus (eighth) all have formally embraced servant leadership within their corporate culture (Ruschman, 2002). According to McGee-Cooper and Looper (2001), these companies outperformed others, yielding an approximately 50% higher return to shareholders than competitors on the *Fortune* List.

Learning from the success found in the business world, servant leadership is gaining momentum in the educational setting. Bass (2000) found that servant leadership has a place in educational organizations in the new millennium because servant leadership is based on teamwork and community, "involving others in decision-making,

is strongly based in ethical and caring behavior, and enhances the growth on people in the learning organization” (p. 33). Belief in the tenets of servant leadership as a practical approach for school communities has gained among practitioners in the past 20 years (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002).

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) examined the link between school leadership and student achievement. The researchers conducted a meta-analysis of 69 studies involving kindergarten through Grade 12 students and school leaders. The findings concluded that principals have a profound effect on the achievement of students in their schools (p. 38). After the findings of 70 studies were combined, which comprised an enormous sample size of schools, approximately 1.1 million students, the research showed that the average effect size expressed as a correlation between leadership and student achievement was .25.

The Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) asserted that principals have the single most significant influence upon students, after the individual classroom teachers (OME, 2005, p. 1). A servant leadership approach for a principal, as the instructional leader in the school, has tremendous potential in education, especially at a time when schools are under intense pressure to produce student-outcome-based results, much like that of the business world. Lambert (2004) wrote that servant leadership may be one key ingredient in the overall recipe for total school reform.

Blanchard (2007) concluded:

I truly believe that servant leadership has never been more applicable to the world of leadership than it is today. Not only are people looking for a deeper purpose and meaning when they meet the challenges of today’s changing world; they are

also looking for principles and philosophies that actually work. Servant leadership is about getting people to a higher level by leading people at a higher level. (p. xi)

Though multiple studies have investigated the servant leadership philosophy, the amount of research related to servant leadership in the educational setting is relatively small (Crippen, 2005). Research relevant to servant leadership and public school organizations related to public school principals is significantly lacking. Although in today's schools the demand for school leadership calls for a principal to employ a servant leadership approach, there is very little, if any, research that examines how this approach is applied by a principal of a public school.

The climate and demands permeating schools have caused principals to develop leadership styles that differ from those of their predecessors. King (2002) proposed that, due to the current landscape of accountability, principals must place much more emphasis on collaboration, fostering professional development, developing leadership capacity in others, and using resources creatively. The principal's leadership is a critical component for an effective school. Much has been written about leadership philosophies and styles that principals should utilize to be effective. As a servant leader is a leader who is focused on serving others, many of the current theories regarding leadership encompass the 10 characteristics of servant leadership. There is a definite need for relevant research that examines how public school principals implement effective leadership practices. Therefore, further study is required that reveals the application of servant leadership by public school principals.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the application of servant leadership practices by public school principals. Servant leadership is emerging on a grand scale in many parts of the world (Hunter, 2004). Although there is evidence that many of the most admired and successful organizations are now practicing the disciplines of servant leadership, especially business and religious organizations, there is a lack of substantive research within the field of educational administration.

This study will use the definition of servant leadership provided by Greenleaf (1977):

Servant leadership is the natural feeling that one has of desiring to serve others. It seeks to develop individuals who ensure that others' needs are met, and advocates a group-orientated approach to decision-making as a means of strengthening institutions and society. (p. 13)

The demand for a greater number and a variety of effective leadership skills has fueled the growth for a servant leadership style (Bass, 2002). Spears (1995) shared 10 characteristics that describe the essence of a servant leader. The characteristics are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and building community. Several educational theorists such as Blanchard, Bolman, Deal, Covey, Fullan, Hunter, and Sergiovanni have included these as characteristics of effective leaders.

Direct research concerning a principal's application of servant leadership, including the methods that principals use to implement the 10 characteristics of servant leadership was not found. The focus of this study was to examine the application of servant leadership practices of principals in New Jersey public schools that were

identified as Benchmark Schools in 2008. Furthermore, the study examined the implementation of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership (listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community) associated with the principal's approach to leadership.

The study was separated into two phases. In the first phase, the Self-Assessment of Servant Leadership (SASL) was used to survey 70 principals in New Jersey public schools that were identified as Benchmark Schools. The results of this survey were used to create a group of principals for further study, which was composed of the 15 principals who yielded the highest score on the SASL. The second phase included an examination of the implementation of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership by these 15 principals. This analysis occurred through a semistructured interview process.

Principals that were identified from New Jersey Benchmark Schools were chosen for the study because these schools have outperformed other schools of similar size and with similar student populations, as defined by low income and limited English proficient status. The Business Coalition of Educational Excellence (BCEE) used data based upon student performance on the state's standardized assessments in grades 4, 8, and 11 to select the New Jersey Benchmark Schools; therefore, the principals eligible for this study were chosen from elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools across all District Factor Groups (DFGs), and across all counties in New Jersey.

### **Research Questions**

**Question 1.** To what extent does servant leadership exist as perceived by New Jersey public school principals?



**Question 2.** How do New Jersey principals who rate themselves high on a self-assessment of servant leadership implement the 10 characteristics (listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth, build community) associated with servant leadership?

### **Significance of the Study**

A generation of research has provided evidence that principals possess the single most significant influence on the school climate and, after the classroom teacher, has the most influence on students (Black, 2007). The connection between the quality of school leadership and student achievement has been documented for many years (Bass, 2000; Fullan, 2001; Marzano et al., 2005; OME, 2005; Sergiovanni, 2005; DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, & Haycock, 2007). Efforts have been made to define key characteristics of effective school leaders. The significance of the study lies in its potential to contribute to the examination of servant leadership practices in public schools.

There is a definite need for effective leadership in our public schools. Thomas Sergiovanni (2001) asserted that the role of the principal is to facilitate educational change through purposing, empowering, and leading the educational growth. Bolman and Deal (2003) emphasized that the artistry and architecture of leadership required to lead successful school requires influence, credibility, trust, vision, and service. The results of this study should contribute significantly to the growing body of literature regarding servant leadership practices, especially as it pertains to the leadership of a school principal.

Research on school reform and practical knowledge of what it takes to run successful schools have pointed to the importance of administrators in school success (Kelley & Peterson, 2002). Research on the role of the principals in successful schools, school improvement, instructional effectiveness, standards-based reform, and change all support a need for well-prepared leaders. Principals play a key role in initiating, implementing, and sustaining high-quality schools. Unfortunately, there is limited practical research that examines how principals apply effective leadership characteristics. The analysis of the data from this study should fill this void and provide examples regarding a principal's application of servant leadership to his or her practice.

This research may provide insight into how each of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership is implemented by principals in the public school setting. As the study was conducted in schools identified as New Jersey's Benchmark Schools, it may shed some light regarding the leadership characteristics that influenced the schools' high achievement. Additionally, the study should provide data that demonstrate practical methods and behaviors that the principals use to implement each of the 10 characteristics, which should show concrete examples regarding how to successfully apply the characteristics of servant leadership in public schools. Therefore, leadership training and development opportunities could be created to grow characteristics related to servant leadership based upon the findings of this study.

This research base may provide examples of *best practices* implemented by principals that provide a framework for higher education institutions to teach characteristics of servant leadership, as a credible academic discipline to those who aspire to be educational leaders. These practical implications of how a principal can apply

servant leadership may provide insight that helps the construction of coursework based on the concept of servant leadership.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The limitations to this study are related to the geographic areas and data collection used by the researcher. The study was limited to schools recognized as New Jersey's Benchmark Schools, which is a relatively small sample; however, the study contained schools from all regions of the state within all District Factor Groups (DFGs). Interviews with principals who ranked the highest on the SASL were used to gather data. The study was limited by the truthfulness of the participants' responses.

Open-ended, semistructured questions were created and used to gather the data from the principals. To increase the credibility and reliability of the collected data, field interviews were recorded and transcribed, with participants being presented with the interview transcription to review and revise.

### **Definitions**

**Benchmark School.** On an annual basis, the BCEE uses data from the Just for the Kids website to select schools that have demonstrated outstanding student performance on the state's standardized assessments in grades 4, 8, and 11. These schools have outperformed other schools of similar size and with similar student populations, as defined by low income and limited English proficient status. Because of the students' performance, these schools are designated as Benchmark Schools.

**District Factor Group (DFG).** The DFG is an index of socioeconomic status (SES) that is created using data for several indicators available in the decennial Census of Population. Socioeconomic status cannot be measured directly. Rather, the literature

holds that socioeconomic status is a function of other, measurable quantities (traditionally, the basic three are income, occupation, and education). Therefore, the DFG is a composite statistical index created using statistical procedures, a model of socioeconomic status, and input data for various socioeconomic traits. Seven indices were developed from the census data as follows: percent of population with no high school diploma, percent with some college, occupation, population density, income, unemployment, and poverty.

These seven indices were utilized in a principal components analysis to produce a statistical score, which was used to rank the districts. Districts were then grouped so that each group would consist of districts having factor scores within an interval of one tenth of the distance between the highest and lowest scores (NJ Department of Education, 2007).

**Elementary school.** An elementary school is a school that spans kindergarten (sometimes including a prekindergarten program) through Grade 5.

**Empowerment.** Empowerment is the extent to which teachers feel that they are involved with decisions that are important to the teachers (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000).

**High school.** A high school is a school that spans grades 9 through 12.

**Leader.** A leader is any person who leads or guides.

**Leadership.** Leadership is the skill of influencing people to enthusiastically work toward goals identified as being for the common good (Hunter, 2004).

**Middle school.** A middle school is a school that spans grades 6 through 8.

**Power.** Power is the possession of control, authority, or influence over others.

**Principal.** A principal is the individual with administrative responsibility for a school in the district.

**Public school setting.** A public school setting is any nonprivate, not-for-profit K–12 setting.

**School administrator.** A school administrator is any administrator specifically hired to supervise in a K–12 setting.

**Self-Assessment of Servant Leadership (SASL).** Taylor (2002) modified the Self-Assessment for Servant Leadership Profile (SASLP) and designed the SASL to equally represent each of the 12 categories of servant leader characteristics. A comparative analysis of the original 99-item instrument (SASLP) with the 24-item instrument (SASL) was conducted, and the results showed a positive correlation of .95 with the total scores of both tests.

**Self-Assessment for Servant Leadership Profile (SASLP).** This 99-question survey instrument was created by Page and Wong in 1998 through an extensive study of the literature regarding servant leadership.

**Servant leader.** Servant leadership is the natural feeling that one has of desiring to serve others. It seeks to develop individuals who ensure that others' needs are met, and advocates a group-orientated approach to decision-making as a means of strengthening institutions and society (Greenleaf, 1977).

**Servant leadership.** Servant leadership is the ability to influence others through the relationship of service to people and purpose (Hunter, 2004).

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Introduction**

No matter how a writer, teacher, or leader chooses to categorize and summarize the traits or elements of leadership, they all seem to revolve around the same theme: leading others is about serving others (Kahl, 2004). A review of the literature indicates a clear connection between the traits and characteristics of leadership: leading of others is tantamount to the serving of others. In countless examples, the essence of true leadership centers on a theme of service and stewardship. This chapter begins by defining and clarifying each of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership and their correlation with the ultimate servant leader, Jesus. Throughout the Bible exists thousands of illustrations of Jesus's leadership principle: to lead is to serve to the characteristics of servant leadership. Next, the chapter includes relevant literature regarding servant leadership from the business sector and noted authors on leadership. After, the researcher summarizes several dissertations regarding servant leadership and highlights the key role that a principal's leadership has in a school community. Finally, the chapter reveals commonalities between the characteristics of servant leadership and Marzano's meta-analysis (2005) and the Interstate School Leaders Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders.

#### **Ten Characteristics of Student Leadership**

Robert Greenleaf is recognized as the father of servant leadership. Greenleaf retired after a long and prosperous career with AT&T in 1964 as director of management research. After retirement, he founded the Center for Applied Ethics and served as a

consultant to organizations such as the Ford Foundation, Lilly Endowment, the American Foundation for Management Research, and the Mead Corporation. He also wrote extensively on the topic of servant leadership.

Greenleaf (1977) described servant leadership in the following manner:

It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead . . . The difference manifest itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons, do they grow while being served, become healthier, wider, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (pp. 13–14)

Through extensive work with Greenleaf, Larry Spears, the director of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, identified 10 characteristics that describe the essence of a servant leader. The characteristics are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and building community. Several educational theorists, such as Blanchard, Block, Bolman, Deal, Drucker, Covey, Fullan, Senge, Sergiovanni, and Heifetz also reference these characteristics as essential components for effective leadership.

**Listening.** Servant leadership places an importance on the leader’s ability and willingness to listen and learn. It is challenging to successfully employ any of the other characteristics of servant leadership without being an effective listener, as the first step toward identifying needs is to listen. Leaders are traditionally valued for their

communication and decision-making skills; however, while these skills are important for the servant leader, they are strengthened by a strong commitment to listening intently to others. Active listening not only provides a medium for sharing information but also provides the opportunity for building relationships. Greenleaf (1977) wrote, “The best test of whether leaders are communicating at the depth the servant leader style advocates, is for leaders to ask themselves if they are really listening to their subordinates” (p. 21).

Servant leaders gather feedback in as many ways as possible for their colleagues and those that the leaders serve (Keith, 2008). They listen, observe, and ask questions to gain information and learn. Servant leaders continually reflect and think about what they learned. They pay attention to others by how they choose to listen. Listening first becomes an automatic response to any problem.

Listening is an attitude toward people (Hunter, 2004). Listening is developing the ability and willingness to hear people out, better understand them, and learn something new. Listening skills are critical for building healthy relationships. True listening builds strength in other people (Greenleaf, 1977).

**Empathy.** Closely associated with listening is the characteristic of empathy. Autry (2001) revealed that a servant leader must be willing to stop, listen, and truly care about people. Empathy allows the servant leader to accept and recognize others by looking at a situation from the viewpoint of another person. By valuing the worth of all individuals and creating an environment where individuals try to understand each other’s point of view, a servant leader builds trust. Heifetz and Linksy (2002) also suggested that leadership comes from love, caring, and concern for others.



Greenleaf (1977) stressed the importance of empathy as a quality at work. He stated that servant leaders need to trust their employees to organize work in ways that create conditions in which employees learn to respect, trust, and value one another. A servant leader needs to create a culture that has all individuals feeling worthy and valued.

**Healing.** Servant leaders need to recognize their ability to provide healing to those who have been hurt. Fullan (2001) indicated that leaders who show how much they care about individuals inspire individuals to follow. The servant leader focuses on the development and maintenance of the health and spirit of the organization. The complete care and well-being of those within the organization to grow and develop, not only to satisfy the needs of the organization, but to also grow as individuals is paramount. Servant leaders are motivated to make life better for others, not just themselves (Keith, 2008). Servant leadership is about paying attention to others and treating them right. The servant leader embraces giving care and support while upholding the expectations of exemplary performance.

Servant leaders have the ability to show unrelenting toughness and sincere affection for people. Hunter (2004) wrote that servant leaders can be extremely demanding in their quest for excellence, but show equal passion for demonstrating care and love for their people. Servant leaders are dedicated to meeting the needs of those whom the leaders serve.

**Awareness.** Spears (1995) quoted Greenleaf and stated that many leaders miss leadership opportunities because of a lack of awareness that stems from having a narrow perception of the world around them. A servant leader uses awareness to understand the challenges that an organization faces, and awareness also provides the tools that enable

the servant leader to find the solution. Salovey and Mayer (1990) found that leaders who had self-awareness and awareness of others could respond more flexibly to changes in their organizations and were better able to build social networks.

Servant leaders are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. These leaders work to build on their strengths and weaknesses, which helps them to accept and build on the strengths and weaknesses of others. Servant leaders appreciate the importance of teams, as a team encourages each person to contribute his or her strength to the task at hand. Servant leaders are aware that every person and every job counts.

Servant leaders know that their moods are contagious. They work to project a positive mood and enthusiasm. Servant leaders are aware that positive energy helps produce cooperation and teamwork, which helps create success for the organization.

Awareness entails making time for reflection to understand the big picture and how each person fits into the big picture. Servant leaders assess, reflect, and are honest with others and seek to develop balance in their work lives.

**Persuasion.** A servant leader relies on persuasion rather than coercion to influence others. The servant leader seeks to convince others rather than force them to comply. Covey (1990) stressed that real leadership power comes from an honorable character and the exercise of certain power tools. A servant leader effectively uses persuasion to build consensus, rather than positional authority, in making decisions within an organization. Greenleaf stated, "Leadership by persuasion has the virtue of change by conviction rather than coercion. Its advantages are obvious" (p. 30).

Servant leaders are not focused on controlling their employees. These leaders do not measure their status in terms of their span of control and are not focused on compliance. Rather, they are focused on mentoring and coaching to influence others.

The servant leader works to ensure that all involved with the organization understand, see the purpose, are in personal alignment, and are willing and able to do what is requested. They understand that giving orders is not an effective method for persuading people.

**Conceptualization.** Conceptualization is the ability to look beyond the day-to-day realities to provide hopes, dreams, and visions for the future. The servant leader must understand the global picture and set a course of action to obtain future goals. It is important for the leader to truly identify the current reality and the gap between the reality and vision. Covey (1990) refers to this process as beginning with the end in mind. Servant leaders need to find a balance between this conceptual thinking and the daily operations approach. The vision shared by servant leader expands into the areas of meaning, purpose, and self-transcendence.

The process of conceptualization is rooted in relationships and shared meanings. The servant leader is able to join the organization around the vision and form a commitment to a common purpose.

**Foresight.** A servant leader uses foresight to learn from the past, identify the realities of the present, and recognize the possible consequences of future decisions. Developing foresight involves the gathering of information. Using the four frames (structural, human resource, political, and symbolic) presented by Bolman and Deal

(2003) provides a leader with multiple lenses to view an organization that are helpful for making sound decisions.

Greenleaf (1977) implied that a good leader has a high level of intuitive insight about the way the past and the present connect to the future. Foresight is about being able to perceive the significance and nature of events before they occur. A servant leader uses foresight to help form the vision that will make the future a great one for everyone (Keith, 2008).

Foresight enables servant leaders to be cocreators of the future (Block, 1996) rather than victims of their organizations and the people that they lead. Servant leaders seek ways to create win-win situations to ensure that all survive and thrive.

**Stewardship.** Sergiovanni (2001) ascertained that leadership that counts touches people differently, as it taps into their emotions, appeals to their values, and responds to people's connections with others. He stated that it is a morally based leadership, which is a form of stewardship. Stewardship can be achieved only through the true commitment to servicing the needs of others with an emphasis on openness. Greenleaf (1977) believed that all institutions are places where the COEs, staffs, and trustees all play significant roles in holding the institutions in trust for the greater good of society.

Stewardship represents primarily an act of trust, whereby people and organizations entrust a leader to perform duties on their behalf. Stewardship involves partnership rather than patriarchy, and empowerment instead of dependency (Keith, 2008). Stewardship is the willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the larger organization by operating in service, rather in control, of those around us (Block, 1996).

Being a steward means choosing to service our colleagues, our community, as well as the world at large. Stewardship demands that we enlarge our vision of the world and our responsibility to make the world a better place for all. Stewardship encourages a sharing of power to create partnerships that truly recognize the value these partnership bring to the organization. Peter Block (1996) wrote:

Stewardship holds the possibility of shifting our expectations of people in power. Part of the meaning of the meaning of stewardship is to hold in trust the well being of some larger entity-our organization, our community, the earth itself. In order for a leader to hold something of value in trust, it calls for placing service ahead of control, no longer expecting leaders to be in charge and out in front. There is a pride in leadership, it evokes images of direction. There is humility in stewardship, it evokes images of service. Service is central to the idea of stewardship. (p. 41)

**Commitment to growth of others.** By removing obstacles that prevent people from effectively doing their jobs, a servant leader helps each individual realize his or her full potential. The servant leader is committed to the growth of others and recognizes that individuals are more valuable than just what they contribute to their job. The servant leader recognizes the responsibility to do everything possible to nurture the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of employees (Spears, 2004). Creating and offering opportunities for personal and professional development support the growth of others.

Kouzes and Posner (1993) concluded that the most admired leaders are leaders who make their followers feel valued, who raise their followers' sense of self-worth and self-esteem. The greatest goals of servant leadership are the value of the individual being

led and that individual's well-being. A premise of servant leadership is that the success of the institution will follow if all individuals involved are in a state of well-being.

The mission of the servant leader is to identify and meet the needs of others. The servant leader ensures that people get the resources that they need to be successful. Atruy (2001) wrote that to be a leader who serves, you must think of yourself as, and indeed must be, their primary resource. Helping others grow gives a servant leader meaning and satisfaction.

Servant leaders teach, coach, and mentor so that others will use their energy for the good of the organization. Members of the organization feel empowered that their efforts have a positive influence on the organization.

**Building community.** A product of the commitment to each individual is the formation of community building. Servant leaders know that the mission of the organization is bigger than any one person. Servant leadership creates other servant leaders, who then work together to build community. Building community requires a culmination of all the nine qualities previously discussed. It is about coming together with a common purpose. The servant leader creates an environment where the individuals feel that the vision and tasks belong to the group. Community building allows a leader to mobilize the collective capacity of individuals and create a team that is committed to working together to achieve the vision and goals. In effective teams, leaders empower others and foster collaborative effort.

Building community is about creating a healthy environment in which people can work free of unnecessary barriers and distractions (Hunter, 2004). Servant leaders work to reduce and eliminate barriers such as politics, positional power, and secret agendas that

often consume positive energy from people and the organization. Building community is working to create a place that allows people to feel safe and allows them to put all their energy and resources that will make themselves and their organizations great.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ revealed the greatest leadership principle: to lead is to serve. According to just about any definition of leadership, Jesus was a great leader (Hunter, 2004). Today, one-third of our world's population, more than a billion people, identify themselves as Christians. Many countries around the world observe national holidays based upon events in Jesus's life. His life had and still has a great influence in history. Jesus illustrated leadership as care, love, and service rather than strength, might, and power.

Jesus's life and teachings exemplified the perfect servant leader (Blanchard & Hodges, 2003). In the book of Matthew in the New Testament, Jesus makes His fundamental statement about leadership. The passage has been paraphrased in subtle ways; however, in essence He says that anyone who wishes to be the leader must first be the servant. If one chooses to lead, he must serve. He personified the most important aspect of servant leadership, as He placed the needs of others before His own needs. Jesus showed that a leader could be strong and effective and able to make powerful changes while remaining humble and caring with a servant's heart.

### **Review of Selected Literature**

In the foreword of the 25th anniversary edition of *Servant Leadership*, Stephen Covey wrote that there is a growing consciousness regarding servant leadership around the world. He stated that, in today's world, we need to produce more for less, and with greater speed than we have ever done before:

The only way to do that in a sustained way is through the empowerment of people. And the only way you get empowerment is through high trust cultures and an empowerment philosophy that turns bosses into servants and coaches, and structures and systems into nurturing institutionalized servant processes. (p. 2)

Organizations throughout the world are changing their attitudes toward leadership, people and relationships. In Fortune's 2003 list of "100 Best Companies to Work For," more than one-third of the organizations identified servant leadership as a core operating principle, and four of the top five on the list purposely practiced servant leadership: the Container Store, Synovus Financial, TDIndustries, and Southwest Airlines (Hunter, 2004). Federal Express, Marriott International, Medtronic, Pella, Herman Miller, Nestle USA, Southwest Airlines, and Wal-Mart all practice servant leadership and have appeared on "America's Most Admired Companies" list. The Lilly Endowment Inc. and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, two of America's largest grant-making foundations, have sought to encourage the development of programs to educate and train boards of trustees to act as servant leaders.

Another application of servant leadership is taking place through leadership and management courses in colleges and universities, as well as through corporate training programs. A few undergraduate and graduate courses on management and leadership incorporate servant leadership within their course curricula. The Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership (2002), as cited by Svoboda (2008), listed many colleges and universities offering servant leadership courses or programs. Examples of institutions offering servant leadership courses or programs included Arizona State University, Baylor University, Butler University, DePaul University, Illinois State



University, John Brown University, University of Michigan, Regent University, University of South Florida, and Trinity Western University.

A number of noted leadership authors such as Peter Block, Ken Blanchard, Max DuPree, and Peter Senge have all acclaimed the servant leader concept as an overarching framework that is compatible with, and enhances, other leadership and management models (Spears, 2004). A servant leader's focus on the characteristics of listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and building community can provide a context and approach that make the difference between ordinary and extraordinary performance.

Servant leadership is a belief system reflective of the responsibilities of leadership. Most organizations begin with a traditional pyramid structure with the leader at the top of the pyramid. However, under servant leadership the structure is more fluid. As the vision and goals are set, the pyramid has the leader on top just as found in the traditional model. Input into the vision and goals must be obtained from individuals in the organizations, who must come to own them. Once this has been accomplished, the pyramid reverses, and the leaders become the facilitators, cheerleaders, and supporters for making those goals happen through the efforts of others. Autry (2001) wrote that leadership is not about controlling people, but instead about caring for people and being a useful resource for them.

Much of the literature connected with servant leadership parallels Stephen Covey's philosophy of principle-centered leadership. Covey (1990) shared the importance for a leader to build character and trust, as key components to attain primary greatness. He wrote about the necessity for a leader to build a strong foundation based on

integrity, fairness, kindness, efficiency, and effectiveness to guide their actions. Starting with self, principle-centered leaders can transform their organizations by communicating vision and clarifying purpose while making behavior congruent with belief, and aligning actions with goals. There must be a direct correlation of values and habit; therefore, values and beliefs need to connect to actions. By focusing on principles, leaders can empower everyone who understands those principles to act without controlling and constant monitoring. These principles create a “compass” that orients people to the direction or course by constantly connecting to the vision.

Servant leadership creates high-performing organizations because it supports shared power and high involvement throughout the organization. Blanchard (2007) stated that servant leadership not just another management technique; servant leadership is a way of life. Servant leaders work to establish the vision and values upfront and work to bring out the best in those whom the leaders serve. They know that when all are involved with decisions that affect their lives they are happier and have a greater sense of ownership and commitment.

Experts in leadership and management often describe an effective leader as a servant leader without using the words “servant leader.” Jim Collins (2001) in *Good to Great* described the highest level of executive as a Level 5. He wrote:

Level 5 leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It is not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious, but their ambition is first and foremost on for the institution, not themselves.

Collins found that Level 5 leaders did not talk about themselves; rather, they talked about their companies and the contributions of their employees. Level 5 leaders were found to have a determination to do whatever needed to be done to make the company great. Some of the researchers working with Collins suggested using the name “servant leader” instead of Level 5 leader (Keith, 2007).

Drucker (1967) in *The Effective Executive* wrote that the effective executive is someone who is focused on contribution and focused on others. He stated:

The effective executive focuses on contribution. He asks: “What can I contribute that will significantly affect the performance and the results of the institution I serve? The focus on the contribution turns the executive’s attention away from his own specialty, his own narrow skills, his own department, and toward the performance of the whole.”

Alfieri (2009) examined the prevalence and effectiveness of servant leadership among a random sample of 156 New Jersey school superintendents. Superintendents in the study completed the SASL and the Leadership Practice Inventory (LPI) to assess five functional attributes of leadership, which include modeling, inspiring, challenging, enabling, and encouraging. The correlational study led to the conclusion that the servant leadership model aligns well with the role of the superintendent and that servant leaders may possess characteristics that allow superintendents to facilitate systemic reforms in the leaders’ organizations.

Svoboda’s dissertation (2008) focused on the strength of the correlation between the perceived presence of servant leadership and principal job satisfaction in Ohio public school districts. A significant positive correlation was found between the perceived level

of servant leadership present in the schools and the perceived level of principal job satisfaction, which indicated that the higher the level of perceived servant leadership, the higher the level of perceived principal job satisfaction.

Black (2007) conducted a research study to identify a relationship between principals' and teachers' perceived practice of servant leadership and the principals' and teachers' perception of school climate. The design used a mixed-method approach by administering two validated quantitative instruments: Laub's Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) and Hoy's Organizational Climate Description for Elementary Schools (OCDQ-RE). These instruments were administered to a randomly selected sample of 231 teachers and 15 principals. Upon the quantitative analysis was completed, focus group interviews were conducted. The data revealed a significant positive correlation between servant leadership and school climate.

Anderson (2006) administered the OLA to staff members in a rural public school district in the Midwest to examine a servant leader's impact on the school organization. The surveys along with interviews and observations were used to identify specific leadership behaviors and the influence that those behaviors had upon the organization in its entirety and the individuals within the school organization. The study confirmed that the leader selected for the study had characteristics of a servant leader and implied that servant leadership behaviors influenced the individuals within the organization.

Thompson (2005) investigated four superintendents who were chosen as "Superintendents of the Year" in Minnesota and Wisconsin. These superintendents were interviewed, and their administrative cabinet members were given the survey, developed by Page and Wong, which assessed servant leadership characteristics of the

superintendents. The survey data demonstrated evidence of the 10 servant leadership characteristics and the superintendents' cabinet teams viewed these four superintendents not only as exemplary leaders but also as servant leaders. Thompson concluded that studying servant leaders and their experiences could provide insights into the interaction between training and successes that lead to the development of other exemplary servant leaders.

Lubin (2001) studied visionary school leader behaviors and their congruency with servant leadership characteristics. Her dissertation focused on 18 "visionary leaders," as selected by county superintendents in California. Thirteen participants worked at the district level, and 5 were based at the school level; therefore, her study included superintendents, assistant superintendents, program directors, and principals. The research methodology was a descriptive style utilizing open-ended questions in a phone interview process. Lubin found that the visionary leaders in her study integrated the 10 characteristics of servant leadership in the participants' leadership behavior.

Wheaton (1999) interviewed public school staff regarding their preference for superintendents who exhibit servant leadership qualities. He concluded that effective superintendents possess servant leadership characteristics of listening, empathy, foresight, awareness, conceptualization, and building community. Wheaton recommended that further research include a leadership survey that incorporates servant leadership characteristics.

Sweetland and Hoy (2000) found that teacher empowerment was a significant independent predictor of student achievement in reading and mathematics, even when controlling for SES. Although other studies have not found a direct influence of teacher

empowerment on student achievement (Short & Rinehart, 1993, as cited in Sweetland & Hoy, 2000), and Louis and Marks (1998), these studies did not view teacher empowerment as shared decision-making over instructional decisions. Servant leadership may lead to authentic empowerment because the leaders share power and help others in constructive ways to make decisions affecting themselves and their work, which is the construct that Sweetland and Hoy used in their study.

Although many highly regarded theorists support the servant leadership model, like any other concept or idea, it is not without criticism. Many leaders are skeptical about servant leadership because they believe it to be a warm and fuzzy, passive style of leadership. Tatum as cited in Spears (1995) viewed the concept of servant leadership as weak and not a model that can be utilized when being new to a situation. Page and Wong (2000) implied that servant leadership makes it challenging to manage because the leader relinquishes power, as the servant leader becomes one of the masses. In addition, the appeal of servant leadership has not translated into academic respectability because of the model's lack of a research base.

Schools with a culture of shared decision-making that focus on student achievement, collaboration, and open communication are likely to produce learning communities that enhance school effectiveness, including student achievement. "Principals who view their teachers as professional, respect their expertise, and support them seem more likely to share and delegate power, that is, to empower teachers" (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). Teacher empowerment does not take place on its own and cannot be mandated as part of an initiative. Schools that have a principal's leadership that is collegial and supportive create an environment where teacher empowerment can

grow and thrive. The greatest gifts that a servant leader can give are the support and time for others to learn, to serve, and to have the opportunity to grow (Greenleaf, 1991). Growth is not measured by the power that the school leader holds but rather by the leader's ability to empower others.

### **The Principal's Role as Leader**

Although there is a vast amount of information about servant leadership, there is little information that relates to the application of servant leadership by a school principal. Two decades ago, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Educational Excellence, 1982) specifically recommended strong leadership as a means for school improvement. Educational leadership that was top-down in the administrative structure was blamed for the shortcomings of public education. Servant leadership rebukes the notion of this authoritative management and provides a model that enhances the growth of individuals and promotes team building. Thus, a principal as a servant leader may have the potential to affect the school culture in a unique manner. The ability or inability to move a school organization forward depends on the school principal; therefore, the principal as servant leader may excel in comparison to the nonservant leader because the servant leader influences through inspiration and collectively working together.

Research and practical knowledge point to the key importance of strong principal leadership that can effectively manage complex systems and lead to instructional improvement (Kelley & Peterson, 2002). Over the past decade, research on school principals has demonstrated their importance in promoting school effectiveness and school improvement (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Fullan, 2001; Kelley & Peterson, 2002; Louis & Marks, 1998). Principals must be able to develop a mission focused on student

learning, to design and implement approaches to improve learning, and to enhance the professional culture in the school, as a means of achieving better results for their school communities (Deal & Peterson, 1990).

Principals are leaders in the school who play a key role in initiating, implementing, and sustaining outstanding schools. Principals are responsible to a variety of stakeholders: students, teaching staff, support staff, parents, district authorities, the school board, and the community at large. During the course of a day, principals encounter numerous situations that are challenging, not because of the technical problems they entail but because of the messy human problems or serious human consequences involved in the situation (Starratt, 2004). Schools need a principal to keep the organization effectively operating and improving continuously. Kelley and Peterson (2007) wrote, “in fact, one seldom finds an instructionally effective school without an effective principal.”

With increased accountability reforms, the roles of the principals have changed to focus on high-stakes testing and accountability for student learning. Principals are responsible for enhancing student learning and leading planning efforts that develop a clear mission and goals for the school, analyzing student performance data, identifying areas that need improvement, and facilitating change. For the most part, preparation programs and professional development opportunities do not adequately prepare principals for the existing realities of the position. All leaders face challenges; however, principals face a special set of problems not found in other organizations with clearer goals, more routine technologies, and fewer social expectations (Kelley & Peterson, 2007).



Marzano et al.'s research (2005) statistically revealed principals' leadership traits that have a positive influence on student achievement. The researchers conducted a meta-analysis, in which they reviewed 69 studies from 1978 to 2001 to determine the impact of principal leadership on student achievement. Correlations were computed between leadership behaviors of the principal and the academic achievement of students in the school. The researchers concluded that the leadership behavior of the principal had a statistically significant impact on student achievement.

Marzano et al. (2005) identified 21 categories of behaviors related to principal leadership, which were referred to as responsibilities, with correlations ranging from  $r = .18$  to  $r = .33$ . These responsibilities included affirmation, change agent, contingent rewards, communication, culture, discipline, flexibility, focus, ideas/beliefs, input, intellectual stimulation, involvement in curriculum, instruction and assessment, knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment, monitoring, optimizer, order, outreach, relationships, resources, situational awareness, and visibility. These 21 responsibilities are clearly supported by the 10 characteristics of servant leadership.

Marzano et al.'s meta-analysis revealed that the leadership responsibility with the highest correlation to academic achievement was situational awareness, which addresses an awareness of the details and undercurrents of the school and uses that knowledge to solve problems. Flexibility was the second-highest leadership responsibility correlated with academic achievement. Flexibility as defined by the authors is the ability to adapt leadership behavior to current situational needs. These responsibilities are visibly also found in the characteristics of servant leadership in traits such as listening, awareness, foresight, and conceptualization.

The role of the principal requires a high level of responsibility to others: the students, the staff, the parents, and the community. As the role of the principal has become more demanding, efforts have been made to define characteristics. In 1996, the ISLLC developed Standards for School Leaders. The ISLLC Standards were updated in 2008 and adopted by 35 states. The standards are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

*ISLLC Standards for School Leaders*

Standard 1	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.
Standard 2	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.
Standard 3	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
Standard 4	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
Standard 5	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
Standard 6	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

*Note.* Information provided by the *School Leaders Licensure Assessment*.

The ISLLC Standards were designed to capture what is essential about the role of a school leader and what makes a difference in whether a school community can provide

experiences that ensure all students succeed. By focusing on the essential aspects of leadership, the standards were designed to help transform the profession of educational administration and the roles of school administrators. Each ISLLC Standard includes characteristics in knowledge, disposition, and performance that reveal the importance of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership. By focusing on service to others and enhancing leadership characteristics of listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and building community, a principal can be an educational leader who ensures success for all.

### **Conclusion**

Servant leadership is a practical philosophy that supports people who serve first and then lead, as a method of serving all within an organization. Servant leadership is a notion that is gaining popularity because it has been shown to be effective in both the public and private sectors. Growing the characteristics of listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and building community found in the framework of servant leadership can enhance the effectiveness of any leader.

A servant leadership approach for a principal has incredible potential, especially at a time when schools are under intense pressure to produce more with less. The school leader does not improve student achievement alone, and the principal must share authority by empowering other members in the organization to also lead. Greenleaf (1991) shared that the role of the servant leader is to serve the needs of others, as a primary motivation for facilitating change within a complex culture. The principal's role

will continue to become more multifaceted with a responsibility for facilitating educational change through purposing and empowering others. Servant leadership can provide a dynamic framework that will aid principals to meet the challenges of today's schools.

Sergiovanni (1992) asserted that the type of schools that exist directly reflect the type of leadership climate provided by the principal. An overarching goal of this study was to investigate the application of servant leadership practices by public school principals. Analyzing how principals from high-achieving schools implement each of the characteristics of servant leadership will support other principals in this exceptional form of leadership.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Overview**

School principals have a great impact on the culture, climate, and success of a school. Despite the growth and support of the concept of servant leadership, there is limited empirical research to support servant leadership's advancement. Page and Wong (2000) wrote that the popular appeal of servant leadership has not translated into academic respectability because of the lack of a research base. This study attempted to provide a base of research that shows how servant leadership is applied by principals in New Jersey schools recognized as Benchmark Schools.

This study investigated the application of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership by principals in public schools. The purpose was to examine the implementation of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership (listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community) associated with the principal's approach to leadership.

#### **Research Design**

This study used both quantitative and qualitative research methods and was divided into two distinct phases. In the first phase, the SASL was used to survey New Jersey public school principals. The SASL survey was given to principals from all 70 schools recognized as Benchmark Schools by the BCEE using an online survey website called Survey Monkey. In this elite group, there were 29 elementary school principals, 20 middle school principals, and 21 high school principals. Each principal was

administered an electronic SASL to self-assess his or her leadership style. The results of this survey were used to create a cohort of 15 principals who were interviewed. The 15 principals chosen to continue into the second part of the study were those who ranked themselves highest as servant leaders compared to the rest of the group, as quantified on the SASL.

In the second phase, the researcher conducted a face-to-face interview in a semistructured, open-ended question format with each principal. Marshall and Rossman (1989) noted that, in qualitative research, researchers dig deep and collect data and then examine them from various angles to construct a meaningful picture of a complete, multifaceted situation. The interviews helped the researcher to understand the principal's application of each of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership.

### **Sampling**

For this study, public school elementary school, middle school, and high school principals in New Jersey public schools that were recognized as Benchmark Schools for 2007 were contacted. More than 70 schools located throughout the state received this award. The schools span all District Factor Groups (DFG) and vary in size. These schools were chosen because they have been recognized for high student achievement when compared to similar schools. The sampling of these schools provided a range of leadership practices and approaches to managing the school. Additionally, by choosing the Benchmark Schools, there was diversity in the gender and ethnicity of the principals chosen.

### **Instrumentation**

Before 1998, there was no instrument that measured servant leadership; however, through the efforts of Page and Wong (1998), the SASLP was developed. This survey instrument was created through an extensive study of the literature regarding servant leadership and led to the establishment of a list of 200 descriptors of servant leaders. The original list of 200 items was narrowed to create a 99-item instrument utilizing a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The 99 items were grouped into 12 distinct categories: (1) integrity, (2) humility, (3) servanthood, (4) caring for others, (5) empowering others, (6) developing others, (7) visioning, (8) goal setting, (9) leading, (10) modeling, (11) team building, and (12) shared decision-making. These 12 categories have been heavily emphasized in the literature regarding servant leadership and can be linked to the 10 characteristics of servant leaders developed by Spears.

Page and Wong conducted a pilot study in which the alpha<sup>2</sup> values for each subscale were calculated, as well as the total assessment score. The alpha coefficients Page and Wong calculated for the 12 categories were total (.94), integrity (.80), humility (.66), servanthood (.76), caring for others (.71), empowering others (.77), developing others (.92), visioning (.57), goal-setting (.77), leading (.84), modeling (.76), team building (.82), and shared decision-making (.80).

Hamilton (1999), as cited in Taylor (2002), conducted another study using the SASLP, and the results were consistent with the pilot study by Page and Wong (xxxx). Taylor (2002) used raw data from the study conducted by Hamilton (1999), and reduced the SASLP to 24 items, thereby creating the SASL. Taylor analyzed the raw data for each item and designed the SASL to equally represent each of the 12 categories of servant leader characteristics. A comparative analysis of the original 99-item instrument

with the 24-item instrument was conducted, and the results showed a positive correlation of .95 with the total score of both tests. An additional analysis was conducted on the instruments that resulted in an alpha reliability score of .96 for the 99-item instrument (SASLP) and .92 for the 24-item instrument (SASL).

Research in the area of servant leadership (Autry, 2001; Hunter, 2004; Greenleaf, 1977; Laub, 1999; Page & Wong, 1998; Spears, 1995) was used to develop the interview questions. The application of each of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership, as defined by Spears, framed each question. A set of well-crafted questions helped maintain consistency for each principal participant.

A pilot study was conducted to field test the interview questions. The interview questions were revised based on the pilot study, and in an effort to strengthen the questions, input was solicited from colleagues. Protocols that allowed for obtaining informed consent, establishing rapport with interviewees, and recording the data were developed. Creswell (2003) wrote that the protocol for the interview can be a powerful organizational tool. A header that reminded the interviewer to address confidentiality, advised consent, the purpose of the study, as well as the actual interview questions with space to record information was developed for the protocol design.

### **Data Collection**

Phone calls requesting participation in the study and follow-up emails requesting the identified principals to complete the SASL via an online survey website called Survey Monkey at <http://surveymonkey.com> occurred. After a week, follow-up phone calls were made to principals who had not completed the survey online. A very high rate of return on the surveys was expected because of the prestige associated with being chosen as a



Benchmark School and the ease of completing the survey using the Survey Monkey website. Additionally, the researcher's prior affiliation with the Benchmark School Award, as the researcher's previous district that had two schools chosen as a Benchmark School, and the personal outreach requesting participation helped create a high degree of participation and return of the surveys.

In the second phase, the researcher made phone calls to the principals who had been chosen to be interviewed. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with each selected principal. The interview questions were open-ended and chosen to provide insight into how the principal applied each of the 10 characteristics. To provide consistency of the information obtained, all principals were asked the same questions. However, the interviews were semistructured, to allow the researcher to ask for more information to clarify a concept. The responses of the interview questions were taped and transcribed. Following the interviews, the transcripts were reviewed and revised to ensure the accuracy of the interview data.

To protect the participants' anonymity, the names of the school district and names of the principals are not revealed in the study.

### **Data Analysis**

The data attained from the SASL was used in a composite format with the total SASL score placed on a continuum for all of the subjects. The data obtained from the SASL was analyzed using a comparison of the total SASL score. As there are 24 questions with a 7-point Likert scale, the scores could range from 24 to 168. Ranking each SASL score on a continuum from the lowest to highest allowed the researcher to choose the 15 principals who ranked themselves as the highest servant leaders.

After the researcher collected the qualitative interview data, an analysis of the interviews was examined against the 10 characteristics identified by Spears as those of a servant leader. The researcher used the data to assess and further analyze patterns and themes across the 10 characteristics. During the data analysis, trends of the application and behaviors of each of the 10 characteristics were identified. Marshall and Rossman (1989) stated, “Through systematic means, the researcher gathers information about those interactions, reflects on their meaning, arrives at and evaluates conclusions, and eventually puts forward an interpretation of those interactions.”

The process of identifying themes included first rereading all data several times to get a sense of what the data represented in totality. Then, the researcher organized the data by breaking down each interview and sorting the data by question. Next, the responses were reviewed by question several times to get a sense of what the question responses contained as a whole. General categories, themes, and subcategories were identified. Creswell (2003) described this process as a data analysis spiral. After, the researcher re-examined the definitions of the 10 characteristics provided by Spears and classified each piece of data accordingly. When applicable, the researcher tabulated the frequency of similar responses for each characteristic found in the data being analyzed. The final step in the process was to integrate and summarize the data, which is presented in the next chapter.

The researcher included many direct quotations from the interviews in the data analysis. Patterson (2002) wrote that direct quotations are a basic source of raw data in qualitative inquiry, which reveal the respondents’ thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions. Verbatim quotations that emerged as

themes and summarized the insights of several respondents were included in the data analysis, as these quotations provide support, depth, and detail to the study.

## Chapter 4

### Analysis of Data

#### Introduction

Sergiovanni (2001) wrote that school systems desperately need a leadership model that places service ahead of management. A servant leader places great emphasis on serving others by fostering teamwork and empowering the members of the organization to meet or exceed their goals. Due to the climate and overwhelming demands saturating schools today, there is a need for effective and dynamic leadership skills to meet these challenges. Servant leadership may provide the answer to these challenges with a focus on teamwork, collaboration, ethical and caring behavior, and enhancement of the growth of all people in the organization. The central focus of this study was to investigate how principals in New Jersey apply the 10 characteristics of servant leadership.

Although efforts have been made to connect school leadership and student achievement, very little research has examined how successful principals lead their schools. The researcher sought to address this problem by analyzing how principals implement the 10 characteristics of servant leadership. This investigation of the application of servant leadership by school principals seeks to provide concrete data that demonstrate practical methods to apply the characteristics of servant leadership.

#### Research Questions

The following research questions served to frame the study:

**Question 1.** To what extent does servant leadership exist as perceived by New Jersey public school principals?

**Question 2.** How do New Jersey principals who rate themselves high on a self-assessment of servant leadership implement the 10 characteristics (listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth, build community) associated with servant leadership?

### **Data Analysis**

In phase 1 of the study, the SASL (Taylor, 2002) was used to study a representative sample of 54 school principals currently employed in New Jersey. Using a 7-point Likert scale, the respondents determined how frequently they employed the components of a particular leadership practice. The scale included 1 (*strongly disagree*), 2 (*disagree*), 3 (*slightly disagree*), 4 (*undecided*), 5 (*slightly agree*), 6 (*agree*), and 7 (*strongly agree*).

The researcher distributed 70 SASL surveys to a random sample of practicing New Jersey principals. As each data set was returned, the researcher reviewed it for completeness and adherence to the directions provided with the instruments. Of the 70 instruments that were distributed, a sum total of 54 were returned and completed correctly. Thus, a response rate of 77% (54 of 70) was reported, with a usability rate of 100% (54 of 54 usable). After the instruments were counted, the researcher extrapolated only the responses and transferred them to Microsoft Excel, where they were automatically totaled in column form. The totals then were entered into SPSS raw data screen for statistical analysis.

Because the SASL is a 24-item assessment with a 7-point Likert scale, the range of possible scores is from a low of 24 to a high of 168. The raw scores for the 54 New Jersey principals who appropriately completed the SASL ranged from a minimum of 125

to a maximum of 165. Table 2 provides a visual assessment of the raw SASL scores with descriptive statistics and measures of central tendency.

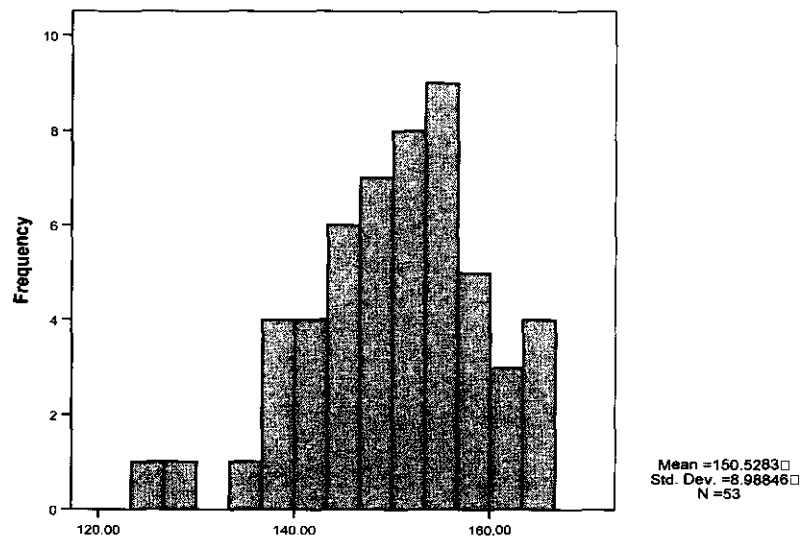
Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics from the SASL*

	<i>N</i>	Range	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>SD</i>
SASL total score	54	40	125	165	150.528	152.0	8.988

*Note.* The raw data are only from the SASL and are reported as composite scores.

Figure 1 represents a graphic illustration of the SASL score distributions for the study.



*Figure 1.* Frequency of SASL score distributions.

Furthermore, as the SASL has a range of scores from 1 to 7, with 54 principals who completed the survey, the researcher was able to find and then rank the average score for each question. Question 4 (“I genuinely care for the welfare of people working with me”) resulted in the highest average, 6.59, while Question 12 (“I am willing to have my ideas challenged”) produced the lowest average, 5.89. Table 3 shows a visual

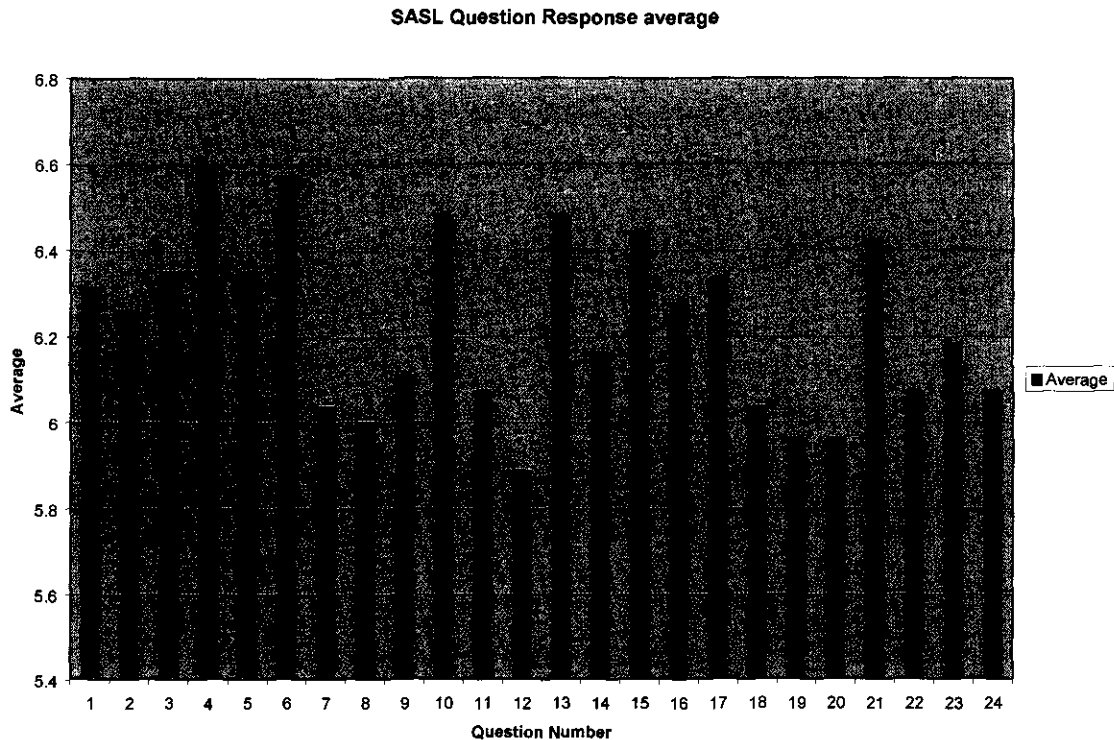
representation of the question number matched to the sum total of all responses and the average scored response for each question.

Table 3

*SASL Questions, Sum Totals, and Average*

Question	Sum	Average
1	341	6.314815
2	338	6.259259
3	343	6.351852
4	356	6.592593
5	343	6.351852
6	355	6.574074
7	326	6.037037
8	324	6
9	330	6.111111
10	350	6.481481
11	328	6.074074
12	318	5.888889
13	350	6.481481
14	333	6.166667
15	348	6.444444
16	339	6.277778
17	342	6.333333
18	326	6.037037
19	322	5.962963
20	322	5.962963
21	347	6.425926
22	328	6.074074
23	334	6.185185
24	328	6.074074

Figure 2 provides a graphic representation of the question number matched to the sum total of all responses and the average scored response for each question.



*Figure 2.* The sum total of all responses and the average scored response for each question.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

In the second phase of the study, the 15 principals who scored the highest on the SASL were chosen for interviews. The following summary statistics represent data regarding the 15 highest self-assessed servant leaders. This cohort contained 11 men and 4 women and 12 Caucasians and 3 Hispanics. Four participants have doctoral degrees, and 11 have master's degrees. Within this group, 6 were elementary principals, 5 were middle school principals, and 4 were high school principals. Table 4 shows a representation of the respondents' background.



Table 4

*Respondents' Background*

Participants' school type	Elementary	Middle	High	Total
<i>N</i> = 15	6	5	4	15
Participants' gender		Female	Male	Total
<i>N</i> = 15		4	11	15
Ethnic breakdown	Black	Caucasian	Hispanic	Total
<i>N</i> = 15	0	12	3	15
Participants' educational background		Master's	Doctorate	
<i>N</i> = 15		11	4	15

Although each school type (elementary school, middle school, and high school) was relatively equally represented by the 15 principals, there was no representation from all District Factor Groups (DFGs). The 15 principals who ranked themselves the highest on the SASL were all from schools that had DFGs classified as (G-J). In other words, even though the SASL was given to an equal representation of school principals from all DFGs (A-I), the 15 highest as ranked on the SASL were principals from schools in higher socioeconomic areas (G-J).

### **Qualitative Data Analysis by Research Question**

**Question 1 (leadership style). What style of leadership do you have, and what impact does the style have on your school?** Given that there is a direct correlation between the leadership style of the principal and the tone and culture of a school setting (Hughes, 2002), the researcher began with a prompt to immediately

connect the topic of leadership to those whom the leaders serve. The highest-scoring leader, with a score of a 164, asserted that “leadership styles are, at times, hard to describe, since when you are ‘in the moment’ an innate set of skills must come to the forefront.”

In this study, 12 of the 15 school principals directly and specifically indicated that their leadership styles involved collaboration. The principals explained that decisions made must have the input of those persons affected by the decisions. One principal strongly suggested that “input from others is essential to increasing the overt level of active participation of the staff.” Another school principal drew a direct connection to the participation of teachers in the governance of the school to that of active classroom participation. These servant principals shared that “really listening” and including others was paramount to their leadership style. One high school principal stated, “I realize that people need to have ownership on the outcomes and they need to feel invested in it, so I do my best to develop leadership across the faculty.”

The 3 principals who did not specifically mention a collaborative style referred to many of the essential components of collaboration in their responses. These principals drew upon their implementation of democratic leadership principles during certain situations where such an approach may have an ultimate benefit upon the outcome. Two of the three stated that “everyone here has a voice,” and all suggested that they were leaders in organizations guided by common beliefs and goals. The other principal stressed the importance cultivating a team mentality and ascertained, “By working together as a team, a leader creates a supportive and positive environment that is not based on power.”

All of the principals in the study referred directly to the importance of relationships within the leadership and culture of the school. One leader at the elementary level was particularly astute in his assessment of the importance of creating strong relationships, as she stated, “Teaching and learning is based on relationships. That is what it is all about, and I need to model that as a leader.” Several principals pointed out their effort to connect and build relationships with all constituents within the organization, including staff, students, and parents. A middle school principal, summarizing her thoughts, concluded, “My role is to cultivate a genuine relationship between all of those involved our school community. I need to assure that each member feels important and respected.”

Collaboration with staff as part of the principal’s leadership approach was a common theme in all responses. A principal at the middle-school level shared that the collaborative approach has had the greatest impact because it “creates strong leadership and decision making from the classroom teachers.” Another principal commented that she works to involve many as “people that have ownership in the building, feel more invested in it.”

The researcher found it interesting that only 1 principal used the words “servant leader” to describe his style; however, 4 principals stated it was their “job” to make everyone better. One of the essential elements of servant leadership involves the leaders’ empowerment of those persons whom the leaders lead. Several of the principals determined that their schools were representative of a “team working together within a leadership model.” Six of these servant leader principals wanted to “remove all obstacles” to allow their teachers to do the very best for their children.

**Question 2 (important leadership characteristics). Which characteristics of leadership are important to you as a leader?** This question was highly open-ended with a plethora of opportunities for principals to make a personal connection. Many of principals immediately mentioned the importance of honesty, integrity, and trust in their repertoire of leadership styles. In fact, each principal mentioned the importance of trust in the principal–teacher relationship. Principals described trust as something that had to be earned. A middle school principal stated, “Without trust, the other characteristics do not mean a whole lot.” An elementary principal reiterated, “Trust is the backbone of the connection between a principal and all facets of school and community.” Finally, a high school principal asserted the notion that he had to “trust enough to be trusted.”

Several principals indicated that there were “no secrets” in their organizations, especially when the needs of the students were at the nucleus of the school’s goals. This group expanded on this concept by discussing the power of information and the need to share as much information as possible, so others feel “empowered.” Being a clear communicator was evident in 8 of the responses. One of the elementary principals underscored the value of clear communication by maintaining, “Information is power, so I share as much as virtually possible by all means possible, including memos, emails, and face-to-face meetings.”

Perception is as important to the leaders as reality: the overwhelming majority of the subjects spoke of their schools with great pride of ownership. Almost all principals in the study weaved in the theme of caring and stated the importance of getting to know their staff “outside” school. One high school principal stressed this by sharing, “I have to know about their family, so I can be there for them. If a staff member has an issue at

home, we will cover you, I will take care of you.” Another high school principal responded, “Actions speak volumes, so I take the time to learn about my staff, and I show my staff that I know their interests and their families by asking questions and making a conscious effort remember.” Under this theme, 5 principals provided examples of celebrating personal and professional accomplishments of staff by beginning faculty meetings with “sharing good news.”

Visibility of the principals in their respective buildings was often a notion that the principals believed to be crucial to their overall effectiveness as a functioning member of the school community. Thirteen of the 15 mentioned that, every day, regardless of what is going on, they spend time visiting classrooms. The principals shared that this provided an opportunity to demonstrate that they were interested in teaching and learning, and that this was a time to listen to their staff and share information. Additionally, the principals revealed that by being out of the office and involved they had a true awareness of what was occurring in their school community. This researcher also noted a high frequency in the use of the word “approachable” to describe an attribute of their leadership style.

Another common characteristic that 10 principals in the study believed was important was that they were knowledgeable about instruction. These 10 principals stated that they were current on best practices in instruction and had a vision of where the school needed to go next. Six of the 15 principals shared that they spent time every day learning more, whether it be on the Internet or reading current literature, to be a better instructional leader. A high school principal summed up the thoughts of many by asserting, “I want people to say, he leads by example . . . he is a learner, he stays current, and he can help make me a better teacher.” The concept of having a role in helping the

staff grow and “increase their instructional expertise” was evident in 12 principals’ responses.

**Question 3 (culture of the school). Describe your school’s culture.** School culture is defined as a set of norms or expectations that are a part of the very fabric of the building, an infrastructure akin to the foundation (Fullan, 2001). The data from the interviews showed that each of the 15 principals referred to the concept of teams and shared governance. Seven of the principals used the word “family” to illustrate their feelings toward their school’s culture. In these principals, the researcher noted an overt sense of pride and passion on the part of the principal; each had a large smile when they spoke of their schools. In two of the interviews, the principals postulated that their school was a “home away from home” for many of the children and their staff members.

Deal and Peterson (1990) stated that an educational setting very quickly takes on the personality of its leadership; the tone of the culture is something that is quickly realized by those persons who come there each day. The artistry and architecture of leadership required to lead successful schools require influence, credibility, trust, vision, and service (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Several of the principals responded with statements of “facilitating a culture of putting the children first and foremost, period.” And, “One might assume this to be obvious, but not always. The staff is totally focused on the most important thing; the children here and we make decisions based upon their best interests.” This principal and a number of others perceived that the students’ needs permeated every aspect of their buildings. A high school principal shared an example of putting students first by elaborating on a conflict between her school’s chamber choir and lacrosse team, as each group shared key students. She put the teachers, coaches, and supervisors

together to develop a plan that would meet the individual student needs. The principal began the meeting by talking about each individual child and what his or her needs were to determine a proactive course of action that focused on each student involved.

Twelve principals in the study ascertained that they had a “very positive culture” based on shared leadership. Several of the principals noted that the “jobs have become so large” that they rely on their staff to also be leaders and make decisions. One middle school principal communicated that she does not formally have to organize everything to get everything done. She stated, “The staff just does it.” An elementary principal acknowledged that he has numerous leaders in the school based on each unique situation. He stated, “There is only one of me and over 100 staff. By all of us taking the lead at different times, depending on the situation, we accomplish so much more than if I always had to initiate something.” A high school principal claimed:

In our school, there is no such thing as just a secretary, or just a teacher, or just an aide. Everyone is part of a team working for the students in which they play different roles at different times, depending on their expertise rather than their title.

The principals’ responses demonstrated a sense of teamwork with a focus on collective energy and synergy from all members in the school community, including staff, students, and parents.

**Question 4 (listening). When you practice the art of listening, what behaviors or practices do you exhibit?** Servant leaders are valued for their communication and decision-making skills. Servant leaders must reinforce these important skills by making a deep commitment to listening intently to others.

Listening involves the act of hearing with attentiveness, paying close attention, and receiving a message with genuine concern (Taylor, 2002). The art of listening shows a deep intent to gain clarity and respond to a person's needs. The servant leader is an active and astute listener who wishes to glean insight into the will of a group. Listening involves hearing not only what is being said but also what is not being said (Greenleaf, 1996). All of the 15 principals noted the art of active listening as a method to demonstrate a commitment to shared governance. An active listener was described by the principals in the study as someone who gives full attention to the person in front of the listener and someone who exercises great restraint to not divert any attention away from the subject. "You eliminate the distractions at all cost—you ignore the e-mail, the phone, and anything else," stated the principal who scored the highest on the SASL. A middle school principal acknowledged that she actually put blinds up in her office to keep her eyes from moving away from the speaker.

Other active listening skills, such as maintaining eye contact, using "I" messages, and repeating back what the person stated, were discussed in a majority of the responses. These servant leader principals asserted the notion that knowing when to speak and when to listen was critical to the role of the leader. A high school principal revealed, "It is often difficult not to jump in and bestow a verdict; however, I believe my role is not to always provide an answer but rather be a sounding board for ideas." Six other principals concurred that they had to make a conscious effort to resist interrupting the speaker.

The next emerging typology was that the listener must do something with what she or he heard; the listener must take some form of action. Every participant in the



study expressed the importance of doing more than just “saying the right thing.” An elementary principal summed up this concept by articulating:

I can use all the active listening techniques ever presented; however, if I do not do something with the information, people will not continue to share . . . you must show that you intend to take some action as a result of what you just heard.

Five other principals clearly ascertained that they make a point to “check in” a few days later with the person who was listened to show that the principal listened and cared.

Many of the principals chose to highlight the importance of an open-door policy that sends a nonverbal cue to the school that the person inside the office welcomes the input of others. The researcher was impressed with the number of principals who were strong in their feelings that what is said is often less important than how it is said. In accordance, the use of expressive body language was critical to the principals’ ability to obtain open dialogue data from their staff.

Several of the principals discussed the importance of sitting next to the person they are listening to, thereby removing the desk between principal and staff member. One principal exclaimed, “I feel that if they have a sense of intimacy, I better create an atmosphere of listening with empathy, rather than listening behind a desk, as an authority.” Another principal described that she arranges her office for a meeting depending on the situation. She revealed:

In a coaching opportunity such as an observation conference, we sit at the table in my office side by side. When I need to listen to a personal situation, I sit face to face with the person in front of my desk, so there are no barriers. And there are

times, when I sit behind my desk, especially for example relating to a disciplinary issue to help establish a boundary.

**Question 5 (empathy). How do you exhibit behaviors that demonstrate empathy?** Servant leaders strive to understand and empathize with others. An overarching goal of servant leaders is to understand and identify with the feelings of others. Empathy is based upon the intellectual identification of the feelings, thoughts, and emotions of others within an organization. The pinnacle achievement of servant leaders is to become completely empathetic listeners whose skills in receptive listening show good human intentions and foster deep personal connections (Alfieri, 2009).

The researcher found that this question was one of the most difficult for the principals to answer. The issue was steeped in the lack of commonality in the understanding of empathy; it seemed to mean many different things to the subjects. Thus, identifying common themes within the responses was a great challenge. However, indications that servant leadership requires the leader to put himself or herself in the place of another was present in 10 of the responses. Further, nine responses included letting the person in the situation know he or she was heard and letting the person know that he or she is valued.

Three principals shared the impression that since you cannot put yourself in someone else's shoes, it is possible to be empathic by asking the person how you can be of help or service to him or her. One elementary principal stated, "With over 500 students and 60 staff members, you cannot definitely feel everything they are feeling, so it is important to listen and ask what the person expects." These 3 principals noted the importance of listening as a key to empathy.

All but 2 of the principals indicated that their past experience as a teacher or as a parent was of tremendous assistance to them demonstrating empathy within the school setting. Understanding what it is like to be a teacher helped several of the servant principals empathize with staff issues and frame the need for a solution. One elementary principal stated, “There are not many problems that come along that somebody has not experienced before. The thing about empathy is just putting it into perspective.”

Several principals in the study revealed the value of writing personalized notes to the staff. Acknowledging a birthday, noting a positive aspect of something seen in a classroom, and sending notes of support were ways that principals built upon personal connections. An elementary principal shared that he made up cards with a picture of the school, and he often writes a quick note with the inscription, “I know this has been difficult for you, and I want to thank you for your efforts and going above and beyond for our students.”

**Question 6 (healing). What behaviors do you use that indicate your commitment to healing?** Servant leaders foster care and support while upholding the expectations of exemplary performance. At the heart and soul of any good leader lies an unending desire for high standards coupled with high expectations. None of the servant leader principals felt that the bar for excellence was ever high enough or that their professional growth was ever complete. The data revealed that all principals in this study believed that it was vital to define and set expectations and “determine the nonnegotiables.” In other words, the principals felt that they needed to be specific about expectations by clearly stating what is not optional, so “all are on the same page.”

Eight of the principals shared the importance of having “honest” conversations with staff to let them know where they are compared to the expectations. These principals noted the importance of using formal and informal observations to “push” staff and help them grow. One high school principal revealed that before he arrived at the school “everybody was satisfactory.” He proudly stated that now they have a new evaluative tool that fosters growth by clearly identifying strengths and areas of need.

The data from this response clearly confirmed the need to establish a climate of trust, as a majority of principals focused on trust as an essential point for setting and obtaining exemplary expectations. A middle school principal’s response incorporated aspects of other responses: “It is much like being a coach and the staff has to honestly believe that I am trying to make them better rather than trying to tear them apart.” Other responses in the study affirmed the importance of the school being for the students, thus promoting the belief that “everyone needs to get better every day because it directly impacts the students.”

Eleven principals clearly articulated the need to provide support to meet the high expectations. The characteristic of being a coach, knowing your team, and giving each individual what he or she needs were evident in almost all of the responses. Several principals made the analogy to teaching a class of students and “differentiating” to move everyone forward. Specifically, the principals shared that they know their individual staff members and “know what motivates” the different personalities. Four of the principals stated that, if they wanted the teachers to differentiate for students, then the principals had to lead by example and differentiate for staff by providing different opportunities for growth.

**Question 7 (awareness). What do you do to grow your awareness of self and others?** General awareness and self-awareness (having understanding or knowledge) strengthen the servant leader. Servant leaders are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Such leaders work to build on their own strengths and weaknesses, which helps the leaders to accept and build on the strengths and weaknesses of others. Reflection was a central theme in 13 of the principals' responses. One principal stated, "It is a balance about reflecting and being aware of what is going on around you and your impact on it." Several principals conveyed that they used the daily commute to and from school to ponder questions such as, "What worked today?" "What could have I handled differently?" "What can I improve?"

Nine principals also commented that they ask for a lot of feedback. Five principals specifically shared that they have key staff whom the principals trust to ask the popular quote, "How am I doing?" They stated that because there is trust, they can get feedback by asking questions such as, "How did that go?" "Did I do something that made that easier or harder?" One high school principal summed up the theme by stating, "It is almost like taking the temperature every now and then."

Another key concept in the majority of responses expanded upon the premise of being visible. Several servant principals shared that by visiting classrooms and being visible in the hallways, in the lunchroom, and at arrival/dismissal, the principals "gain a pulse" on the entire school community. Five principals shared that they can learn a lot from listening to students and parents. One elementary principal commented, "It is important, again, to be a good listener, but not just in my office, but throughout the school building and community, too."

Spears (1995) wrote that many leaders miss leadership opportunities because a lack of awareness that stems from having a narrow perception of the world around them. One of the principals highlighted a technique that she called “checking in and checking out” to grow awareness of her staff. She explained that this is a process that helps build relationships as her staff begins every meeting “checking in” with some type of question such as, What is your favorite food? What is a movie you liked? The meeting ends with some type of “checking out” questions such as, What did you learn? What are you celebrating? The principal ascertained that the process provides insights and awareness for her staff.

Attending conferences, reading current literature, and participating in book clubs were other techniques that several of the principals used to grow their awareness. The data clearly showed the importance that the principals placed on growing their knowledge of instructional practices and the world. Two principals made it a point to share that they read as much outside education as they do about education, as they believe that many parallels can be brought from other avenues to enhance teaching and learning in our schools.

**Question 8 (persuasion). When you practice the art of persuasion, what behaviors or practices do you exhibit?** Servant leaders rely on persuasion rather than authority to convince others. These leaders seek to convince rather than coerce. Servant leaders are not focused on controlling their employees. These leaders do not measure their status in terms of their span of control and are not focused on compliance. Rather, servant leaders are focused on mentoring and coaching to influence others. While responding to the question about persuasion, all principals in the study shared that, when

they are trying to convince, they clearly try articulate benefits to the person involved. Furthermore, the principals revealed the importance of staying true to the goals of the school. One principal's response encapsulated the thoughts of most in the study: "I need to understand their needs. In other words, what is in it for them?"

Covey (1990) stressed that real leadership power comes from an honorable character and not the position a person holds. Several of the principals again reiterated the importance of honesty and building a trust. Two principals clearly revealed the same sentiment by contending, "That without trust, I cannot persuade anyone to do anything." Another principal shared an example of moving staff forward with technology. He believed that if he mandated Smart Boards that this technology would sit in rooms collecting dust. Therefore, he asked a few teachers on each grade level to try the Smart Board. He provided training and release time, and in return, he asked these teachers to share their experiences at a faculty meeting. This principal was pleased to report that, 2 years later, every teacher in the school is actively using the Smart Board.

Nine principals stated that they use the approach of sharing the facts and "putting out options," so the staff has choices. One elementary principal provided an example of allowing options with his scheduling process. He shared that, after his schedule is presented, he tells the staff that if they have a suggestion to make the schedule better and meet the same goal, let him know, as he believes more eyes are better than one.

Providing a larger perspective and beginning with, "I need your help" were heard in 4 principal's responses. These principals reaffirmed the necessity of building strong relationships as an effective element of persuasion. One of the principals commented, "It is not about making demands; it is about working together for the good of the students."

A commonality in all the responses to the question was that notion that all decisions are for the best of all students; therefore, persuading staff to do things usually was not a difficult task.

**Question 9 (conceptualization). How do you balance the day-to-day management of your school along with supporting the visions for the future?**

Servant leaders strike a balance between the day-to-day “operations” and visions for the future. The servant leader is able to join the organization around the vision and form a commitment to a common purpose. Conceptualization is the ability to look beyond the day-to-day realities to provide hopes, dreams, and visions for the future. Thirteen of the 15 principals stated that balancing the management of the “day-to-day operations” while supporting the visions for the future is one of the biggest challenges they face. Several principals commented that, with increased state mandates and a focus on accountability tied to annual tests results, the principals had to make a concerted effort to focus on a vision for the future. An elementary principal shared that it is so easy to get wrapped up with management issues, such as assignment of lunch and bus duties, that sometimes planning for the future could be pushed off. Three principals, 1 from each level, specifically shared that they include “place holders” on their calendars to ensure that they continue to plan and collaborate for the future.

Ten principals stressed the importance of having a vision and a 5-year plan, which includes detailed action plans for each year. One high school principal articulated the responses of most by stating, “If you do not take the time to put a plan together, you always be responding to a crisis. A plan helps you to be proactive.” Another high school principal shared the popular quote, “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” She expanded by



stating that, if the plans and actions are not in writing, leaders of the school are likely to be driven by “ever-changing” demands of parents, the community, and even the Central Office. She communicated that she believed that one major factor in the success of her school was that they were able to “stay true to their 5-year plan.”

All principals in the study referenced the importance of continually sharing, discussing, and measuring progress toward the goals, as a means to go beyond management and “look at the bigger picture.” Ten principals discussed the importance of using faculty meetings to promote a vision, professional development, and growth rather than focus on operational issues. These servant principals noted that they sent a weekly memo to update the staff regarding the day-to-day management of the building such as changes to the daily routine, upcoming assemblies, bus/lunch duties, team meetings, etc., so that the majority of the staff meetings were more about vision with a focus on student learning.

Seven principals indicated that empowering others was the key that allowed the principals to have time to focus on a vision and planning for the future. Several of these principals commented that they needed to rely on others to help with the management of the daily operations, so the leaders could set a course of action for future goals. Specific examples of empowering teachers, secretaries, guidance counselors, team leaders, and other administrators to make decisions about daily operational issues were found in several responses. These principals believed that student issues such as a conflict at recess could be effectively handled at a level other than the principal’s level. A high school principal summarized this sentiment by asserting:

There are talented professionals around me at all times. It is a mistake on my part to invest time when someone else could be doing it. So whether it is the guidance counselor, head custodian, teacher or secretaries, I expect that others can handle most issues, which allows me to plan for the future.”

Another principal shared, “You have to have confidence in the people you are working with, your team. You have to be able to divide the workload up. That’s important.”

**Question 10 (foresight). How do you exhibit behaviors that portray foresight?** Foresight is a characteristic that enables servant leaders to understand lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future. A servant leader uses foresight to help form the vision that will make the future a great one for everyone (Keith, 2008). Foresight is about being able to perceive the significance and nature of events before they occur. Ten principals in the study discussed the need to reflect and learn from past experiences. In the responses, there was a common theme of making comparisons between a present situation and something that happened in the past and reflecting upon what worked and what did not.

Greenleaf (1977) asserted that a good leader has a high level of intuitive insight about the way the past and present connect to the future. Six of the principals shared their commitment to keeping detailed notes about decisions and things to improve, as they believed doing so enhances the reflection process and ensures that improvement occurs. An elementary principal shared an example of how graduation was improved due to the notes and a suggestion from a parent to have a slide show of the students playing with music as parents waited for the event to begin.

Five of the principals conveyed that foresight encompasses the value of “keeping the big picture in mind.” These servant leaders expressed the importance of looking at a decision through multiple lenses to determine how it will affect the many aspects of the school community. The principals noted that predicting the impact on many levels is vital to a school’s success.

**Question 11 (stewardship). When you practice the art of stewardship, it is assumed that you are committed to serving the needs of others first. What actions come to mind?** Servant leaders assume first and foremost a commitment to looking out for the best interests of others. Stewardship is the willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the larger organization by operating in service, rather in control, of those around us (Block, 1996). All principals in the study included that everything they do is “what is best for the students.” Several principals shared that they work to support the teachers and help make the staff better because “first and foremost” it affects students. A high school principal shared that he demonstrated stewardship by supervising the lunch period, so that some of the teachers are freed up and can work with students.

Several principals imparted that having a commitment to serve others first provides the foundation of their work and related stewardship to being visible, accessible, and “there for the school community.” One principal described time as a key element to stewardship by claiming, “Time is important with stewardship. I often have to put aside my own agenda and priorities, so that I can support the needs of others first.” Six other principals also illustrated that reports, paperwork, etc. are often completed at late hours, at home, or on weekends because stewardship “necessitates being there to help and support.” The principal who scored the highest on the SASL stated, “Being effective is

often putting my own needs aside at any given moment to be there for students, staff, or parents.”

**Question 12 (commitment to the growth of others). What actions do you employ to show a commitment to the growth of all individuals?** Servant leaders are committed to the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of every individual within the organization. The servant leader is committed to the growth of others and recognizes that individuals are more valuable than just what they contribute to their job. The analysis of the principals’ responses revealed a passion and pride in the efforts the principals make to grow those around them. Each principal conveyed a sense that everyone in the organization needed to be better for the students. Nine principals directly stated that, as the instructional leaders, they needed to lead by example and demonstrate that they were clearly dedicated to their own growth.

There was a common theme of empowering the staff to take ownership for their own professional growth. One principal commented, “I provide the opportunities and the values of what my staff thinks are important—continued growth is one of those values.” Almost every principal reported supporting staff, including financial assistance, in their pursuit of additional education. Several principals shared the need to be creative in providing opportunities that help staff fit learning experiences into “an already full schedule.” Professional development through book study groups that were offered before school or during lunch were examples shared by 5 principals. A high school principal and an elementary principal discussed using technology tools such as blogging and podcasting as a means to offer professional development that staff “can access at a time that works for them.”

Seven principals reiterated the value of using staff meetings for professional growth and highlighted that they assign “teams” or grade levels to share best practices during these learning opportunities. A high school principal shared that he holds an annual best practice fair, in which every staff member creates a display of learning to demonstrate something “new” that he or she has incorporated into his or her practice. He boastfully shared that this “fair” was the favorite faculty meeting of the year and often went into the late hours of the evening with staff proudly sharing their projects.

Several principals in the study suggested that much professional growth comes from the observation process with opportunities for meaningful dialogue in pre- and postconferences. These principals explained that truly knowing their staff and using data from the observation helped the principals coach and mentor staff. This coupled with working collaboratively to develop a “meaningful” Professional Improvement Plan aided the principals’ efforts to help each individual grow. Four of the principals shared that they allow tenured staff to “eliminate a formal” observation by picking a project that is related to the school goals. The principals reported that the teachers who choose this “alternative evaluation” track their progress, collect data, and then make a presentation to staff regarding the teachers’ findings.

The servant leader recognizes the responsibility to do everything possible to nurture the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of employees (Spears, 2004). Thirteen principals in the study stressed the importance they place on their staff to “take care of themselves.” A middle school principal shared that he continually emphasizes with his staff, “If you do not take of yourself, you can’t be much help to the students or our organization.” Several principals detailed efforts to nurture the sense and

importance of family by encouraging and covering them to attend important events that sometimes cause a schedule conflict such as a staff member attending his or her own child's school concert. Five principals shared that, to support staff members attending these important events, the principals covered the teachers while "away from the building" when no other substitutes were available.

**Question 13 (building community). When you are building community within your school and school community, what does it look like?** A servant leader creates an environment where the individuals feel that the vision and tasks belong to the group. Servant leaders know that the mission of the organization is bigger than any one person. Building community requires a culmination of all nine qualities previously presented. The servant leader creates an environment where the individuals feel that the vision and tasks belong to the group. All principals in the study highlighted the need to include all members of the community in the process: students, staff, and parents. Likewise, the principals shared the importance of creating a "safe environment" that allowed all to share ideas. A middle school principal encapsulated the thoughts of others in the study by exclaiming, "It involves hearing anyone who wants to be heard." The middle school and high school principals shared specific examples of students being involved in the process of planning and goal setting by being on committees. In comparison, the elementary principals received student feedback through surveys.

Servant leadership creates other servant leaders, who then work together to build community. One elementary principal stated, "I think creating leadership opportunities are one of the most important things we do here. Everyone has a role to play, and it constantly changes from leader to supporter. It is the PTO, staff, parents—all of us

together.” A common theme found in many responses was the principal’s effort to put teams together to work toward the goals of the school. Several principals explained that, depending on the situation, they sometimes joined different groups but not always. Further, even if they were part of a group, they stressed that they did not always need to be the leader.

“Coming together with a common purpose” was clearly articulated by 8 principals. One high school principal provided the analogy of steering thoroughbred horses. He replied:

They can all go their own way, and my job is to see if I can steer them in the same place at the same time. There is a tremendous amount of power and energy in our community of students, staff and parents.

Another high school principal replied, “We all know that we are here for the students. That is our purpose. My work is to place them in situations where they can have a positive impact toward our purpose.”

Several principals discussed the importance of reaching out to parents and inviting them to be part of the process. Principals from all three levels noted the need to provide a variety of options and opportunities that gathered parents from all parts of the community, thus leading to involvement. One high school principal commented, “I realized that we were missing a major parent population by only hav[ing] night meetings, as several of our parent community work at night or have issues with child care.” She addressed this issue by offering morning meetings and a few Saturday meetings to be more inclusive. Several principals also commented on the importance of holding

community activities that are not always focused on academics or team sports such as walk-a-tons, fairs, skating, etc. because these events “bring the community together.”

### **Conclusion**

The data clearly supported the concept of the 10 characteristics being connected to each other and, thus, very difficult to separate into 10 separate principles. Throughout and woven in the responses to all 13 questions were two common themes: a focus on doing what is best for students and the importance of creating a culture and climate that foster a sense of collaboration by forming relationships based on trust. Every principal included, in one or more responses, that doing what is best for students permeated every aspect of the school. Likewise, the necessity of building relationships with all members of the school community was specifically identified “as a key to success” several times by each respondent.

The approach to these two critical themes was similar for all 15 principals in the study, and the researcher did not find patterns of responses that did not fit within the data. In fact, the researcher did not uncover any notable difference among the responses of principals from different school levels: elementary school, middle school, and high school. A strong example of the commonality in approaches was found in three of principals’ responses, each from a different level, under the auspices of “putting students first.” These principals stated that they make a concerted effort to recognize and support students who may be at risk. Each principal shared that members of his or her staff “mentor” students who are deemed at risk. These principals described programs where staff members work individually with specific students who have academic, social, or emotional needs. While the approaches to how each program was organized and



conducted varied, all were focused on making sure that all students connected with an adult at the school. The elementary principal and the middle school principal asked teachers to identify students who were at risk and asked for staff to volunteer to pick one of these students to mentor. The high school principal used a different approach by placing pictures of every student on the wall during a faculty meeting. Then, the staff members were instructed to put a check next to the picture of the students the staff could name and share at least one fact about. After this process, students who had one check or no check were assigned a mentor who would develop a relationship with these students.

Gaining trust by forming relationships was the other theme described as critical throughout all of the responses. All principals stressed the need to get to know their staff both in and out of school. These relationships put the principals in a position to ask for help, rather than using power, to share leadership responsibilities in the principals' respective school. In addition, understanding their staff and being aware of their needs, strengths, weaknesses, and "what made them tick" provided a venue that allowed the principals to support each individual to "meet the goals of the group."

This chapter provided an analysis of the data collected from the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study. The purpose of the study and the research questions were reiterated, and the findings of the study were revealed. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software, and descriptive statistics were run to make the analysis. These data were used to form the cohort of principals who participated in the one-on-one interviews.

Qualitatively, a data analysis spiral was used to analyze the findings of the 15 interviews. The interview questions specifically addressed application of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion,

conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and building community. The following themes emerged from the one-on-one interviews: focusing on serving the students is paramount, trust is a cornerstone to being an effective leader, collaboration and team work are necessary to accomplish goals, and in today's schools, a shared leadership model is needed.

Chapter 5 presents an analysis and synthesis of these research findings. The chapter includes four sections: Summary of the Study, Findings Related to the Literature, Conclusions and Implications, and Future Research.

## Chapter 5

### Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the application of servant leadership practices by public school principals. The climate and demands facing schools today have caused principals to develop leadership styles that differ from those of their predecessors. Principals need to be effective leaders that can meet the complexities permeating schools of the 21st century. Focusing on the servant leadership characteristics of listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and building community may provide a principal with the tools he or she needs to help schools find success today and in the future.

Businesses that follow the tenets of servant leadership have achieved high levels of success. Greenleaf (2003) stressed the need for a better approach to leadership that emphasized serving employees, customers, and community as the highest priority. Leadership practices based on serving others by focusing on the servant leadership characteristics such as listening, awareness, and building relationships have the potential to result in creating an effective school community, which can positively influence student achievement.

The connection between the principal's leadership and school success has been documented for several years. Principals who implement a servant leadership approach have the potential to create a culture of shared decision-making that focuses on student achievement, collaboration, and open communication. Therefore, servant leader

principals are likely to produce learning communities that enhance school effectiveness, including student achievement. Lambert (2004) asserted that servant leadership may be one key ingredient in the overall recipe for total school reform. Bass (2000) affirmed that servant leadership has a place in educational organizations because this type of leadership is based on teamwork and community and is strongly based in ethical and caring behavior. An overarching goal of this study was to investigate the application of servant leadership practices by public school principals. Analyzing how principals from high-achieving schools implement each of the characteristics of servant leadership adds to the research based on servant leadership and provides practical methods for its application.

The following questions guided this study regarding servant leadership in public schools: (1) To what extent does servant leadership exist as perceived by New Jersey public school principals? (2) How do New Jersey principals who rate themselves high on a self-assessment of servant leadership implement the 10 characteristics (listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth, build community) associated with servant leadership?

### **Findings Related to the Literature**

**Quantitative data.** In phase 1, the quantitative data clearly showed that several principals in this study perceived themselves as servant leaders. The raw scores for the 54 New Jersey principals from the Benchmark Schools who appropriately completed the SASL ranged from a minimum of 125 to maximum of 165 with a mean of 150.53. The data from this study were similar to the SASL results in Alfieri's dissertation (2009) that included 156 raw scores from superintendents in New Jersey that ranged from a minimum of 89 to a maximum of 167, and a mean of 146.06 and Taylor's study (2002),

with 112 usable raw scores from principals in Missouri that ranged from a minimum of 85 to a maximum of 168, and a mean of 144.9. Although this study had a smaller sample size than the previous studies (Alfieri, 2009; Taylor, 2002) that used the SASL, which may have accounted for the higher mean in this study (150.53 compared to 146.06 and 144.9) and a smaller range (125–165 compared to 89–167 and 85–168), these results may also be due to choosing principals from high-performing schools. The data from this study demonstrated that the principals from the Benchmark Schools ranked high as servant leaders, which supports the research on school principals and their importance in promoting school effectiveness (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Fullan, 1997; Kelley & Peterson, 1997; Louis & Marks, 1998).

Additionally, the SASL data in this study revealed that caring for others (6.59), wanting to bring out the best in others (6.57), leading by example (6.48), and practicing what one preaches (6.48) had the highest averages, as descriptors of the leadership style of the 54 respondents. Just as Jesus exemplified leadership as care, love, and service rather than strength, might, and power, the theme of caring was the most significant descriptor in the principals' approach to leadership. The theme of caring forms the basis of all 10 characteristics of servant leadership, and can be directly found in the definitions of empathy, healing, and listening.

The descriptor of wanting to bring out the best in others is abundantly cited in the literature regarding servant leadership. The SASL results clearly identified that a servant leader is committed to the growth of others and recognizes that individuals are more valuable than just what they contribute to their job. Spears (2004) stressed that a servant leader recognizes the responsibility to do everything possible to nurture the personal,

professional, and spiritual growth of employees. The focus on the growth of others leads to authentic empowerment because the leaders share power and help others in constructive ways to make decisions (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). Stewardship can be achieved only through the true commitment to servicing the needs of others with an emphasis on openness (Greenleaf, 1977). The SASL data supported growing others and stewardship as key components of servant leadership.

The descriptors of leading by example and practicing what one preaches connect directly with Covey's work regarding principle-centered leadership. Covey (1990) concluded that there must be a direct correlation of values and habit; therefore, values and beliefs need to connect to actions. The principal needs to model a servant leadership approach by continually focusing on all 10 characteristics, and the focus must be more than words as actions speak louder than words. Sergiovanni (1992) asserted that the type of schools that exist directly reflect the type of leadership climate provided by the principal. The data from the SASL in this study reinforced that leading by example provides a platform for servant leadership.

**Qualitative data.** The qualitative research findings from the 15 one-on-one interviews were also consistent with the existing research on servant leadership. Covey (1990) wrote:

If you really want to get servant leadership, then you have to have institutionalization of the principals at the organizational level and foster trust through individual character and competence at the personal level. Once you have trust, then you lead people by coaching, empowerment, persuasion, example. And modeling. That is servant leadership. (p. 17)

The concept of building trust was strongly emphasized by all principals in the study and highlighted as a key element in all of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership. The word “trust” was included more than 50 times in responses throughout the 15 principal interviews. This trust was enhanced by forming relationships and truly getting to know every staff member “in and outside” school. Knowing and understanding each staff member allowed the principal to demonstrate a genuine caring for his or her staff. The data revealed trust as the cornerstone to the application of servant leadership.

Each principal shared leadership based on ethical and caring behavior in an effort to enhance the growth of people in the school, which supported sentiments in the literature written by Fullan (2001) and Bolman and Deal (2003). Credibility, honesty, service, and connecting with others were abundant throughout the principals’ responses to questions during the one-on-one interviews. The data support Greenleaf’s belief that servant leaders seek to develop individuals and ensure that others’ needs are met by advocating a group-orientated approach to decision-making.

The principals conveyed that relationships were fostered through formal and informal interactions. All 15 principals in the study referred to an open door policy, yet identified that much of “what they learned” transpired during informal meetings that occurred in the classrooms and hallways. Autry (2001) and Bass (2002) observed that a servant leader must be willing to stop, listen, and truly care about people, which corresponded to the remarks made by all 15 principals in the study. Several principals noted that, due to the importance that the principals placed on these interactions, the principals spend a majority of their day “out of their office” and visibly accessible to staff members and students. This approach often caused these servant principals to complete

much work at night and on weekends, which upholds the central premise of servant leadership of serving others first. This thought is clearly contained in the definition provided by Greenleaf (1977):

It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead . . . The difference manifest itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. (pp. 13–14)

The principals in the study clearly identified the importance of involving others in decision-making and identified a collaborative style as vital to success. These principals highlighted the skill of using persuasion to build consensus, rather than positional authority, in making decisions within the school community. Greenleaf (1977) stated, “Leadership by persuasion has the virtue of change by conviction rather than coercion.” Each principal worked to ensure that all involved with the organization understood, saw the purpose, and were willing and able to do what is requested. They understood that giving orders was not an effective method for persuading people. Strong communication skills were identified as a method for engaging and influencing staff members to work toward a common goal.

Marzano et al. (2005) concluded that the leadership behavior of the principal had a statistically significant impact on student achievement. Many elements of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership are also found in Marzano’s et al’s. categories of behaviors related to principal leadership, which were referred to as responsibilities. These responsibilities included affirmation, change agent, contingent rewards, communication, culture, discipline, flexibility, focus, ideas/beliefs, input, intellectual



stimulation, involvement in curriculum, instruction and assessment, knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment, monitoring, optimizer, order, outreach, relationships, resources, situational awareness, and visibility.

Marzano et al. found that situational awareness, which addresses an awareness of the details and undercurrents of the school and uses that knowledge to solve problems, was the leadership behavior most correlated with academic achievement. The 15 principals in the study clearly demonstrated a strong understanding of the multiple aspects and complexity of their school communities. Furthermore, the principals revealed that they knew their own strengths and weaknesses. This awareness helped these servant leaders understand the global picture and set a course of action to obtain future goals, which is the foundation for the servant leadership characteristic of conceptualization.

Using active listening skills with staff, students, and parents in formal and informal situations supplied the principals with a vast amount of information that gave them the “pulse of the school.” The data from the interviews revealed that these servant principals spent the majority of their time building awareness about the school community and gaining information about the “reality of where the school is in relation to its goals.” Greenleaf (1977) wrote that a servant leader uses foresight to learn from the past, identify the realities of the present, and recognize the possible consequences of future decisions. The principals in the study were astute at gathering information and then using it to move the school community forward.

During the interviews, the principals rarely used the word “I” and instead used the word “we.” The principals shared the credit for the success of the school, and stated that

the high achievement was a result of the entire school community working together. These servant principals' responses paralleled Collins's (2001) research regarding Level 5 leaders. Collins found that Level 5 leaders did not talk about themselves, but rather they talked about their companies and the contributions of their employees. He observed that Level 5 leaders were found to have a determination to do whatever was needed to be done to make the company great. The principals' responses confirmed that the principals were extremely ambitious; however, their ambition was first and foremost for the benefit of the school community, not themselves.

Principals are responsible for enhancing student learning and leading planning efforts that develop a clear mission and goals for the school, analyzing student performance data, identifying areas that need improvement, and facilitating change. The principals in the study emphasized the importance of being an instructional leader, as a vital element to enhancing student learning and facilitating change. The ISLLC developed Standards for School Leaders, which were designed to capture what is essential about the role of a school leader. Each standard includes the words "educational leader," which also was identified by the principals in this study as an essential component to serving their school community.

This study extends and complements other dissertations regarding servant leadership. The data added to the research demonstrating that a servant leadership approach is utilized by principals in high-performing schools. Further, the information gained from the 15 interviews showed that the 10 characteristics of servant leadership aligned well with the role of a principal. These characteristics can be applied by principals to facilitate excellence in schools through fostering trust, building

relationships, and empowering and serving others. The 15 principals from high-achieving schools provided concrete examples that demonstrated much commonality in the application of servant leadership in a school community.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Kouzes and Posner (1993) claimed that leadership is not a position; leadership is a process, and is an observable, understandable, learnable set of skills and practices. This study supported this notion and provided practical information regarding the application of servant leadership. The data from the SASL and the 15 interviews clearly demonstrated that servant leadership by principals exists by in New Jersey's high-achieving public schools. The one-on-one interviews provided an abundant amount of common themes regarding how these servant leaders apply the 10 characteristics of servant leadership in the principals' practice. The data also revealed these servant principals had a similar belief system and approach to leadership, which may have been a factor in the high achievement experienced by school. Further, the study showed that 10 characteristics of servant leadership were uniformly applied by principals from all three levels of schooling: elementary school, middle school, and high school.

Page and Wong (2006) wrote that we are facing a leadership crisis that will deepen unless a fundamental change is made. They concluded that we need to rethink how to best train leaders for the next generation. Colleges and universities need to prepare future school leaders by including curricula with servant leadership at the nucleus. The tenets of servant leadership and the practical application of the 10 characteristics should provide a framework for course design in undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs. Learning about servant leadership will provide future school

principals with a leadership model that places service ahead of management, and gives aspiring school leaders 10 critical characteristics as areas to focus the leaders' growth.

Blanchard (2007) stated that the servant leadership is not just another management technique; servant leadership is a way of life. This researcher believes that mastering servant leadership is a lifelong learning process due to the complexity and multidimensional approach. Servant leadership is an attitude toward the responsibilities of leadership as much as a style of leadership (Page & Wong, 2000). Providing professional development and training for school principals appears essential to meet the demands that schools face today. Ongoing and systematic professional development for principals focused on the 10 characteristics of servant leadership may help principals grow their leadership ability and be better prepared to meet the high demands that schools face today. Thus, principals will continually build skills that can have a positive influence on student achievement and school climate.

The data from this study can have a profound influence on the current practice of school leaders. The principals in the study had common methods that created a school culture and climate that was based on trust, which may be a critical factor in the high performance of the schools. The approaches and practical examples that the servant principals in the study shared can be replicated by other principals, which will aid them to move toward a servant leadership style. The data demonstrated that the 10 characteristics are closely connected to each other; therefore, as principals implement the practices uncovered in this study, the leaders will be supporting their growth and approach toward servant leadership. Furthermore, the SASL and the interview questions developed for

this study would be outstanding tools utilized in the interview process, as they clearly help to identify those who are servant leaders.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Kelley and Peterson (2007) observed that one seldom finds an instructionally effective school without an effective principal. Thus, this study should be replicated in other states to provide more information regarding principals and the application of servant leadership. Determining the extent that servant leadership by principals exists in high-performing schools from other states would provide additional data to show if a servant leadership approach aligns well with the role of the principal. Further, examining how principals from other states apply each of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership would add and enhance the practical approaches shared by the principals in this study.

A similar study of the application of servant leadership in private and parochial schools, in New Jersey and other states, would yield data that could be used to analyze the leadership approach in these institutions. The results then could be compared to determine if there are similarities or differences in the application of servant leadership in public, private, and parochial schools.

As this study focused solely on the perceptions of the principal, additional studies that gain the perceptions of other school community members, including teachers, students, and parents, may shed more detail on how each of the 10 characteristics of servant leadership are applied. Additionally, a comparison of the principal's self-assessment on the SASL to an assessment of leadership characteristics by his or her staff may more effectively identify principals who employ the tenets of servant leadership, as leaders often rate themselves higher on leadership characteristics than the leaders really

are. Insight into the application of servant leaders who are identified as servant leaders by their school community would add another dimension to the data.

Because the 15 principals who scored the highest on the SASL all were principals from schools in higher socioeconomic areas with District Factor Groups (DFGs) of (G-J), studies that explore servant leadership in lower socioeconomic schools are necessary. Expanding the distribution of the SASL to all New Jersey principals would shed light on how other principals from all DFGs perceive their approach to leadership. This could help determine if other principals from lower socioeconomic schools rank themselves high as servant leaders. If the data from additional studies show that principals from lower socioeconomic schools do not perceive themselves as servant leaders, an in-depth study of the rationale of this perception would be necessary.

A study that examines the differences in the application of servant leadership between principals who rank themselves highest compared to those who rank themselves lowest may further uncover variation in how each of the 10 characteristics is implemented. Studying the differences and comparing the application of the 10 characteristics should add specific and relevant data regarding methods that support servant leadership and those approaches that do not.

Further research that extends the field of servant leadership in schools by correlating servant leadership with student achievement levels, job satisfaction, and teacher empowerment would be valuable. These studies would reveal more information regarding the influence that servant leadership has on important components in education. Schools exist for students; therefore, data that show the impact of servant leadership on student achievement would be valuable. Studies have connected job satisfaction and

teacher empowerment to student achievement, so further research that analyzes a servant leadership approach and the influence this approach has on job satisfaction and teacher empowerment would be helpful.

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## Appendix A

### Self-Assessment of Servant Leadership Survey

#### Self-Assessment of Servant Leadership

This instrument was designed for individuals to monitor themselves on several leadership characteristics. Please use the following scale to indicate your agreement or disagreement with each of the descriptors of your leadership.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Strongly Disagree      Undecided      Strongly Agree

For example, if you strongly agree, you may type in a number 7, if you mildly disagree, you may type in a 3. If you are undecided, type in a number 4, but use this category sparingly.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I am genuine and candid with people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I learn from subordinates whom I serve.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I am willing to make personal sacrifices in serving others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I genuinely care for the welfare of people working with me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I consistently encourage others to take initiative.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I have great satisfaction in bringing out the best in others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. My leadership is based on a strong sense of mission.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I am very focused and disciplined at work.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I usually come up with solutions accepted by others as helpful and effective.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I lead by example.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. I am willing to sacrifice personal benefits to promote group harmony and team success.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. I am willing to have my ideas challenged.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. I practice what I preach.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. I readily admit when I am wrong.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. I have a heart to serve others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Many people come to me with their problems, because I listen to them with empathy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. I continuously appreciate, recognize, and encourage the work of others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. I invest considerable time and energy equipping others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. I am able to inspire others with my enthusiasm and confidence for what can be accomplished.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. I am able to motivate others to achieve beyond their own expectations in getting a job done.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. I try to match people with their jobs in order to optimize productivity.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. I often demonstrate for others how to make decisions and solve problems.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. I encourage cooperation rather than competition through the group.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. I place the greatest amount of decision-making in the hands of those most affected by the decisions.

Note: The SASL Instrument is a modification of "The Self-Assessment of Servant Leadership Profile," by Page, D. and T.P. Wong, (1998) *A conceptual framework for measuring servant leadership*. Unpublished manuscript, Trinity Western University, Langley, British Columbia, Canada, p. 20. Modified by T.A. Taylor, (2002). Used by permission.

**Appendix B**  
**Permission Letter from Dr. Tim Taylor**

# Hollister R-V School District

**Dr. Tim Taylor**  
Superintendent  
**Craig Carson**  
Assistant Superintendent  
**Kris Rhodes**  
Administrative Assistant

1914 State Hwy BB  
Hollister, MO 65672  
417-243-4000

**BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
Lisa Westfall, President  
Andy Penrod, Vice President  
Teresa Behle, Secretary  
Joe Donavant, Treasurer  
Dan Crisp  
Tony Doerr  
Coy Scott

March 19, 2009

Dear Mr. Kasun,

I am pleased that you are expanding the research regarding servant leadership in the Public Schools, as part of your doctoral program at Seton Hall University.

Please accept this letter as formal approval to use the Self-Assessment of Servant Leadership (SASL) in your study.

I wish you much success with your study.

Sincerely,



Dr. Tim Taylor, Superintendent  
Hollister R-V School District



## Appendix C

### Interview Questions

1. What style of leadership do you have, and what impact does it have on your school community?
2. What characteristics of leadership are important to you as leader and why?
3. Describe your school culture.
4. Listening. Servant leaders are valued for their communication and decision-making skills. Servant leaders must reinforce these important skills by making a deep commitment to listening intently to others.

When you practice the art of listening, what behaviors or practices do you exhibit?

5. Empathy. Servant leaders strive to understand and empathize with others.

How do you exhibit behaviors that demonstrate empathy?

6. Healing. Servant leaders foster care and support while upholding the expectations of exemplary performance.

What behaviors do you use that indicate your commitment to healing?

7. Awareness. General awareness and self-awareness (having understanding or knowledge) strengthen the servant leader.

What do you do to grow your awareness of self and others?

8. Persuasion. Servant leaders rely on persuasion rather than authority to convince others. Servant leaders seek to convince rather than coerce.

When you practice the art of persuasion, what behaviors or practices do you exhibit?

9. Conceptualization. Servant leaders strike a balance between the day-to-day “operations” and visions for the future.

How do you balance the day-to-day management of your school along with supporting the visions for the future?

10. Foresight. Foresight is a characteristic that enables servant leaders to understand lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and likely consequences of a decision for the future.

How do you exhibit behaviors that portray foresight?

11. Stewardship. Servant leaders assume, first and foremost, a commitment to looking out for the best interests of others.

When you practice the art of stewardship, it is assumed that you are committed to serving the needs of others first. What actions come to mind?

12. Commitment to the growth of people. Servant leaders are committed to the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of every individual within the organization.

What actions do you employ to show a commitment to the growth of all individuals?

13. Building community. Servant leaders create an environment where the individuals feel that the vision and tasks belong to the group.

When you are building community within your school and school community, what does it look like?

14. What else would you like to share that might give more insight into your leadership approach?

## **Appendix D**

### **Letter Requesting Participation**

Ross Kasun  
70 Conover Road  
Colts Neck, NJ 07722  
kasun@mail.cnboe.org

May 2009

Dear Principal,

Congratulations on receiving recognition as one of New Jersey's Benchmark Schools in 2008. As an administrator, I was involved with two schools that also received this award; therefore, I applaud your efforts that helped your school receive this prestigious award.

In addition to being the superintendent for schools for the Colts Neck Township School District, I am a doctoral student at Seton Hall University enrolled in the Executive Ed.D. Program. I appreciate you taking the time to help me with my study.

My dissertation topic is servant leadership, and I am specifically studying how the 10 characteristics are applied in the public school setting. My study focuses on the Benchmark Schools, as I believe that the leadership provided by the principal contributes to the school's success.

The study consists of a two-part process. The first part is to request that all principals of the Benchmark School complete the Self-Assessment of Servant Leadership (SASL) using an online survey website called Survey Monkey, which will take approximately 10 minutes. This self-assessment will provide information about the style of leadership that you exhibit. The results of the SASL will be analyzed and used to identify a group of principals to continue with the second phase of the study.

If you are identified to continue with the study, I will again call you to discuss the second phase, which will involve a face-to-face interview that will take about an hour.

All data will be analyzed in the dissertation without reference to the schools or principals. No names or identifying factors will be used. Please be assured that your answers will be kept confidential.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research. The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subjects' privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The chairperson of the IRB can be reached at 973-275-2974.

Please complete the SASL survey on Survey Monkey using the link attached:  
[https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=lTL4J3ajdqODAI\\_2bEixfGAg\\_3d\\_3d](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=lTL4J3ajdqODAI_2bEixfGAg_3d_3d)

If you have specific questions or want more information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 732-946-0055 x 4104 or at my e-mail address, [kasun@mail.cnboe.org](mailto:kasun@mail.cnboe.org).

Again, I sincerely appreciate your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Ross Kasun

## Appendix E

### Informed Consent Form



#### Informed Consent Form

**Researcher's Affiliation:**

Ross Kasun is a doctoral student at Seton Hall University enrolled in the Executive Ed.D. Program and is currently employed as the superintendent for Colts Neck Township School District.

**Purpose of the research and duration:**

The title to the study is: The application of servant leadership by selected New Jersey public school principals. The purpose this study will be to examine the application of servant leadership practices of principals in New Jersey Public Schools that were identified as Benchmark Schools. Furthermore, it will provide an examination of the implementation of the ten characteristics of servant leadership (listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people and building community) associated with the principal's approach to leadership.

The interview will take approximately an hour.

**Procedures:**

The examination of implementation the ten characteristics of servant leadership will be conducted through face-to-face interviews. The researcher will call the participants to set up a time, date and location for the interview. The researcher will use a semi-structured format and ask all participants the same questions.

**Instruments:**

Research in the areas of servant leadership was used to develop the interview questions. The application of each of the ten characteristics of servant leadership, as defined by Spears, will frame each question. The format of the questions will help maintain consistency for each principal participant. Example questions are: When you practice the art of listening what behaviors or practices do you exhibit? How do you exhibit behaviors that demonstrate empathy? What behaviors do you use that indicate your commitment to healing? What do you do to grow your awareness of self and others? When you practice the art stewardship, it is assumed that one is committed to serving the needs of others first, what actions come to mind?

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

MAY 12 2009

**Expiration Date**

MAY 12 2010

College of Educational Services  
Executive Ed.D. Program  
Tel. 973.275.2728  
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685

**Voluntary Nature of the Participation:**

By signing the Informed Consent Form, the participant is consenting to participate fully in the study and is fully aware results of research data will be used for presentation and publications without the use of names or personal information. Interview results will be analyzed and translated for presentation. The participant may refuse to participate and/or withdraw at any time without any consequences.

**Anonymity:**

As the study will include face-to-face interviews there is no anonymity.

**Confidentiality:**

Responses will be kept confidential. No mention of any subject's name, name of school will be included in the researcher's dissertation. Only the researcher and the researcher's dissertation committee will have access to the participant's information in the interview.

**Security of Records:**

The data will remain secure and under lock and key with the researcher. This data will be destroyed after three years.

**Risks:**

There are no risks in this research.

**Compensation:**

There are no benefits in this study, monetary or of any other nature to the participants.

**Alternative Procedures:**

There are no alternative procedures for this study.

**Contact Information:**

The researcher may be contacted for further information, answers to questions and for information regarding the research subjects' rights by writing to the researcher at the Colts Neck School District, 70 Conover Road, Colts Neck, NJ 07722, or through email at [kasun@mail.cnboe.org](mailto:kasun@mail.cnboe.org), or by phone at 732-946-0055 x 4104.

The researcher's mentor, Dr. Anthony Colella, may be contacted by phone at 732-539-0412, or through email at [anthony130@aol.com](mailto:anthony130@aol.com).

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

MAY 12 2009

Approval Date

Expiration Date

MAY 12 2010

**Permission to Use Audio Tape Recorders:**

Please be informed that a digital voice recorder will be used to capture all comments, opinions and ideas from the interviews and may be vital to the study. Participants have the right to review all or any portion of the taped sessions and request that it be destroyed. Participants will be identified by a coded number on the tapes. After the interviews, the researcher will have the sessions transcribed into written format, so the researcher can analyze the data. The participants will have the opportunity to review to ensure accuracy. The data will be destroyed three years after the completion of the dissertation.

**Acknowledgement of Informed Consent Forms:**

The IRB believes that the procedures adequately safeguard the subject's privacy, welfare and civil rights. The Director of the IRB, Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D, can be reached at (973) 343-6314 or through email at [irb@shu.edu](mailto:irb@shu.edu).

The participant has read the material above and agrees to participate. The participant is aware that he/she will be given a copy of this Informed Consent Form for his/her files.

Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

MAY 12 2009

Approval Date

Expiration Date

MAY 12 2010

## **Appendix F**

### **Oral Script for Face-to-Face Interviews**

Researcher: “Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to meet you. I appreciate your time and input. As discussed on the phone, you were selected to participate in the second phase of my research study due to your high score on the Self-Assessment of Servant Leadership (SASL).

The second phase is a semistructured interview that will take approximately an hour. To ensure consistency of information, I will be asking all participants in the second phase the same questions. Depending on the participant’s response, I may ask for clarification or a follow-up question to better understand the response.

Please be aware that the conversation is being recorded via a digital voice recorder. To ensure confidentiality, each participant will be assigned a number that corresponds to a specific interview. I will take notes, and the recording will be transcribed using the assigned number as an identification. Participants will be offered the opportunity to listen to the recordings or read the transcripts.

If you are ready, I would like to begin with the first question.”

Question 1.

After the questions are completed:

“Thank you for participating in this interview. If you have any questions, concerns, or other input that you would like to add, please write them down and send them to me in the enclosed prepaid envelope. I appreciate your time and have a great day.”