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PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS
OF LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVED SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

by

CHRISTINE L. KEYSER-FANICK

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the University of the Incarnate Word
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

May 2019

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Christine L. Keyser-Fanick

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and father, LaVonne J. Larsen Keyser and Archie H. Keyser, who instilled in me a voracious and lifelong appetite for learning; to my husband, Edward Robert Fanick; and to our family, Christopher Fanick, Bryan and Jessica Fanick, and grandchildren, Camille, Zachary, and Caroline, whose love and support made the completion of this dissertation possible.

Public High School Principals' Perceptions of Leadership Strategies for Improved School Performance

Christine L. Keyser-Fanick

University of the Incarnate Word, 2019

The purpose of this study was to explore what leadership behaviors and strategies public high school principals perceived to be most effective in achieving school improvement. The qualitative constructivist grounded theory research methodology used for the study was modeled after the work of Kathy Charmaz (2014), who acknowledges that the researcher is a part of the process, as observer, data collector, analyzer, and interpreter of the data. Data were gathered through one-on-one interviews with six principals from high schools with student populations of 1,200 or more whose schools showed improvement based on state standardized test scores and whose high schools were located in the metropolitan area surrounding the university where the researcher studied. The central research questions were: (1) How do public high school principals, who have been identified by the researcher as achieving school improvement, describe their leadership? and (2) Which of their leadership behaviors and strategies do the public high school principals perceive to be most effective in achieving the desired school improvement? Through coding and analysis, five common themes were identified, based on the converging perspectives of the participants. The common themes form the foundation of the grounded theory that emerged from this study. Fiedler's Contingency Theory (1967), the theoretical framework for this study, defined leadership effectiveness in terms of group performance and the ability of the group to achieve its goals, and that theory was supported throughout the study. The participating principals facilitated strategies that were carried out by teams of administrators and teachers who were committed to school improvement, and the

school improvement was measured by group performance and the ability of the group to achieve its goals. The school improvement theory that emerged from the data presents that five leadership strategies support school improvement and improved student learning and achievement. Those behaviors and strategies include (1) hiring and developing quality teachers; (2) setting and accomplishing campus goals (3) building relationships; (4) employing communication tactics; and (5) building effective teams. Perhaps most significant to this study are the importance of the school environment and culture and the principal's ability to influence that environment and to facilitate the strategies identified in the common themes. The researcher suggests that building and sustaining a healthy and positive school culture is a collaborative process that is essential to accomplishing and sustaining school improvement. The principal leader is in a position to facilitate the change required to build a student-focused, collaborative culture. The key is to create the vision collaboratively, to define the desired culture together, and to undertake the work required to achieve the desired results as a campus team. As the school's leader, the principal serves as facilitator. With the theory that the environment and culture create the foundation for school improvement and sustained student achievement, a model, grounded in the data, emerged.

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Chapter 1: Leadership and School Improvement

Context of the Study

The study of leadership has expanded over the past 20 years in a variety of disciplines—ranging from sports teams and government to corporations and education. The critical need for effective leadership in education, at all levels, has gained increased attention, as the cry for quality education and accountability intensifies. Academic standards are being raised; states are mandating increasingly complex standardized testing; teacher accountability continues to be scrutinized; and the quality of education in the United States continues to be challenged on local, state, and national fronts (Anderson & Macri, 2009; Bodine Al-Sharif, 2011; Geijsel, Krüger, & Slegers, 2010; Goldenhaber, Quince, & Theobald, 2018; Stark-Price, Munoz, Winter, & Petrosko, 2006).

With increasing attention paid to school performance and accountability, the leadership of high school principals has come sharply into focus. The need for effective leaders is clear, as the role of the high school principal grows increasingly complex and demanding (Normore, 2006). In a study focused on the leadership of high school principals in both Canada and the United States, Normore (2006) found that scholars and practitioners alike focus on the importance of effective leadership as “key to ensuring the success and sustainability of public-school effectiveness” (p. 42). It is generally accepted that effective leaders make effective schools, and public schools “both need and deserve high-quality educational leadership” (p. 43).

In the context of continued state and federal emphasis on school reform and accountability, Elmore (2002), Fullan (1991), and Hale & Moorman (2003) link school improvement to the leadership abilities of the principals. Salazar (2007) cites a report by the National Staff Development Council (2000), *Learning to Lead, Learning to Learn*:

Improving the quality of America's school leaders is the most feasible way to make a significant difference in American education. . . . Without a sustained focus on improving the quality of school leadership, this nation's reform efforts will falter. (p. 18)

Key Areas of Literature

Four categories identified in the literature contribute to the study of leadership and school improvement, including accountability, academic interventions, performance incentives, and performance reporting (Ely & McAndrew, 2009; Normore, 2006; Northside Independent School District, 2009; Reiss, 2007; Task Force on Principalship, 2000; Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2009b; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). These four areas of concentration emerged in the literature as important to the discussion of principal leadership and working to achieve school improvement. The four categories were chosen as a means by which to organize the information in the body of knowledge and are not intended to be exclusive of other important topics.

Accountability. Under the current accountability system in Texas, TEA's Department of Performance Reporting compiles and analyzes data to report accountability ratings designed to help public schools meet the educational needs of all students (TEA, 2019b). The current Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR), formerly known as the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) that was last published for the 2011-12 academic year, combines a wide range of information annually on the performance of students in each school and each district in Texas. The state accountability ratings are based on four performance indices: Student Achievement, Student Progress, Closing Performance Gaps, and Postsecondary Readiness. The TAPR also provides information about staff, programs, and demographics for each school and district (TEA, 2019b).

For state accountability, Texas public campuses are rated as Met Standard, Improvement Required, or Not Rated. Another rating, Met Alternative Standard, is assigned to charter schools

or alternative education campuses evaluated under alternative education accountability provisions (TEA, 2019b).

The state of Texas holds the superintendents and other district leaders accountable for the performance of students on all campuses for all accountability measures. Principals are accountable for campus performance and are required to submit accurate data on all performance measures on a timely basis, as defined by the TEA. The data is then used to create the TAPR documents and to examine district, campus, and student performance (TEA, 2019b).

Academic interventions. The TEA Division of School Improvement currently supports the state's goal to improve low-performing schools by reviewing, evaluating, monitoring, and intervening with campuses and their districts to ensure excellence in education for all students. The division intervenes with campuses that earn an Improvement Required rating, with districts that earn a grade of D or F through the current State Accountability System, and with campuses identified for Comprehensive, Targeted, and Additional Targeted Support under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). These campuses engage in improvement planning and continuous monitoring by the TEA Division of School Improvement until improvements are made (TEA, 2019a).

The current state school improvement plans are divided into Interventions and Submissions: Improvement Required Year 1 (Appendix F), Interventions and Submissions: Improvement Required Year 2 (Appendix G), and Interventions and Submissions: Improvement Required Year 3 and Up (Appendix H). The improvement plans require the appointments of a District Coordinator of School Improvement, a Professional Service Provider, and a Campus Leadership Team. The campus also undergoes Visioning Training in the first month of the improvement process. With the people in place and the Visioning Training completed, the

campus then follows a monthly plan established by the TEA Division of School Improvement. Communication with TEA officials during the first year are by phone and online reporting mechanisms, while campuses in Year 2 and up of the Improvement Plan process may be subject to a campus visit from agency staff or may be required to attend a hearing (TEA, 2019a).

Performance incentives. Performance indicators, including standardized testing scores, continue to be used in some schools as part of administrator and teacher pay incentive programs (Hanover Research, 2014). A key finding reported in the national Hanover study was that individual pay-for-performance models have been shown to positively impact student performance and, when teachers' pay is linked to students' academic outcomes, achievement increases. In Texas, and as reported by the TEA, the District Awards for Teacher Excellence (D.A.T.E.) program was a statewide incentive pay program available from 2008 to 2011, and districts throughout the state were given the opportunity to participate. The TEA published these goals of the program: (1) award teachers for positively impacting student achievement, (2) target the district's most in-need campuses to improve teacher quality, and (3) create capacity and sustainability for improved instruction within the district (TEA, 2010b).

In the *District Awards for Teacher Excellence (D.A.T.E.) Program Final Evaluation Report* published by the National Center on Performance Incentives (TEA, 2010b), Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores prior to the incentive program being implemented were lower in D.A.T.E. schools than in non-D.A.T.E. schools, with the D.A.T.E. schools having a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students. The state TAKS assessment system, from which the D.A.T.E. data was obtained, was in place from 2003 to 2011 and tested grades 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11. Examination of TAKS scores before and after the implementation of D.A.T.E. showed that the difference in scores for D.A.T.E. and non-D.A.T.E.

schools decreased, indicating that passing rates in D.A.T.E. schools were catching up with those of non-D.A.T.E. schools. During the first two years of the program, students in D.A.T.E. schools had greater TAKS gains than those in non-D.A.T.E. schools (TEA, 2010b). Because this report was published after the first two years of the program, data for the third year of the program were not available. The report supported the national Hanover Research (2014) findings that when teachers' pay is linked to students' academic outcomes, achievement increases.

While the D.A.T.E. program was a state-funded example of an incentive program, incentive programs are also federally funded. The U.S. Department of Education updated a report in March 2018 making known the availability of Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grants. The program provides funding for performance-based teacher and principal compensation systems in high-need schools. The program has funded 131 projects to improve pay structures, reward effective teachers and principals, and provide greater professional opportunities to educators in high poverty schools. The systems developed with the TIF grant funds must consider gains in student academic achievement and include classroom evaluations several times each year. The intention of the federal TIF program is to support the use of performance-based compensation to increase students' access to quality educators in high-need schools. The principle on which TIF was based was that student outcomes would improve by increasing teacher effectiveness (U.S. Department of Education, 2018b).

TIF grantees from 2006 to 2016 used the federal funding in several ways, including programs to develop and fund teacher leadership positions and to incentivize teachers to serve in high-need schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2018b). The funded projects have taken many forms, based on the needs of the school districts, including incentives that attract, support, reward, and retain the best quality teachers and administrators in high-need schools. TIF

appropriations for 2016, the last year for which data were provided, totaled \$70.2 million for new awards and \$155.2 million for continuation awards. The 2017 application process included 14 categories and competition for the grants was open to public schools, charter schools, magnet schools, and American history and civics academies (U.S. Department of Education, 2018b). The application for incentive programs and grants to fund them, and the subsequent management of those programs, add responsibility to the leadership scope for principals who choose to participate.

Performance reporting. In Texas, the first AEIS reports were issued for the 1990-1991 school year, though the origins of the accountability system date back to 1984 when the state legislature passed a bill that called for a system of accountability, based primarily on student performance. Before this time, school performance was measured by a school's ability to follow rules, regulations, and sound educational practices (TEA, 2011).

The annually published AEIS reports, which were last published for the academic year 2011-12, pulled together a wide range of information on the performance of students for each campus and district in the state, and the data were available to the public each year in the fall for the previous academic year. Performance indicators included results of the state standardized test by grade, by subject, and by all grades tested; participation in the statewide assessment programs, including accommodated testing for special needs students; exit-level cumulative passing rates; progress on the prior year's standardized testing failures; results of student success initiatives; attendance rates; annual dropout rates; completion rates; and college readiness indicators. Performance on each of these indicators was disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, special education, low-income status, limited English proficiency status, and at-risk status. The AEIS report also included the campus accountability rating. School report cards, based on the

AEIS report data, were sent home to all parents each year and were also published on campus websites (TEA, 2011). The AEIS reports were replaced by the TAPR reports, which added other indicators of student success in addition to the standardized test scores. Among the additional data provided in the TAPR are attendance, average SAT and ACT scores, college/career/military readiness, advanced dual-credit course completion, post-secondary education enrollment, and demographics about students and teachers (TEA, 2019b).

Performance reporting for federal legislation and its accompanying guidelines fell under the supervision of the states (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which was in place from 2005 to 2015, put emphasis on setting high standards and establishing measurable goals to improve individual student performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). NCLB was designed to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps. A change from the then existing 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, NCLB held schools accountable for student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). States were required to comply with NCLB standards and guidelines in order to receive federal funding for public education (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The four pillars of NCLB included accountability for results, state and local flexibility and reduced red tape, focusing resources on proven education methods, and expanded choices for parents. NCLB placed more emphasis on standardized testing as the means by which to measure student progress, with a performance indicator that increased annually, building toward 100% on-grade proficiency of all students by 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). With NCLB, emphasis on standardized testing was expanded and educator accountability gained more focus (U.S. Department of Education, 2018a).

NCLB was replaced by ESSA on December 10, 2015. While the new federal law gave states more flexibility to design how to hold their schools accountable, the state standards were required to fit within the federal framework. Major differences between NCLB and ESSA included testing standards. With the implementation of ESSA, states must test students in reading and math once a year in grades 3 through 8, as well as once in high school. They must also test students in science once in grade school, middle school, and high school. Under ESSA guidelines, no more than 1% of students are allowed to take alternate tests (U.S. Department of Education, 2018a).

Statement of the Problem

With the expanded focus on accountability came an increasing number of leadership challenges. The enormous demands placed on school districts to raise standards for students and for improved school performance created increased pressure on school leaders at every level. The increased pressure made leadership positions in schools less desirable, which was reflected in a decline in applicants for school leadership positions and an increase in retirements (Reiss, 2007).

The Task Force on Principals (2000) issued a national report stating that 50% of superintendents reported a shortage of qualified candidates nationally to fill principal positions. The nationwide shortage of qualified principal candidates persisted through 2017, prompting The National Association of Secondary School Principals on March 27, 2017 to update its 2002 published position on the nationwide principal shortage (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2017). The updated report showed that school leaders who are retiring, transferring schools, or pursuing new opportunities in the education sector are not being replaced by qualified candidates. As a result, many school districts across the country report principal

vacancies and serious lack of qualified applicants to replace them. Further, the report projects that the demand for employment of elementary, middle, and high school principals will grow 6% nationwide by the year 2022 because of population increases.

The Wallace Foundation (2013), an independent foundation committed to quality education for all children, recognized that strong principals were central to improving schools, with leadership second only to teaching among school-related factors that influence student achievement. In response, the foundation funded a program to help districts build a pipeline of qualified principals to help overcome the challenge of a shortage of qualified principals (Aladjem, Anderson, MacFarlane, Riley, & Turnbull, 2016). The program, which ran from 2011 to 2015, culminated with mixed results. Participating districts reported that the most beneficial steps of the initiative were establishing standards and competencies for principal candidates and aligning the principal preparation programs with district priorities and goals. The researchers who reported outcomes of the initiative also emphasized that building a qualified principal pipeline required time and patience and that the programs improved and were expected to improve more over time. Participating districts noted that limitations to the program included retention of trainee participants and the limited amount of time available to devote to the initiative, while meeting the many demands of running the school (Aladjem et al., 2016).

The increasing emphasis on school improvement and higher levels of school performance, together with the heightened levels of accountability and declining pool of school leadership candidates, made clear the need for effective school leadership (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2017; Normore, 2006; Reiss, 2007). Schools in need of improvement require effective leaders. Principals must serve as leaders for their administrative teams, faculty members, and students, as they work to improve school performance. Principals

who lead schools in need of improvement must choose leadership practices that will motivate their administrative teams, faculty members, and students to work toward school improvement. They must be effective leaders.

A plethora of studies exist about the quality of public schools, standardized testing, the need for school reform, and leadership in the fields of education, business, health care, and not-for-profit organizations (Bodine Al-Shariff, 2011; Flynn, 2008; Goldhaber et al, 2018; Morgan, 2016; Murdock, 2014). Fewer studies exist that examine the perceived leadership effectiveness of high school principals who are recognized for school improvement and the leadership behaviors and strategies that they perceive to be among the most effective in achieving school improvement, thereby leaving a gap in knowledge in the field of study. This study seeks to help fill a portion of that gap through qualitative research.

Purpose of the Study

The need for effective principal leadership and school improvement is evident in the literature and in the existing school climate, where accountability measures continue to be important at the federal, state, district, and campus levels, and educators strive to provide all students with a quality education. As reported by the National Staff Development Council (2000), “Improving the quality of America’s school leaders is the most feasible way to make a significant difference in American education” (p. 15). At the campus level, the importance of principal leadership in guiding teachers, staff, and students to the desired school improvement is of paramount importance.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore what leadership behaviors and strategies public high school principals, identified as achieving school improvement, perceived to be the most effective in attaining the desired improvement. By identifying these leadership

behaviors and strategies, the research intent was to add to the body of knowledge and to potentially provide information to current and future principals to enhance their leadership abilities as they worked toward improved school performance.

Central Research Questions

Central research questions that guided the study were:

- How do public high school principals, whose campuses the researcher identified for achieving school improvement, describe their leadership?
- Which of their leadership behaviors and strategies do the public high school principals perceive to be most effective in achieving school improvement?

Theoretical Framework

Definitions of leadership effectiveness are as diverse as the researchers and theorists who create the leadership models. Nahavandi (2003) summarizes that “The common thread in all of these examples of effectiveness is the focus on outcome. We look at the results of what leaders have done to judge how effective they have been” (p. 6).

The theoretical framework that served as a catalyst for this grounded theory study is Fiedler’s Contingency Theory (1967). In his work, Fiedler defined leadership effectiveness in terms of group performance. The researcher considered elements of Fiedler’s theory of leadership effectiveness and group performance in the context of public high school principals and their schools’ improved performance.

In both his Contingency Model (Fiedler, 1967) and the Cognitive Resources Theory (Fiedler & Garcia, 1987), Fiedler maintained that leaders were effective when their groups performed well. Fiedler (1996) described leadership effectiveness as the ability of a leader to get a group to accomplish its mission. Fiedler and Chemers (1974) maintained that whatever the

goals of the organization were, when the criteria were clearly stated, leadership effectiveness could be investigated and evaluated based on the achievement of the goals.

An assumption of this study was that public high school principals would be able to articulate their perceptions about how their leadership behaviors and strategies contributed to school improvement (group performance) and that they would be able to identify which practices they perceived most effective in helping them meet their school improvement goals.

Chemers and Skrzypek (1971) described Fiedler's Contingency Model of leadership effectiveness as the most widely accepted theory of leadership development. In his model, Fielder (1967) asserted that the relationship of leader style to group effectiveness is mediated by situational demands. He maintained that the leader's opportunity to influence the group's performance was dependent on situational favorableness, based on three variables, including: group members' respect and liking for the leader; task structure; and the leader's position power. Considerable research both inside and outside of Fiedler's laboratory has supported the Contingency Model (Hill, 1969; Hunt, 1967; O'Brien, 1969).

A more recent study by Bar-Tal (1991) further explained that Fiedler's Contingency Model holds that the situational characteristics impact outcomes, including, in order of importance: aspects of group atmosphere, task structure, and the leader's position power. In his study, Bar-Tal added that the situational characteristics should be translated according to the follower's, not the leader's, perspective:

If followers' behavior is the focus, both the environmental and personal factors should be of the followers. Rather than measuring the favorability of the situation from the leader's or the 'objective raters' perspective, followers' perception of their environment is the proper measure. In sum, every component of a situation, including the leader's behavior, should be translated according to the follower's perspective. (p. 168)

Bar-Tal (1991) expanded Fiedler's theory on situational leadership to include: (1) that leader-followers' relationships may determine the follower's motivation for social contact with the leader; (2) that the structure of the task may determine the follower's need to get instructions from the leader; and (3) that the degree to which the followers perceive that the action(s) will be instrumental in helping them achieve their own goals will determine if the followers "will perform better and be more satisfied" (p. 168).

In exploring the leadership practices that Texas public high school principals perceived to be most effective in achieving improved school performance, the researcher was alert to characteristics of Fiedler's Contingency Model that could emerge as characteristic of the principals and schools that participated in the study. Because the study used a qualitative, grounded theory methodology, the researcher did not preconceive that characteristics of Fiedler's Contingency Model were present, and objectively analyzed data gathered during the study to allow theory to emerge from the data.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, working definitions for the following terms are offered:

Community buy-in. Community buy-in is defined as a network of people in the community surrounding a school who support the school, its administrators, its teachers, and its students. The community at-large supports the school and helps the school in its efforts to improve and to provide the best possible education for its students.

Effective Teams. Effective teams were defined as teams that were successful in producing their intended result and/or meeting or making progress toward their established goals.

Group. Group was defined 1) as the teachers who guided the students on the campus and prepared them for their performances on standardized tests; 2) as the students who took the tests

that were used as a measurement of improvement; 3) as administrators, faculty and staff who worked together; 4) as Professional Learning Communities made up of teachers; and 5) as teams of teachers and administrators who met together for a specific purpose.

Leadership. Leadership was defined as interpersonal influence of groups or individuals in an organizational setting. A leader uses his/her influence to assist in the process of establishing goals for the group or organization and to guide the group toward achievement of those goals (Nahavandi, 2003). For this study, the term leader required some direct superior-subordinate interaction with others, implying a group of individuals in face-to-face contact (Fiedler & Chemers, 1974). Therefore, leadership was defined as the leadership of one leader—the high school principal. In this age of high leader accountability, the principal is ultimately responsible for the school’s performance, and it is upon that person’s leadership that the study focused.

Leadership effectiveness. Leadership effectiveness was defined as the performance of the leader in terms of the major assignment of the group. The leader’s effectiveness was assessed based on the group’s performance; that is, the degree to which the group met its goal or goals (Fiedler, 1971).

Leadership practices. Leadership practices were defined as the leadership behaviors and strategies used by principals in leading their schools to improvement.

School improvement. School improvement was defined as the improvement in the campus group scores for the all tests indicator for state standardized test scores over a three-year period for all grades/all subjects.

Assumption

The researcher was intentional when securing participants for the study to include principals from a variety of school districts. The researcher’s assumption was that responses of

principals from the same school districts would be similar and that including principals from a variety of districts would provide more depth and diversity for the study.

Overview of Methodology

For this study, the grounded theory methodology in the qualitative paradigm was used to discover the leadership practices public school principals identified as the most effective for achieving school improvement. The qualitative paradigm was chosen for the study because the researcher sought “to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions therein. This understanding is an end in itself” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 5). That is, the researcher gathered data through one-on-one interviews with high school principals, not attempting to predict what might happen in the future, but to understand each principal’s perceptions of his or her experiences in achieving school improvement.

The constructivist grounded theory methodology was chosen for this study because the inductive methodology was best suited to the content and to the intent of the study to use inquiry through one-on-one interviews to discover principal’s perceptions of behaviors and strategies that were the most effective in achieving school improvement. The flexibility of the constructivist grounded theory data analysis process was also well suited to this study. The use of the constant comparative process kept the researcher involved with the data throughout the study. The thorough analysis of the data through initial and focused coding began to lead the researcher to the school leadership model that eventually emerged from the study, and memo writing provided additional clarity. Further, one of the researcher’s hopes for the study was that the constructed grounded theory derived from the work could one day inform policy, practice, and/or principal training for school improvement. Though the grounded theory was localized, dealing

with the real-world experiences of the Texas high school principals interviewed, the model that emerged may be useful to other principals who seek school improvement.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher must be understood and disclosed as part of the research report. The qualitative study necessarily involved the researcher on a personal level, as the researcher sought to collect data through conducting one-on-one interviews with knowledgeable participants within their circumstances. Creswell and Creswell (2018) note that qualitative research is interpretive research and that the researcher is typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with the participants. Creswell and Creswell advise that researchers must explicitly identify their potential biases, values, and personal backgrounds as a part of the research report and that the researcher must remain cognizant during the research process of how those experiences could impact the interpretation of the data. In the final analysis, the researcher's own experiences cannot overshadow or substantially impact the interpretation of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In preparing for the dissertation process, the researcher chose to study Public High School Principals' Perceptions of Effective Leadership Strategies for Improved School Performance because education has always been of paramount importance to her. As an educator and as a business executive, she has believed continuous learning to be the key to a happy and fulfilling life. As an educator, mother, and member of the community, the researcher held to her commitment that children of all circumstances deserve a good education. In recent years, the focus on school improvement and educator accountability by government entities, coverage of school performance by the general media, and publications in educational journals, combined with her study of organizational leadership, spurred an interest in how principal

leaders impact school improvement. She became keenly interested in the strategies and behaviors of principals that successfully guided their campuses to school improvement and which of those behaviors and strategies they perceived to be most effective in leading their schools to improvement. The researcher's combined interest in education and in organizational leadership naturally led her to this study.

The researcher holds a Master of Arts degree in mass communication, with concentrations in public relations and advertising, from Drake University; a Bachelor of Arts degree in English/education, with a journalism minor, from the University of Northern Iowa; and an Associate of Arts degree in liberal arts from Iowa Central Community College. Her career includes public school teaching at the middle and high school levels in two states, community college teaching, and university teaching. She also worked nearly 18 years in business, including work in marketing, strategic planning, advertising, public relations, investments and insurance management, and executive leadership. She is currently teaching at a Texas high school and is a candidate for a Doctor of Philosophy degree in education, with a concentration in organizational leadership.

Because this researcher's career included extensive experience in business and in education, she was cognizant of her own values and beliefs that could potentially impact questioning techniques and data collection and interpretation. While honoring the ethics that govern scholarly research, special care was taken to avoid asking leading questions and to avoid the influence of her views in reporting and interpreting the data gathered from participants. The focus was on discovering the perceptions of the public high school principals who participated in the study, regarding their perceptions of their leadership effectiveness and leadership behaviors and strategies.

The researcher diligently sought the objectivity required of scholarly study and academic writing by carefully examining the data and verifying that the data were true to the source and not an interpretation guided by her own experiences. The researcher also attempted to verify data by contacting the participating principals for their review of the original data and to assure that the data had not changed over time.

Significance of the Study

In this study, the researcher sought to derive inductively, through research and analysis, a preliminary theory of school leadership grounded in data, which would lead to an understanding of the leadership behaviors and strategies employed by Texas high school principals whose schools achieved improvement. In interviewing the high school principals, the researcher listened to better understand the practices that the principals perceived to be most effective in achieving school improvement. Analysis of the data, and the construction of a grounded theory based on that data, yielded insight for possible future school improvement planning and execution, especially on public high school campuses with populations greater than 1,200.

This expanded understanding may influence the curriculum of future leadership development programs for high school administrators (future practice) and has the potential to provide guidance or ideas for other professionals selected for similar organizational improvement challenges. This research study was designed to add information to the body of knowledge, as the researcher sought to understand the role of principal leadership and the behaviors and strategies the participants perceived to be most effective in achieving the resultant improved school performance.

The researcher intends to share the results of the study through academic publication, offering the information for use by other academicians and educators in the field. Results of this

qualitative research also may serve as a foundation for more in-depth or quantitative follow-up research in the future.

Participant Selection

Participant selection for this study was based on the geographic location of the campus, the school population, and school improvement. The geographic location of the campus was confined to the metropolitan area of the researcher's university. The principals included in the study served campuses with populations of at least 1,200 students, and those campuses showed improvement, as measured by standardized test scores.

At the start of the study, the researcher intended to interview principals at public school campuses of 2,500 students or more, and when it became apparent that the size was too limiting to garner enough participants, the campus size was reduced to 1,200 students or more. Of the 109 public high schools in the greater metropolitan area, 21 are traditional high schools. That is, 21 of the public high schools serve all students and are not categorized as magnet high schools, alternative high schools, or charter high schools. Of those 21 public high schools, 16 had student populations of 1,200 or more students.

In determining which principals to invite to participate in the study, the researcher also studied the AEIS reports for the 21 campuses to determine which campuses showed improvement in scores for the Texas standardized test, TAKS, in Campus Group Scores for the All Tests category for the period 2005-2007 (TEA, 2005, 2006, 2007). Of the 16 schools with student populations of 1,200 or more, 12 campuses were identified as achieving school improvement, as indicated by improved state standardized test scores in the All Tests category.

The study was delayed for an extended period of time due to the researcher's serious illness that was diagnosed in 2007. When the researcher resumed the study, AEIS data were

collected for the years 2009, 2010, and 2011. The 12 campuses continued to show improvement for the period 2009-2011 (TEA, 2009a, 2010a, 2011).

As the researcher contacted the high school principals for participation, four of the 12 principals were not able to participate for a variety of personal, professional, and circumstantial reasons. The remaining eight principals were invited to participate in the study. Two of the eight, ultimately, were not able to participate in the study. Six of the principals agreed to participate in the study, and those interviews are included in this document. As the study continued, the researcher faced another serious health issue, delaying the analysis of the data. The analysis of the interviews was completed later and is included in the study.

During the second delay in the study, the TEA transitioned from the TAKS standardized testing model to the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) standardized testing model. To confirm continued school improvement in the new measurement paradigm, the researcher verified that schools from which the principals were selected all continued to show improvement under the new testing model. All six campuses continued to show improvement, and the principals who were interviewed were still in place.

Limitations

A limitation for this study was lack of access to the principals that the researcher intended to include in the study. Reaching the high school principals was difficult, and, once reached, convincing them, or their secretary schedulers, that participation in the study warranted an hour of time in their already busy schedules was a challenge. Extended principal responsibilities over long periods of time, including school construction and major new initiatives, limited some of the principals' time to participate, and one of the qualifying high schools closed its campus.

Delimitations

The researcher acknowledges as a delimitation that the selection criteria excluded those principals whose students consistently performed well on standardized tests. The focus of the study was principals whose campuses achieved school improvement over the time periods shown in the TAKS and STAAR data. Principals whose campuses did not show improvement were also excluded by the parameters established for the study.

Summary

Chapter 1 established the context of this study and introduced the four key areas presented by the literature review on principal and school leadership. The purpose of the study was explained, and the central research questions that guided the study were stated. The theoretical framework that inspired the research was identified as the Contingency Theory developed by Fred Fiedler (1967, 1971). Definitions important to the study were provided for the reader, and an overview of the methodology was described. The role of the researcher was included in the chapter, along with the significance of the study. The significance of the study included the projection that the research could result in a preliminary theory or model of school leadership and school improvement that would be grounded in the qualitative data gathered during the study. The selection criteria for the study was described, complete with the delimitations and the limitations. Chapter 1 introduced the dissertation topic and presented how the study may be used for future leadership development and school improvement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature provides scholars and practitioners who read this study with a sense of the research that has gone before and the research yet to be done. Strauss and Corbin (1998) maintained that for grounded theory research “there is no need to review all of the literature in the field beforehand, as is frequently done by researchers using other research approaches” (p. 49). However, for this researcher, the literature review provided important foundation information that led to more comprehensive interviews with the selected Texas public high school principals identified by the researcher as achieving school improvement.

Three areas of research reviewed in the literature include (a) dimensions of school leadership, (b) leadership and school improvement, and (c) current trends in educational leadership.

Dimensions of School Leadership

Nahavandi (2003) maintained that “leaders are effective when their followers achieve their goals, can function well together, and can adapt to changing demands from external forces” (p. 2). In a school environment, a principal is successful when the faculty and staff meet the campus goals regarding school improvement, when the administrators and teachers function together, and when the school community can, together, adapt to the changing demands of external forces, like changing standardized test requirements and other issues facing the campus community.

Researchers support the notion that successful schools are led by principals who have a clear vision of where the school is going, who are knowledgeable enough about teaching and education to assist teachers and students as they work toward desired outcomes, and who are able to protect schools from the kinds of demands that make it difficult for the school to operate

professionally (Fullan, 2001; Normore, 2006; Sergiovanni, 2001). Principals in successful schools also seemed to understand and believe in their mission and remain motivated to fulfill that mission during their tenure. Further, Normore (2006) presents that principals in successful schools seem to view themselves as knowledgeable and skillful educational leaders, while principals at less successful schools perceive their roles more as middle managers.

Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) note that while a substantial body of research has been conducted on what is known of successful leaders in the private sector, “within schools the evidence is less comprehensive” (p. 36). They further note that educational research has focused more on cognitive processes and leaders’ values. The researchers report that while they did not set out to research leader traits, studies of leaders’ efforts to improve low-performing schools have begun to replicate evidence from private sector research.

This evidence warrants the claim that, at least under challenging circumstances, the most successful school leaders are open-minded and ready to learn from others. They are also flexible rather than dogmatic in their thinking within a system of core values, persistent (e.g. in pursuit of high expectations of staff motivation, commitment, learning and achievement for all), resilient, and optimistic. (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 36).

Roles of school leaders. Begley (2001) outlined five key dimensions of school leadership, including the principal (1) as manager, (2) as program leader and learning facilitator, (3) as school/community facilitator, (4) as visionary, and (5) as problem solver. As manager, the principal attends to the day-to-day operations of the campus. As program leader and learning facilitator, the principal attends to the curriculum, testing standards and procedures, teacher performance, student engagement, and other academic details. As school/community facilitator, the principal seeks out and nurtures relationships with members of the larger campus community,

including parents, business owners, vendors, and government officials. As visionary, the principal develops a vision for the school and, with other members of the campus community, works consistently to achieve that vision. As problem solver, the principal is depended on to solve any problems associated with the students, teachers, or campus. The understanding of these dimensions is essential to effective leadership.

The Begley (2001) study had international scope and produced regional profiles of effective leadership practices in Canada, the United States, Australia, Russia, and Hong Kong. Normore (2006) noted that these profiles are considered in the literature as “a sufficient and effective means for knowledge construction and skill enhancement needed for effectively leading schools” (p. 44). The five key dimensions that Begley identified in his work are relevant to the purpose of this study—in seeking to explore what leadership practices public high school principals perceive to be most effective in attaining school improvement. As the researcher proceeded through the interviews with participating principals, using the constant comparative methodology, this portion of the literature review was useful in understanding the five roles that principal leaders may serve, including manager, program leader and learning facilitator, school/community facilitator, visionary, and problem solver.

In research conducted in the United Kingdom, Penlington, Kingston, and Day (2008) studied 20 schools, including 10 primary and 10 secondary schools, which were selected based on their sustained improvement in pupil outcomes over at least three consecutive years. Three themes were evident in each of the case studies, including (1) the key role played by the headteacher (a principal-like role) in setting and communicating a strategic vision for the school within the values framework; (2) models of widening participation and distributing leadership to other staff; and (3) “building leadership and teaching capacity within the school so as to build a

collective commitment, responsibility and accountability for the improvement of pupil outcomes” (p. 65). This international study had similarities to the researcher’s study in that the schools selected for the study sustained improvement in student outcomes. The themes also shared similarities to the data gathered in the researcher’s study, including the importance of the principal leaders in setting and communicating the vision for the school, the expanding participation of teachers in leadership, and building a culture of commitment, responsibility, and accountability for the benefit of the student. In today’s global environment, this comparison to schools in a neighboring country reinforces the idea that good educational concepts and ideas are universal, and they can be shared for the benefit of all.

In their study, Penlington et al. (2008) found that school leaders play a key role in establishing a school culture that centers on student success. Together with a clear vision, a culture where innovation and change are accepted by staff is necessary to insure continued school improvement and accomplishment of desired student outcomes. Forty-nine of the study’s participants across 18 of the 20 case-study schools commented that building a school culture where change and innovation are embraced is essential to the school’s success in fostering improved student achievement. The headteachers’ clear communication of a vision for the school was also important in fostering a culture where staff felt empowered to create change (Penlington et al., 2008).

Distributed leadership. Distribution of leadership involves a wide range of campus leaders and adds new dimensions and broader understanding that are critical to the school’s success. Penlington et al. (2008) stated that distribution of leadership is more than a means of sharing tasks. Distributed leadership is a model that includes shared decision making, development of a broader range of leaders, and ownership of change. Mayrowetz (2008)

maintained that the use of distributed leadership required a shared understanding of the term distributed leadership by the participants and that the field, if embraced as an educational leadership strategy, would benefit from scholarship “that clearly articulates what is meant by *distributed leadership* in studies that are both responsive to central problems of practice and anchored in relevant theory” (p. 433).

Leithwood et al. (2008) argued that one way in which leadership impacts student achievement in U.S. schools is that it acts as a catalyst for “unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organization” (p. 15). In their research, Fullan (2001) and Sergiovanni (2001) showed that building capacities of staff within the school, including knowledge and skills, is an effective means of achieving school improvement.

Leithwood et al. (2008) reported that a comprehensive review of literature resulted in seven findings, which they describe as “strong claims” about successful school leadership. They are:

1. School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.
2. Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.
3. The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices—not the practices themselves—demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work.
4. School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions.

5. School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.
6. Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others.
7. A small handful of personal traits explains a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness. (pp. 27-28)

The Leithwood et al. (2008) study offered that school leadership has great influence on schools and students when leadership is widely distributed and that some patterns of distribution are more effective than others. Further, results of their study showed that successful leaders draw on the same basic leadership practices. They also found that teaching was most improved through staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions. Their work also acknowledged that personal traits and the context in which leaders work explain variations in leadership effectiveness. These seven claims about school leadership identified by Leithwood et al. applied to this study, as the researcher explored what leadership practices public high school principals perceive to be most effective in attaining school improvement.

Models for successful school leadership. Knapp, Copeland, and Talbert (2003) offered a two-part framework for successful school leadership. The first explained that equitable, high quality learning experiences for students “are predicated on leaders’ simultaneous engagement with three ‘learning agenda: student learning, professional learning and system learning’” (p. 10). Professional learning is pre-service training and professional development that sustain the teachers’ growth, and system learning provides insight into how the system works.

In a second part of this framework, Knapp et al. (2003) described leadership in the context of five areas of action, including: (1) establishing a focus on learning; (2) building professional communities that value learning; (3) engaging external environments that matter for

learning; (4) acting strategically and sharing leadership; and (5) creating coherence by connecting student, professional, and system learning with each other and with learning goals. In this framework, establishing a school climate that focused on learning was of primary importance. Also important were professional learning communities, where teachers worked together to improve student learning and achievement. Engaging external environments that matter for learning could include parents, the surrounding community, and others who support students in their learning and encourage them to stay in school. Acting strategically and sharing leadership require intentional and written strategies for increased student learning, and leadership must be distributed among teacher leaders and not guarded for the principal alone. This two-part framework (Knapp et al., 2003) had application to this qualitative study, as the researcher sought to discover the practices that participating principals perceived to be most effective in achieving school improvement.

Portin (2005) presented that “regardless of school type, all schools need leadership in seven critical areas” (p. 15), including: instructional leadership, cultural leadership, managerial leadership, strategic leadership, human resources leadership, external development and political leadership, and micropolitical leadership. Portin explained that “principals are responsible for ensuring that leadership happens in all seven critical areas, but they don’t have to perform all leadership tasks personally” (p. 17). Portin’s work, like others, supported distributed leadership in accomplishing desired school improvement and increased student learning and achievement.

Principal training. With the rapidly expanding and complex demands on high school principals to be effective leaders, the traditional approach to principal preparation is being examined, and schools and post-secondary institutions are seeking a change in how leaders are

prepared for their new roles (Portin, 2005). If principal preparation remains static, principals will be trained for jobs that no longer exist in the ever-changing academic environment.

The sharing of leadership among administrators and staff is another opportunity for leadership development, as individuals are given the opportunity and the responsibilities of leadership in the context of the campus. Forms of support, guidance, and nurturing will help new leaders accomplish new responsibilities successfully (Penlington et al., 2008).

Leadership and School Improvement

The literature presents the importance of principals and teachers alike in achieving school improvement and improved student performance (Pennington et al., 2008; Stark-Price et al., 2006). Also presented in the literature is the complex and varied nature of public-school education, which requires all students to be educated, regardless of economic disadvantage, special needs, language, home environment, or other factors (Portin, 2005). Other issues faced by Texas educators are also included in the literature.

Leaders of school improvement. Stark-Price et al. (2006) maintained that the principal is a critical element in school improvement and increased student achievement. Pennington et al. (2008) found that teacher leaders play a key role in student success, and work by Fullan (2001) and Sergiovanni (2001) suggest that building the knowledge and skills of the staff is essential to school improvement.

Reeves (2008) suggested that school improvement must be led by administrators and teachers alike. In his study, Reeves conducted research with 81 schools in Clark County, Nevada, the country's fourth largest school district with a student population of more than 330,000 students. His study showed that action research by teachers and school leaders led to school improvement. The teachers and school leaders conducted action research, also known as a cycle

of inquiry, to solve specific problems. The process included: 1) identify the problem to be studied; 2) collect data on the problem; 3) organize, analyze, and interpret the data; 4) develop a plan to address the problem; 5) implement the plan; 6) evaluate the results of the actions taken. Unlike more formal research studies, action research is not expected to be applicable outside of the school where it is taking place. The research is conducted by the people who are experiencing the problems to resolve the problem, thereby accomplishing school improvement.

In their study of principals who transformed the school culture of National Blue-Ribbon Schools in a southern state, McKinney, Labat, and Labat (2015) found that the principals of the Blue-Ribbon schools held high expectations for their teachers and tended to possess characteristics such as tact, approachability, caring, sensitivity to the needs of others, personal and professional knowledge of teachers and staff members, respect for subordinates, the ability to listen, the ability to learn from others, and a willingness to seek out new and innovative teaching and learning techniques. The study showed that the morale of teachers impacted the level of instruction delivered to students and that the absence of a high level of instruction resulted in adverse student outcomes. The study also showed that the academic and social connection between the principal and teacher “played a huge role in the success of these national Blue-Ribbon schools” (p.164). The development of strong, positive rapport between the principal and the faculty and staff was important to improving student learning, according to the study. The data also showed that principals should seek to build a better rapport with teachers and staff by developing and implementing behaviors and traits that were identified as characteristic of successful principals, including developing cooperative relationships with teachers, actively listening to teachers, treating teachers and staff with respect and dignity, supporting progressive decisions made by teachers, and growing staff members through professional development. The

results of the study showed that it is imperative that teachers work in a school culture that embraces collaborative teamwork, and principals should reinforce common academic and social goals within teacher teams, have experienced teachers serve as mentors to new and younger teachers, promote workplace cooperation, and initiate the sharing of teacher best practices among colleagues. The researchers noted that the principals' actions were critical to the development of a culture of academic growth and continuous school improvement for the Blue-Ribbon schools in the study (McKinney et al., 2015).

Factors impacting variability of student academic performance. Portin (2005) notes that the challenges faced by schools in the United States are complex and varied. Public schools are required to educate students who represent a wide range of learning backgrounds and needs:

Whether having special education needs, being a recent immigrant just arrived in the U.S., or families living without a home, all children have a right to be served by the nation's public schools. In many of our nation's most challenged schools, it would not be uncommon for a majority of the students to be on public assistance, for dozens of first languages to be spoken by the students and their families, for a wide range of educational and emotional needs to be daily apparent in the classroom, and for teachers and principal to be working in a deteriorating school building. (p. 2)

In a multi-year study of four school districts in Ontario, Canada, Anderson and Macri (2009) found that the leadership practices of principals were identified by district administrators as among key factors that influenced the variability of student academic performance. Other key factors identified by the district administrators were parental involvement, at-risk factors related to student family circumstances, instructional practices of teachers, and educators' beliefs about the potential for success of all students. In the study, district administrators reported that some schools impacted by poverty, language barriers, and lack of support from home were outperforming other schools if they used the right strategies. Given similar challenges in the United States mentioned by Portin (2005), this could be the case here as well. Administrators

from all four districts included in the study rejected the tendency to minimize the power of the principals and teachers to make a difference in student success.

In the United States, a study by Valentine and Prater (2011) examined the relationships between principal managerial, instructional, and transformational leadership and student achievement in 131 public high schools. The nine leadership factors included in the study were instructional improvement, curricular improvement, identifying a vision, providing a model, fostering group goals, providing support, providing stimulation, high expectations, and interactive processes. The quantitative study showed that principal leadership factors did impact student achievement. Principal behaviors promoting instructional and curriculum improvement were linked to achievement and, within transformational leadership, the principal's ability to identify a vision and provide an appropriate model had the greatest impact on achievement. The principal's education level also positively correlated with each leadership factor. Principals who were perceived to be more competent influenced student achievement despite the school and community contexts in which they operated. The five leadership factors that influenced student outcomes to a greater degree than the others were instructional improvement, curricular improvement, identifying a vision, providing a model, and fostering group goals, though all nine of the leadership factors were linked to student achievement to some degree. The findings of the study clearly indicate that leadership behaviors of high school principals can influence student achievement.

Current Texas issues. In addition to the many state legislative, district, social, and economic challenges schools manage, schools across the United States also must meet academic guidelines set forth by the federal ESSA. ESSA leaves implementation strategies to be managed at the state level. In Texas, campus implementation of ESSA is under the supervision of the TEA

that publishes the results reports at the end of each academic year. Performance and participation guidelines require that districts and campuses meet test participation thresholds, in addition to performance thresholds. ESSA requirements mandate that districts and campuses have accountability measures for reading and math test scores, English language proficiency, and high school graduation rates. The schools also must show evidence of their plans for creating school quality, college readiness, access and completion of advanced course work, school climate and safety, and attendance, with special attention on schools with struggling students.

An accountability model introduced in Fall 2017, which grades campuses A-F, added another aspect to leadership accountability for Texas high school principals (TEA, 2017a). The Texas state legislature joined 16 other states with A-F school rating systems when lawmakers passed a bill that established the A-F rating system. The three domains for the measurement of academic performance for districts and campuses under the A-F rating system include student achievement, school progress, and closing the gaps. With the implementation of the bill, campuses received a rating of A, B, C, D, or F for overall performance, as well as for performance in each domain, with the first ratings released in August 2018. The 2017-2018 ratings were published as an indicator of how campuses would score, based on the 2017-2018 academic year performance. The first official A-F grades in Texas will be published for the 2018-2019 academic year by the Texas Commissioner of Education (TEA, 2018a). The program was established to promote continuous improvement over time, to recognize student achievement and to recognize the impact of highly effective educators, while maintaining focus on the students most in need. The intent of the rating system is to provide the public with a more transparent and easily understood rating system that holds schools accountable for student achievement. With the implementation of the A-F public school rating system, district leaders

and campus principals are challenged to help their faculty, staff, parents, and surrounding community members interpret their A-F ratings in the context of their school populations, economic environments, and individual needs of the students that they serve (Tanner, 2016).

Current Trends in Educational Leadership

Principal preparation. The preparation of American school leaders is undergoing a period of examination and review. Principal preparation programs vary across all 50 states, and forging agreement on the best practices for preparing individuals for school leadership is controversial at best (Portin, 2005).

Portin (2005) reports that a recent review of the literature identifies

five leading elements of emerging and redesigned principal preparation, including: field-based internships of appropriate substance to provide meaningful learning opportunities; problem-based learning strategies for examining the interconnections in school life; cohort groups for both collaborative learning and to mirror school learning communities; respected and established mentors for novice leaders; and novel collaboration between university programs and school districts. (p. 5)

As principal leadership continues to grow in scope with local, state, and federal accountability standards, increasing instructional requirements, teacher training and retention efforts, standardized testing, and the ever-changing educational landscape, preparing principal candidates to be successful leaders is essential to school improvement and student achievement.

In Texas, the State Board for Educator Certification adopted new principal standards in 2016, in response to the evolving role of the principal as an instructional leader and the needs of Texas schools and communities (TEA, 2019d). The standards were developed after gaining input from practicing principals, principal preparation program faculty, and other educators, and those standards were aligned with the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System. The new standards emphasized the critical role of the school principal with an increased emphasis on instructional leadership. TEA worked with principal preparation program faculty and practicing

principals to get input for a new test framework, and new testing instruments to certify Texas principals were developed by testing vendors, in collaboration with the TEA. The new testing instruments were created to reflect the skills needed for beginning principals to be effective (TEA, 2019d). The new 268 exam includes a much greater emphasis on instructional coaching and providing evidence-based feedback to teachers. Emphasis on the 268 exam is also placed on supporting staff in the effective use of instructional data to inform instructional practice and develop intervention plans, continuous improvement, change management, and the importance of culture and diversity in schools (TEA, 2019d). A computer-administered exam, the new Texas Examinations of Educator Standards Principal as Instructional Leader exam includes 91 select-response questions and four constructed response questions. In addition to passing the new exam, principal candidates must hold a master's degree from an accredited university, have a valid Texas teaching certificate, have at least two years of creditable classroom teaching experience, and complete an approved principal preparation program (TEA, 2019d).

Hiring and developing qualified principals. Stark-Price et al. (2006) noted that “the principal is a critical element in school improvement efforts and increased student achievement” (p. 82). Studies showed that the hiring and development of qualified principals are “essential to the delivery of quality education programs” (p. 82) and to improving school performance. Portin (2005) suggested that future needs include an expansion of what is necessary to lead a learning community, an expansion of who participates in that leadership, and an expansion of when, where, and how leaders can best integrate these capacities to provide powerful leadership for their schools. Stark-Price et al. (2006) emphasized the need to recruit qualified individuals to serve as principals at all schools and, especially, low-performing high schools.

Principal development programs take many forms, with some run by outside consulting groups, by districts, by region support organizations, and by not-for-profit organizations committed to quality education for all children. One such organization is the New Leaders program, a non-profit organization whose mission is to ensure high academic achievement for all students by developing school leaders to serve urban schools. The premise of the program is that a combination of principal preparation, improved working conditions for principals, continuous development, and extra support in the first years in a principal position will result in improved student outcomes (Gates et al., 2014). The Rand Corporation conducted an objective study and analysis of the New Leaders program and its outcomes for the period 2006-2013 in 10 school districts where the program was in place. Though the program has evolved over time, the principals in the New Leaders program all experienced selective recruitment and admission to the program, training and endorsement, and support in the early years of their tenure as principals. The Rand Corporation study showed that schools led by New Leaders principals experienced slightly larger achievement gains on average than similar students in schools led by non-New Leader principals. The achievement effects varied substantially across districts and across principals. In their recommendations, the researchers noted that the fact that they observed a statistically significant program effect in a comprehensive evaluation of a national training program for school principals was consistent with the growing body of research that suggests that principals and the principal training programs matter (Gates et al., 2014).

In Texas, principals are required to complete 200 clock hours of Continuing Professional Education (CPE) hours every five years and to renew their principal certificates, according to Administrative Code 232.13 (TEA, 2019e). School districts determine which training programs and workshops qualify for the CPE credit. TEA also offers Career and Technical Education

(CTE) training for administrators on Texas Gateway: Texas CTE Resource Center through its website. The site offers best practices and ideas designed especially for administrator development (TEA, 2019f).

Several universities in the metropolitan area surrounding the researcher's university offer Master of Arts, Master of Education, and doctoral degree programs in educational leadership, providing aspiring and current administrators opportunities to attain professional degrees and the training needed to become administrators and/or to advance their careers. Program content varies by university and degree program. Texas regional service centers also offer an alternate route toward principal certification.

The Texas Association of Secondary School Principals (TASSP, 2019) offers a wide range of continuing education and workshops for its members. For new principals, the TASSP offers a New Principal Academy during the summer to prepare novice principals to become highly qualified leaders. Training includes Leadership and Team-building Skills, Best Hiring Practices and Human Resource Information, Crisis Management Training, Campus and Activity Fund Training, Documentation Skills, School Law as it relates to the campus principal, and How to Avoid Career Derailing Mistakes. TASSP training and workshops are available throughout the year, and annual conventions are held for principals at different levels. In addition, TASSP provides legislative updates and educational trend information to its members throughout the year.

Some metropolitan-area school districts surrounding the researcher's university provide administrative training and intern programs to prepare interested persons in their districts for administrative positions. While programs vary from school district to school district, participants apply to be a part of the administrator preparation programs, which included class work and on-

campus intern programs to prepare persons aspiring to be administrators with hands-on training in the administrative arena (Ely & McAndrew, 2009).

Instructional teacher leadership. In their work, Mangin and Stoelinga (2010) focused on what instructional teacher leadership could contribute to school improvement. They noted that teachers have the potential to lead instructional improvement initiatives, even though they do not have positional leadership authority. The current trend toward using instructional teacher leadership to improve school performance emerged from the increasing focus on accountability at both the state and federal levels. In their effort to improve school performance, administrators turned to instructional teacher leaders to help align curriculum content with standardized assessments and to improve instructional practice among other teachers, thereby improving student performance.

Mangin and Stoelinga (2010) noted that while available research on the impact of instructional teacher leadership was limited, one of the most pressing factors influencing the increase in instructional teacher leadership was the emphasis on accountability brought about by state standardized tests and assessments and the requirements of federal standards, like those of the ESSA (TEA, 2017). The reform environment put more at stake when schools and districts failed to reach improvement goals. Teachers potentially faced diminished morale, increased pressure to improve student performance, and, ultimately, reassignment or firing. For schools, possible consequences ranged from parents choosing another school for their children, to increased monitoring, restructuring, or rebuilding from the ground up. Parents, students, and the community could face the humiliation of a failing school. Districts could face administrative changes, possible state takeover, or changes in the allocation of funds (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2010). The high stakes of school improvement led administrators to be more open to extending

leadership roles to instructional teacher leaders, a distributed leadership strategy that remained attractive only if it yielded the desired results.

Harrison and Killion (2007) also held that instructional teacher leadership was sometimes assumed in a formal role and other times in informal ways. By whatever means the leadership occurred, instructional teacher leadership had great impact on school improvement. Harrison and Killion named 10 primary roles of teacher leadership, including as resource provider to other teachers, instructional specialist, curriculum specialist, classroom supporter, and learning facilitator. Other roles included mentor, school leader, data coach, catalyst for change, and learner. In whatever instructional leadership roles they assumed, teacher leaders shaped the culture of their schools, improved student learning, and influenced practice among their peers.

Along with the current trends in education, the literature surrounding instructional teacher leadership informed this study by bringing into focus its use, impact, and the roles of instructional teacher leadership on a variety of campuses. The literature showed that instructional leadership can be executed from a formal, appointed position or from an informal position, and both can be equally effective. Murphy (2005) described teacher leadership as a pathway to school improvement. His work described instructional teacher leadership as an expanded view of leadership that once focused only on administrator leadership. When they use instructional teacher leaders, schools add one more tool to the toolbox, as they work toward school improvement. Instructional teacher leaders help their schools meet improvement goals and support the schools' improvement plans. Murphy (2005) noted that the use of instructional teacher leadership nourishes school reform by honoring the professionalism and knowledge of educators in influencing school improvement and student achievement.

School culture. Known as an international speaker and scholar in the area of educational leadership, Sergiovanni (2001) long held that for school improvement to occur, the principal had to focus on the improvement of the teachers' skills and knowledge. Sergiovanni asserted that helping teachers get better at standards, assessments, alignment, data aggregation and disaggregation, and development of interventions would lead to school improvement..

Sergiovanni's leadership work, along with the work of Fullan (2001), championed building the capacities and skills of the teaching staff as the key to achieving school improvement, a process-focused approach to improving student achievement and overall school improvement. In 2000, Sergiovanni defined school effectiveness as (1) higher levels of pedagogical thoughtfulness; (2) developing relationships characterized by caring and civility; and (3) achieving increases in the quality of student performance as measured by traditional tests and alternate assessments. This definition of school effectiveness reflected Sergiovanni's expanded view of effective leadership, in that the definition added as one of its main tenets relationships characterized by caring and civility, in addition to the processes and the knowledge and skills of the teachers for the accomplishment of school improvement.

Sergiovanni (2004) emphasized the importance of collaborative cultures in achieving school improvement. He held that competence in the school environment is too often divided among different people. Teaching is often regarded as an individual practice in strong contrast to what is found in most professions. Sergiovanni (2004) emphasized that if schools chose not to utilize the collective intelligence of all its professionals, closing the achievement gap and resolving educational problems were no more than wishful thinking. Organizational competence, not individual practice, would make schools better and would begin to create a culture of mutual obligation, accountability, and commitment among the professionals working on campus.

In 2007, Sergiovanni wrote that his own views on leadership had changed dramatically since the 1980s. He now held that principals and teachers, simultaneously, had to learn to respond to change and to work to change the environment of the school to a culture of learning. His focus turned from knowledge, skills, and processes to a focus on culture, ideas, shared values, traditions, meanings, and purposes. As Sergiovanni elaborated on his changed view of school leadership, he emphasized the need for leaders to develop “schools of character” (p. 6). He held that schools of character (1) know who they are; (2) have developed common understanding of their purposes; and (3) have faith in their ability to achieve goals together. With schools of character, both local control and distinctiveness enhance the school’s sense of purpose. In these successful schools, the culture embraces shared values, traditions, meanings, and purposes. As character builds, Sergiovanni offered, the capacity increases for a school to serve the intellectual, social, cultural and civic needs of its students and community. Sergiovanni concluded that school character and school effectiveness are linked.

In building the school culture, Sergiovanni (2007) noted that schools are social, not formal, organizations. Instead of focusing on bureaucratic structure, rules, and authority, schools must, instead, build relationships, establish community, and agree on the goals, values, traditions, and beliefs that they share. Schools, Sergiovanni held, are more like families and congregations than they are like businesses and shopping malls, and the culture must be built accordingly. The document that contains the school’s vision and goals must be a working document upon which all decisions are made. The leader must build a culture where people feel safe to share ideas and to try things and fail. In a healthy school culture, members of the school community follow a vision and follow ideas. They do not follow a leader because of the leader’s authority or bureaucratic power. They follow a leader who understands and communicates where

the school is and where it should be and involves the members of the community in meeting goals and in striving to accomplish the vision for the school every day.

While emphasizing his belief that building a school culture that emphasized community, shared values, traditions, meanings, and purposes was the key to school improvement and increased student achievement, Sergiovanni (2007) cited three reasons for failed school leadership. First, leaders began to think of leadership as behavior, rather than action; as something psychological, rather than spiritual; and as having to do with persons, rather than ideas. He held that the hand of leadership had been separated from the head and the heart. Second, Sergiovanni held that, in trying to understand what drives leadership, scholars overemphasized bureaucratic and personal authority and neglected professional and moral authority, thereby separating process from substance. Third, he held that failed leaders viewed schools as formal organizations, like banks and shopping malls, instead of social organizations, like families and congregations, with shared ideas, beliefs, goals, and obligations. School improvement and increased student achievement occurred to the greatest extent when principal leaders focused on building a school culture that emphasized community, shared values, traditions, meanings, and purposes.

MacNeil, Prater and Busch (2009) studied the effects of school culture and climate on student achievement. The researchers investigated whether Exemplary, Recognized and Acceptable schools differed in their school climates, as measured by the 10 dimensions of the Organizational Health Inventory (Miles, 1965). Categories addressed by the Organizational Health Inventory included goal focus, communication adequacy, optimal power equalization, resource utilization, cohesiveness, morale, innovativeness, autonomy, adaptation, and problem-solving adequacy. The findings of the study, conducted in a major metropolitan area, suggested

that students achieve higher scores on standardized tests in schools with healthy learning environments. MacNeil et al. summarized their findings:

Strong school cultures have better motivated teachers. Highly motivated teachers have greater success in terms of student performance and student outcomes. School principals seeking to improve student performance should focus on improving the school's culture by getting the relationships right between themselves, their teachers, students and parents. Measuring school climate and using these assessments to focus the school's goals on learning is important for the process of improving the school's academic performance. (pp. 77-78)

Sustainable turnaround. Challenged with turning around a low-performing California school relatively quickly, Fullan and Pinchot (2018) worked together to transform a low-performing, high-poverty school within two years, using specific strategies. Fullan served as consultant, using strategies he discovered over a lifetime of studying organizational and school leadership, and Pinchot was principal at the school. As the work began, six leadership strategies were identified as essential for a sustainable turnaround, including (1) build staff morale; (2) set up necessary procedures; (3) coach teachers; (4) build relationships; (5) build trust; and (6) build a positive school climate. The principal began her work in her new school by listening to the stakeholders to identify challenges that would require action. Stakeholder groups included other administrators, teachers, parents, district personnel, and students. The principal listened and took notes to determine what was needed to accomplish the goals and to put systems in place to begin building success early.

Based on this case study, Fullan and Pinchot (2018) presented six strategies for school improvement with proven success, including: (1) establish multiple permanent teams led by teachers, with defined responsibilities and a commitment to long-term goals; (2) provide a variety of specific teacher professional development opportunities and follow up with clear expectations and support; (3) develop a schoolwide behavior plan, with strong involvement by

students, teachers, and parent groups; (4) use instructional rounds to collect data on instructional practice; (5) purchase digital devices for use by teachers and students and establish a media center; and (6) be highly visible in teacher-led team meetings and in classrooms, through weekly visits to encourage and help, without judgment.

How the Literature Informed This Study

The three areas of research reviewed in this chapter include: (1) dimensions of school leadership, (2) leadership and school improvement, and (3) current trends in educational leadership. All three of these areas are germane to this study and provided the foundation of knowledge required to conduct an informed qualitative study on the topic of “Public High School Principals’ Perceptions of Effective Leadership Strategies for Improved School Performance.”

The first area of literature, dimensions of school leadership, presented from the literature the characteristics of successful school leaders, roles of school leaders, explanations of distributed leadership, and information on approaches to principal training. The knowledge gained in this section of the literature review informed this study in the areas of principal preparation and hiring and developing qualified principals, as well as the resources available for principal development. The role that instructional teacher leadership can play in achieving school improvement was also explored, along with importance of school culture in attaining and sustaining school improvement and enhanced student achievement. Understanding the dimensions of school leadership was especially useful in developing the interview guide. This expanded understanding of the roles of both principal and teacher leaders was useful in developing questions for the interview guide and in asking clarifying questions during the interviews. While the principals may not have used the term “teacher leader,” they provided examples of using teachers as leaders in their school improvement plans, including, but not

limited to, department coordinators leading other teachers, teachers leading committees, teachers serving as mentors to younger teachers, and teachers leading instructional improvement through Professional Learning Communities, mentoring, and student intervention sharing.

The second area of literature, leadership and school improvement provided relevant information about leaders of school improvement, factors impacting variability of student academic performance, and academic standards. This section of the literature review was of great importance in framing the context of this qualitative study. Knowledge of some of the published work in leadership and school improvement helped the researcher to better understand the gaps that this study could potentially help to fill in the body of knowledge, including the specific strategies and behaviors that principals identified for school improvement perceived to be most effective in accomplishing school improvement.

The third area of literature, current trends in educational leadership, informed the researcher in the areas of principal preparation, hiring and developing qualified principals, instructional teacher leadership, school culture, and sustainable school turnaround strategies. Reading the literature for current trends in educational leadership and principal preparation provided the researcher an overview of procedures and programs that currently guide the preparation of principals for their ever-expanding roles as school leaders.

Overall, the literature review provided the solid foundation of knowledge needed to support this study. The literature review was completed early in the study and was revisited and updated later in the study to assure that current trends and studies were included in the review, up through and including early 2019.

Summary

The literature, in general, showed that principal leadership is second only to classroom teachers in impacting student learning and achievement. As reflected in the literature review, a host of researchers acknowledge that the most successful organizations are guided by leaders who have a clear vision of where the organization is going, who have the knowledge to assist employees (teachers) and customers (students and parents) in meeting defined goals, and who protect both teachers and students from external forces that can impact their achievement or success.

A publication by Division A of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) claimed that research in school leadership “has generated few robust claims” (Leithwood et al., 2008). AERA attributed the reason for the gap in knowledge and literature to:

the lack of programmatic research; a paucity of accumulated evidence from both small- and large-scale studies, the use of a variety of research designs, and failure to provide evidence in sufficient amounts and of sufficient quality to serve as powerful guides to policy and practice. (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 36)

Though additional studies have been added to the body of knowledge on school leadership since Leithwood et al.’s 2008 study, the assessment by the AERA, together with literature describing other current trends in educational leadership, support the need for further research to learn from effective school leaders.

As presented in this chapter, the literature supports the need for this study and a deeper understanding of principals’ perceptions of their leadership and the leadership strategies that they perceive to be most effective in achieving school improvement. The literature also makes clear how important principal leadership is to the success of teachers in engaging the students in the learning process, the ultimate success of the students, and overall school improvement.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how public high school principals whose campuses were identified by the researcher as achieving school improvement describe their leadership and what they perceive to be their most effective behaviors and strategies in improving school performance.

Central Research Questions

Central research questions that guided the study were:

- How do public high school principals, who have been identified by the researcher as achieving school improvement, describe their leadership?
- Which of their leadership behaviors and strategies do the public high school principals perceive to be most effective in achieving the desired school improvement?

Research Design

Because the study sought to gain understanding of the perceptions of the high school principals regarding the leadership behaviors and practices that they perceived to be most effective in achieving school improvement, a qualitative research design was appropriate. The researcher chose the constructivist grounded theory methodology for this research study because grounded theory methods offer a set of general principles, guidelines, and research strategies that allowed the researcher to study the data collected and to construct an original analysis of the data. Following the constructivist grounded theory methodology, the researcher was able to collect and analyze qualitative data and to construct a preliminary theory or model grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2014).

Qualitative researchers use theory in a variety of ways. Creswell and Creswell (2018) present that theories can be used in four ways. First, theories can be used as broad explanations for behaviors and attitudes, including variables, constructs, and hypotheses. Second, theories can be used as theoretical lenses or perspectives through which questions are asked and data are collected and analyzed. Third, and distinct from other qualitative studies, are qualitative studies in which theory becomes the end point. Fourth, some qualitative studies do not employ any explicit theory. In these types of studies, the researcher constructs a rich detailed description of a central phenomenon. The grounded theory methodology uses theory in the third way described by Creswell and Creswell (2018). That is, the theory becomes the end point of the study, as the theory emerges and is constructed from the analysis of the data.

Charmaz (2014) describes the history and development of grounded theory as being “intertwined with larger currents in social scientific inquiry, and particularly with tensions between qualitative and quantitative research in sociology in the United States in the 1960s” (p. 5). Inductive qualitative inquiry shifted mid-century from field research and ethnographic studies to participant observation, though what researchers did in the field was not clearly described in research records. Charmaz notes that early methodological texts emphasized data gathering and field work roles and relations, rather than qualitative analytic strategies.

Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss refocused qualitative inquiry on methods and analysis in 1967, when they published *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Charmaz, 2014). Prior to this time, the details of the methodology for qualitative research were not widely shared. In their study, Glaser and Strauss successfully collaborated while studying death and dying in hospitals. They gave their data analytical

treatment and produced theoretical analyses, developing systematic, methodological strategies that researchers could adapt to studying other topics.

While their qualitative methodology met opposition from among quantitative researchers who sought to prove hypotheses through scientific and quantitative analysis, Glaser and Strauss held that systematic, qualitative analysis had its own logic and could generate theory. In their work and publications in 1967, 1978, and 1987, Glaser and Strauss defined the components of grounded theory practice (Charmaz, 2014). These components are:

- Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis
- Constructing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically induced hypotheses
- Using the constant comparison method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis
- Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis
- Memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps
- Sampling aimed toward theory construction (theoretical sampling), not for population representatives
- Conducting the literature review after developing an independent analysis. (pp. 7-8).

Glaser and Strauss' work sparked growing interest in qualitative methods and changed the way researchers learned about methods. Their book offered systematic strategies for qualitative research practice, and they proposed that systematic qualitative analysis had its own logic and could generate theory.

Grounded theory methodologies continued to evolve over the next two decades, with different approaches utilized and advocated by qualitative researchers. Glaser and Strauss parted ways because of differences on how data should be analyzed, and Strauss later published with Juliet M. Corbin (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Glaser held that Strauss and Corbin's approach contradicted fundamental tenets of grounded theory research because it did not emphasize emergent theoretical categories and the comparative methods that distinguished earlier grounded

theory strategies. Beginning in the 1990s, Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory became more widely known (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theory adopted the inductive, comparative, emergent, and open-ended approach and acknowledged that researchers are not neutral observers.

In this constructivist grounded theory methodology, the researcher included her background as part of the research document. She was challenged to remain cognizant of tacit and explicit beliefs or experiences that could potentially influence the analysis process.

Charmaz (2014) explained her selection of the term constructivist:

I chose the term 'constructivist' to acknowledge subjectivity and the researcher's involvement in the construction and interpretation of the data and to signal the differences between my approach and conventional constructivism of the early 1980s and 1990s. (p. 14)

Creswell and Creswell (2018) described qualitative research as exploratory and understanding oriented, with focus on the participants' experiences. In this qualitative study, the researcher collected data from the six individual secondary principals at their sites, and data interpretation focused on text analysis and the discovery of common themes, with attention to any emergent grounded theory.

In grounded theory research, theories are generated or developed during the process of the research. A grounded theory study extends beyond description to generate or discover a theory or model. The theory development does not come from a library of existing theories but is grounded in data gathered during the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A grounded theory design allows theoretical categories to emerge from the data that explain how individuals respond to a specific problem or challenge. In a grounded theory research study, data is gathered primarily through interviews. The data is then analyzed inductively, and the resulting theory is

grounded in real-world experiences, as described by the participants (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

The grounded theory design was chosen for this study because it was well suited to the intent of the study, which was to learn what strategies participating high school principals perceived to be most effective in achieving school improvement. The qualitative grounded theory methodology, particularly Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory methodology, has the flexibility required for this qualitative study and offered the constant comparative methodology when analyzing and coding data.

The model, grounded in the data, began to emerge during the one-on-one interviews with the public high school principals. The research description included the recording and transcription of the words of the principals as they provided an accounting, from their perspectives, of their leadership and of what leadership behaviors and strategies they perceived to be most effective in accomplishing the desired school improvement. As the principals described their leadership and their behaviors and strategies that were most effective in achieving improvement, the data that repeated itself foreshadowed components that could become part of a model, if one emerged.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that in qualitative inquiry, the intention is not to generalize findings to a population but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon. For this study, that central phenomenon was leadership effectiveness and leadership behaviors and strategies that the principals perceived were most effective in achieving school improvement, as perceived and reported by Texas high school principals identified by the researcher as achieving school improvement. The qualitative data is intended to inform other

school leaders about the leadership behaviors and practices that are perceived to be most effective in achieving school improvement.

Quantitative data can have conventional uses in qualitative research. The data can suggest trends, provide descriptive information, and open avenues to explore and questions to answer (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). However, for the purposes of this study, quantitative data was utilized exclusively for the purpose of selecting potential participants for the grounded theory study. Data from the AEIS reports published by the TEA were used at the start of the study to identify potential participants for the interviews, but the data had no further purpose or use in the study. The selection-only data was not used for analysis or interpretation of the qualitative data gathered in the course of the study and was not included in the findings.

Participant Selection

Participants in this study included six public high school principals whose campuses were identified by the researcher as located in the metropolitan area surrounding the researcher's university, serving student populations of 1,200 or more, and achieving school improvement, as indicated by improved standardized test scores in the All Tests category.

To be included in this study, an individual met the following criteria:

- Public high school principal who led a campus with a student population of 1,200 or more
- Public high school principal whose campus showed improvement in the TAKS Campus Group Scores for All Tests for the reporting years 2005-2007 and 2009-2011, as detailed in the AEIS campus performance reports (TEA, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009a, 2010a, 2011) and whose campus also demonstrated continued improvement in the STAAR All Subjects scores for the reporting years 2013-2015, as detailed by the

AEIS campus performance reports (TEA, 2013, 2014, 2015). Because of the extended length of the study, data were included for the reporting years, 2005-2007, 2009-2011, and 2013-2015 to verify that the schools continued to show improvement and the principals qualified for the study.

- Public high school principal in schools located in the metropolitan area where the researcher was completing her doctoral studies. Public high schools categorized as magnet high schools, alternative high schools, or charter high schools were not considered for the study.

The All Tests score reflected the sum of all grades tested, who met the standard for the selected campuses for the years reported. With the implementation of the STAAR assessment, the category changed to All Subjects.

Twenty-one traditional public high schools are located in the metropolitan area surrounding the researcher's university, excluding magnet and alternative public high schools and charter high schools (Public School Review, 2019). Sixteen of the high schools in the metropolitan area met the participant selection criteria of a campus of at least 1,200 students and achieving school improvement, as indicated by improved standardized test scores in the All Tests category. The top 12 schools were chosen in an effort to secure enough participants for the study, and the principals were invited to participate by letter (Appendix A). Four of these principals were not able to participate for a variety of personal, professional, and circumstantial reasons, leaving eight potential principal interview participants. The researcher's intent was to include participants from a variety of area school districts, and the study included principals from four different school districts. In accordance with academic protocol, when required, the researcher sent a letter to gain any required permission from the administrative offices of the selected

school districts before setting up the interviews (Appendix B). To confirm the principal's participation in the study, a confirmation letter was delivered electronically (Appendix C). For the six principals that agreed to participate, the appropriate consent agreement was signed and retained among the researcher's secure files (Appendix D).

Six of eight public high school principals who responded to the invitation to participate in the study were interviewed in their respective offices and represented four different school districts in the metropolitan area surrounding the university where the researcher was pursuing her doctoral degree. Two principals who had originally responded positively for an interview were not available to participate in the study. The participating principals were leaders of high schools with student populations greater than 1,200, and the campuses showed improvement in the TAKS Campus Group Scores for All Tests for the reporting years 2005-2007 and 2009-2011, as reported by the TEA (2005, 2006, 2007, 2009a, 2010a, 2011) and demonstrated continuous improvement for the STAAR All Subjects scores for the period 2013-2015 (TEA, 2013, 2014, 2015).

During the extended time over which this study was conducted, the TEA transitioned from the TAKS standardized testing model to the STAAR student standardized testing model. Because the researcher used school improvement data to select participants at the start of the study, the researcher took steps to confirm continued school improvement under the new assessment model. The researcher verified that all six campuses from which the principals were selected continued to show annual improvement under the new testing model. The researcher noted that the category name "All Tests" used in the TAKS model was changed to "All Subjects" in the STAAR model. Though the selection instrument changed over the extended time period of

the study, each principal's school continued to show improvement, thereby supporting the original selection criteria.

Data Collection Strategies

Data were gathered through one-on-one interviews with the six public high school principals from four different metropolitan-area school districts whose schools the researcher had identified as having achieved school improvement. Obtaining appointments for the interviews required significant time, with the process of garnering participants more difficult than anticipated because of the high school principals' demanding schedules. Once agreement to participate was obtained, a Participant Confirmation Letter (Appendix C) was delivered and an appointment was confirmed for the interview.

One-on-one interviews. To collect the data required for the study, one-on-one interviews were scheduled for a time period of 45 minutes, though some interviews extended longer, with the agreement of the principal. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw from the study at any time, though none chose to withdraw from the research process. Individuals had no risk in participating in the study, and anonymity was assured.

Interviews were held in the office of each participant. With the permission of the participant, each interview was recorded to assure accuracy of data collection, using a digital recorder and a phone voice recording device as backup. All participants gave consent to use the recording process, and the recording of the interviews was accomplished without difficulty. The researcher also recorded descriptive hand-written field notes for use in the analysis. The principals responded to the questions holistically, considering their full administrative experiences on current and past campuses. The recorded interviews were later transcribed to

facilitate the study and analysis of the data. Once transcribed, the researcher compared the data to the recordings and the field notes to verify accuracy.

In accordance with qualitative methodology for data gathering, the researcher summarized the data that was collected during each of the principal interviews. Summaries of the collected data are included in Chapter 4 for each principal who was interviewed. The summaries are organized by the categories that each principal addressed during the description of effective leadership strategies.

Interview Protocol

The researcher arrived at the interview location in advance of the appointed interview time and adhered to the expectation of a 45-minute to one-hour uninterrupted interview. With the principal's consent, some interviews extended beyond the one-hour time frame.

The intent of the researcher was to create a conversation that put the principal leaders at ease and made them comfortable to share their experiences and the significance of those experiences with an unknown researcher. The researcher also followed the prepared Interview Guide (Appendix E).

The researcher asked questions about:

- The principal's leadership position
- The principal's motivation to be a school leader
- The many roles of a school leader today
- How the principal became an effective leader
- Leadership strategies the principal employed that resulted in school improvement
- Strategies to sustain school improvement
- Accountability measures

- Key factors for the principal's success as a school leader

The interview protocol document (Appendix E) was utilized consistently across all interviews. The interview protocol document included essential demographic information about the interview and interviewee, including the date, time, place, name of interviewer, the interviewee's assigned number, position of interviewee, the educational background of the interviewee, the number of years in education, the number of years at the campus where school improvement occurred, the school and district of the principal, and a statement about the purpose of the study. Participants were given a copy of the interview protocol document for review before they were asked to sign the consent-to-participate form to allow the participants optimum flexibility for responding to the questions (Creswell, 2005). The researcher also explained that the participant's identifiable information was for the researcher's use only, and anonymity in reporting the results of the study would be maintained and assured in the final report. In accordance with the assurance of anonymity, the participants were coded by number, starting with Principal 1.

Audio Recordings

All audio recording equipment was tested in advance of each in-depth, one-on-one interview, and extra batteries were available for use in the event of battery failure. The researcher also carried a back-up digital recorder to assure that technology was available for the entire interview. The audio recordings were later transcribed, and the transcription and notes were combined to become a part of the larger body of information that was examined during study.

Observations

During the office visits and the in-depth, one-on-one interviews, the researcher recorded observations, using an observational protocol document. The observational field notes taken,

using this document as a research tool, included information about the setting, the name of the observer, and the time and date of the observation. Both descriptive and reflective data were recorded. Because the data were based on each participant's perceptions of his/her own leadership effectiveness and reported leadership practices and because the campuses varied greatly, the content of the observational protocol documents vary.

Protection of Human Subjects

Bogdan & Biklen (2003) note that "Qualitative researchers go to the particular setting under study because they are concerned with context" (p. 4). As a guest on site, the researcher honored the time of the public high school principal participants and recorded observations, with the permission of the participants. Consistent with scholarly research ethics and guidelines, approvals were sought from the appropriate school district officials and the anonymity of the participants was assured. Campus protocol was followed for guests-on-campus policies and procedures. All data gathered during the inquiry process were carefully guarded and locked in the researcher's office for security.

Participation in the study was strictly voluntary and participants' anonymity was respected and protected. There was no anticipation that participation in the interviews would involve risk or harm to the participants. The following process was followed to maximize protection of participants:

1. The researcher completed the research proposal and obtained approval from her dissertation chair and committee members before pursuing approval from The University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) Institutional Review Board.
2. The researcher sought and received approval from UIW Institutional Review Board before the study began.

3. The researcher respected the time and administrative responsibilities of the participants and would have ceased the interview, and/or returned later to finish the interview, should an emergency have occurred during the interview. While no emergencies occurred and return visits were not required, two of the interviews were interrupted briefly for the principal to answer questions and to solve immediate challenges in staffing. After the resolution of those situations, the interviews continued as planned.
4. Audiotapes and all written field notes and records were secured and held in the strictest confidence. Only the researcher was able to identify specific participants and sites. A code identification was assigned to each audio recording, file, or related materials.

Constant Comparative Methodology

Analysis of the data began as the data were collected, using Glaser and Strauss's 1967 constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014). Use of the constant comparative methodology required that all interviews be transcribed soon after each interview was completed. During the constant comparative process, the researcher began to identify from the text of the transcriptions the behaviors and strategies that the principals perceived as most effective in achieving school improvement. The constant comparative methodology was useful in gaining familiarity with the data from the early stages of the research and provided continuity and focus for this study, which extended longer than originally planned because of personal health crises that occurred in the life of the researcher. The researcher went back to review the notes from the constant comparative methodology before conducting each next interview, to assure the same focus on the research questions and to remain informed of the data that was gathered during each interview.

Listening to Audio Recordings

To assure accuracy of the transcription and to familiarize herself with the data, the researcher listened to the audio recordings as they were collected and studied the data as it was transcribed, so that data analysis and collection proceeded together (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The constant comparative methodology allowed the researcher to think analytically about the data, and early analysis provided the groundwork for thinking in-depth about the data, even as the interviews progressed. Continuing the constant comparison methodology during data collection, the researcher began to code the data line-by-line and word-by-word to assure two criteria for completing a grounded theory analysis were met: (1) fit and (2) relevance (Charmaz, 2014). In other words, the researcher remained cognizant of the data's fit for the purpose of the study and its relevance to the strategies and behaviors the selected high school principals perceived to be most effective in achieving the desired school improvement.

Hand Coding the Data

After all interviews were completed and transcribed, analysis of the qualitative data was accomplished by hand coding the data, instead of using computer software. Manual coding afforded the researcher the opportunity to look at the data in new ways and to draw connections among the participants' interpretations of their experiences (Charmaz, 2014). While computer software is useful in storing and organizing data and has the capacity to locate texts assigned to specific codes, the researcher chose hand coding to assure personal and careful examination of all of the information in the interview transcripts and to avoid the loss of any information because a computer program did not recognize a principal participant's word choice as being associated with behaviors and strategies that the principals perceived to be most important. When a researcher uses a computer program, the researcher is still required to go through each line of

text and assign the codes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher made the decision to hand code the data to accomplish accuracy and consistency.

Initial coding. The first phase of hand coding was initial coding (Charmaz, 2014). Initial coding required a broad reading of the data, without applying pre-existing categories to the data. The first broad reading of each interview transcription occurred after data were collected and subsequent to the constant comparative analysis during the collection of the data. After the first broad reading, the researcher began the process of initial coding, which required word-by-word and line-by-line analysis of the data gathered during the interviews and provided in the transcriptions.

In performing initial coding, the researcher reviewed the data with attention to detail, color coding and highlighting key strategies and behaviors described by the principals as most effective in leading to the desired school improvement. During the initial coding phase, the researcher interacted with the data, with the express purpose of reviewing the earlier interactions with the participants. Initial coding gave the researcher the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the way the principals described their leadership and their perceptions of the strategies and behaviors that were most effective in achieving school improvement. The initial coding process was interactive in that the researcher color-coded and highlighted key ideas and worked to gain a better understanding of the principals' experiences.

The next step was to annotate the transcriptions with key words and ideas derived from the data. The researcher continued to study the data during annotation, remaining aware of behaviors and strategies that potentially could be linked together as common themes and later contribute to the emergent grounded theory as analysis continued. Each interview transcription was a different length, thereby generating different numbers of initial codes. By example, the

transcription for the interview with Principal 1 was 32 pages in length and generated 72 initial codes, while the transcription for Principal 2 was 19 pages and generated 38 codes. Table 1 provides an example of the initial coding process, whereby the researcher highlighted the strategies included in the data and annotated the code in a word phrase.

Table 1

Initial Coding Example.

Transcription	Initial Coding
Principal 2 “You have to hire the best people that you can for the...for the...for the vacancies that you have. You have to make tough decisions on personnel issues. You can’t...you have to...you have to use the processes that are in place to compel people to make other decisions. You have to have good people in every single corner of the building, and if you don’t, nothing will happen.”	Hire the best people. Hire quality teachers.
Principal 3 “All the publicity was very negative, so we worked very actively to change the perception in the community. We opened up the [campus] community to the parents, coffee with the parents, lots of open houses, lots of after-school parent information nights, senior nights, just really opened up the school to the community because when you really look from the outside looking in, you really don’t know. But when you open the doors and let the community come in, well, then they’re your biggest ones to sell the school for you.”	Build relationships. Gain community buy-in.

Note. In this initial coding phase, the researcher studies the data in the interview transcripts to identify important ideas the principals expressed during the interviews.

Because the researcher used the constant comparative research methodology, insight was gained as the research progressed. With the completion of each interview, the researcher was able to develop more specific or more clearly stated questions for use in subsequent interviews (Charmaz, 2014). The constant comparative methodology also provided the researcher insight

for follow-up questions for each subsequent interview and helped the researcher to recognize potential components of the emerging model.

Focused coding. In the second major phase of coding, the researcher engaged in focused coding (Charmaz, 2014), reducing the number of codes across all interviews from more than 70 initial codes to 20 focused codes. In this coding phase, the researcher used the initial codes to sort, categorize, and synthesize the large amount of data gathered during the interviews. To facilitate the categorization and synthesis of the initial codes, the researcher created a large spreadsheet that included strategies and behaviors identified by the principals during the interviews as those that they perceived to be most effective in achieving school improvement. In her work, Charmaz (2014) recommends these clustering and visualization techniques, like a spreadsheet or other visual organizer, as means by which to organize findings, identify gaps, and work toward the construction of the grounded theory. For this study, the spreadsheet provided the visual tool needed to categorize and synthesize the codes. The resulting 20 focused codes are listed in Table 2.

Each of the 20 categories included on the list of focused codes was derived from the data, and the researcher also summarized and recorded descriptions of the categories on the spreadsheet for use during analysis. As the data analysis continued, the large spreadsheet provided a vehicle by which to visualize which of the behaviors and strategies aligned as common behaviors and strategies that the principals perceived to be most effective in achieving school improvement. Table 3 is an example of the researcher's identification of common behaviors and strategies that emerged from the data. This table shows a sampling of topics each principal found important. The highlighted items are strategies that all six principals identified as among the most effective in achieving school improvement. Items that are not highlighted were

mentioned as important by the designated principal, but not by all. The table represents a portion of the larger chart used for analysis.

Table 2

Focused Coding Categories.

1. Relationships	11. 21 st Century Learner
2. Supporting Teachers	12. Communication
3. Community Buy-in	13. Student Relationships
4. Quality Teachers	14. Expand Student Life Experiences
5. Team Building	15. Attitude
6. Accountability	16. Leader Qualities
7. Professional Learning Communities	17. Philosophy
8. Discipline	18. Greatest Challenges
9. Teacher Involvement/Empowerment	19. Differentiated Instruction
10. Goals	20. Situational Leadership

Note. Focused coding categories of strategies and behaviors derived from the data and based on the transcriptions of the conversations with participating principals. Inclusion on the list does not mean that all principals have these categories in common, only that one or more principals named the category as important and contributing to school improvement.

With initial and focused coding completed, the researcher turned her attention to in-depth analysis of the coding. In analyzing the data organized on the spreadsheet for visual analysis, the researcher carefully compared the codes with the data to determine their relationships with each other and to identify which behaviors and strategies fit together into categories, or common themes, and which data emerged as sub-themes. This process required many hours of analysis, as the research continued to study and interact with the data (Charmaz, 2014). As the researcher continued the coding and analysis and as the information was placed on the large spreadsheet for visual clarity, the grounded theory and school improvement model began to emerge. From the focused coding process, the researcher identified five common themes and three sub-themes.

Table 3

Focused Coding Example

Principal 1	Principal 2	Principal 3	Principal 4	Principal 5	Principal 6
Building Relationships	Building Relationships	Building Relationships	Building Relationships	Building Relationships	Building Relationships
Community Buy-in	Community Buy-in	Community Buy-in	Community Buy-in	Community Buy-in	Community Buy-in
Expand Life Experiences					
Hiring & Developing Quality Teachers	Hiring & Developing Quality Teachers	Hiring & Developing Quality Teachers	Hiring & Developing Quality Teachers	Hiring & Developing Quality Teachers	Hiring & Developing Quality Teachers
Essential Tools	Essential Tools	Essential Tools	Essential Tools	Essential Tools	Essential Tools
					Small Faculty Meetings
Teacher Accountability	Teacher Accountability	Teacher Accountability	Teacher Accountability	Teacher Accountability	Teacher Accountability
	Situational Leadership	Situational Leadership			
Building Effective Teams	Building Effective Teams	Building Effective Teams	Building Effective Teams	Building Effective Teams	Building Effective Teams
Discipline		Discipline			
Setting & Accomplishing Campus Goals	Setting & Accomplishing Campus Goals	Setting & Accomplishing Campus Goals	Setting & Accomplishing Campus Goals	Setting & Accomplishing Campus Goals	Setting & Accomplishing Campus Goals
Student Relationships	Student Relationships			Student Relationships	
Employing Communication Tactics	Employing Communication Tactics	Employing Communication Tactics	Employing Communication Tactics	Employing Communication Tactics	Employing Communication Tactics
				Involve Teachers in Data Analysis	
			Believe in People		

Completion of Interviews

Because of the lack of access to the last two principals invited to participate in the interviewing process, the researcher sought and received the approval of the dissertation committee to cease the pursuit of more interviews and to turn her attention to the analysis of the data. The focused coding process continued, with the use of the constant comparison methodology (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Memo Writing

As an important intermediate step before writing, the researcher wrote informal memos to record details relevant to the data analysis (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher kept a memo bank for later reference. The memos, informally written as recommended by Charmaz (2014), provided the researcher the opportunity to make observational notes, to reflect on the meaning of the categories that emerged from the data, and to once again examine the direct quotations of the principals as they described their leadership experiences. Figure 1 provides an example of memo writing.

All six principals perceived building relationships as a behavior or strategy among the most effective in achieving school improvement. While each principal described building relationships a bit differently, relationships were clearly a priority for school improvement. One principal cited relationships with students, teachers and the administrative team, while another spoke more broadly about students, teachers, religious leaders, government officials, service clubs, and the chamber of commerce. Another principal perceived that relationships developed with parents and other residents of the surrounding community as effective in achieving school improvement and in building support for students to achieve more. Yet another emphasized knowing students by name and communicating frequently with them about their progress or lack of progress.

Figure 1. Memo Writing Example. Memo writing is the intermediate step between data collection and analysis and writing the research document. This step affords the researcher an opportunity to analyze the data and codes early in the process (Charmaz, 2014) and to begin to reflect on the emerging theory as an outcome of the constructivist grounded theory study.

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling was used throughout this constructivist grounded theory study. Theoretical sampling is defined as the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the researcher simultaneously collects, codes, and analyzes the data and decides which data to collect next, keeping an eye toward the development of a theory or model as it emerges from the data (Glaser, 2017). Theoretical sampling cannot be planned in detail before the primary data collection process begins because there is no clear process or guidance that applies to all grounded theory studies. For each study, data collection, analysis, initial coding, focused coding, theoretical sampling, and memo writing take on their own unique characteristics and processes as the researcher continues with the study. The flexibility offered by the constructivist grounded theory methodology allowed the researcher to guide the study, making important decisions along the way. The researcher studied the data for each interview extensively before beginning the coding process to familiarize herself with her data and the meaning behind the words of the participating principals. The constant comparative methodology contributed greatly to the model that emerged. The theoretical sampling, combined with the constant comparative methodology, resulted in focused thinking, a higher level of analysis and, ultimately, the school improvement model that emerged from the study.

Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness of the data, the researcher used multiple validity procedures, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The researcher established trustworthiness of the data by carefully checking the path to her conclusion(s) from interview to analysis.

Verification also included the researcher's careful review of the data gathering process, analysis

and confirmation that all processes, procedures, data, and resultant findings were clearly articulated.

The researcher confirmed that all data were accurate during the study by listening to the recordings multiple times and by comparing the transcriptions to the audio recordings. Further, the researcher closely compared the data transferred to the spreadsheet from the text of the transcripts to confirm no errors were made in the transfer of the data for analysis. Themes then were established based on converging perspectives of the participants, thereby contributing to the trustworthiness of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Member checking was conducted in late 2018 to check findings and accuracy of the interviews and the data gathered therein (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because of the extended time that elapsed over the course of the study, the researcher provided participating principals a copy of the interview summary and asked them to verify the current accuracy of the data. The researcher also invited participants to make changes or to add insights that they had gained, since the time of the original interview, about their leadership strategies and behaviors that they perceived to be most effective in achieving the desired school improvement. Two of the participating principals responded to the request for verification, and each said the data were accurate as written and responded that they had no further insight to add.

Methodology Summary

Chapter 3 describes the research design for this qualitative study. The researcher chose the constructivist grounded theory methodology, championed and taught by Kathy Charmaz (2014), because the study's purpose was to understand the perceptions of the participating high school principals about their leadership and the leadership strategies and behaviors they perceived to be most effective in achieving school improvement.

Constructivist grounded theory methodology offered a systematic process for the study yet offered the flexibility to construct original analysis of the data, with the focus on understanding the principals' perceptions. The study was based on data gathered during one-on-one interviews with the principals, each with campus populations of at least 1,200 students. The interviews were audio recorded, and the researcher also penned hand-written notes to record observations.

Using the constant comparative methodology, the researcher studied the data throughout the course of the study. Audio recordings of the one-on-one interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews to facilitate the use of the constant comparative methodology. When all interviews were completed and transcribed, the researcher completed the hand coding of the transcript data, with initial coding completed first, followed by focused coding. The 20 categories identified during the focused coding were placed on a spreadsheet for visual analysis, and common themes and subthemes were identified. Memos were written for each of the common themes and subthemes, as the researcher sought a thorough understanding of the data. Theoretical sampling was utilized to bring focus and depth to the study, as the researcher was alert to an emergent theory or school improvement model.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Research Findings

Data analysis and research findings are reported in two sections in this chapter. The first section is the Description of the Data that presents each interview summarized by the researcher, as well as the demographic information for the principals interviewed. For organizational purposes, the data is divided into 10 categories the principals discussed during the one-on-one interviews, including career path, quality teachers, community buy-in, essential tools, academic interventions, improved discipline, campus goals, communication, relationships, and leadership style. The second section of the chapter presents the Description of the Data Summary, including descriptions of the five common themes and three subthemes that were derived from the data after coding and analysis.

Description of the Data

This section includes data from six one-on-one interviews conducted with high school principals. In responding to the interview questions, principals responded holistically — considering their full administrative and leadership experiences, not exclusively responding to the administrative and leadership experiences on the campus identified for participation. Table 4 provides demographic data for the principals interviewed. The data for each principal is divided into categories for organizational purposes. The categories do not represent the common themes, which are identified in the second part of this chapter.

Principal 1

Career path. Principal 1 led a campus with an approximate student population of 2,500 at the time of the interview, serving students in grades 9-12, in the metropolitan area surrounding the researcher's university. Principal 1 started his career as a certified athletic trainer and served in that capacity for four different schools, where he also taught biology and health. Principal 1

left athletic training for one year to pursue his master's degree. He earned his special education certification and became a self-contained special education classroom teacher, while he pursued his master's degree. Principal 1 held education positions in two major South Texas cities and in eight secondary schools over the course of his career. While he was completing his mid-management certification, Principal 1 completed an administrative internship at a high school with a campus population of nearly 3,000 students. He said that during that time, he asked the principal a lot of questions and volunteered to do anything above and beyond what he was required to do. He said the supervising principal convinced him to apply to an administrative internship program offered by a large school district.

Table 4

Principal Participants

Principal	Metropolitan School District	Years in Education	Years as Principal	Years at School	**Economically Disadvantaged	Approximate Student Population	*Date of Interview
1	A	26	16	5	Yes	2,500	January 2015
2	B	20	3	3	No	3,000	March 2015
3	C	24	14	10	Yes	3,400	November 2014
4	B	34	20	14	Yes	3,000	May 2014
5	D	30	22	22	Yes	1,700	February 2015
6	B	18	5	5	Yes	2,700	February 2015

*Data is accurate as of date of interview.
 **Indicates more than 50% of students on campus are economically disadvantaged.

To apply to the program, Principal 1 was required to submit a portfolio of the work that he had accomplished in various aspects of school leadership. The next application phase was a phone interview, followed by a panel interview with the associate superintendent and principals from various elementary, middle, and high schools. Two hours after the panel interview, Principal 1 was asked to apply for an assistant principal position at a large high school in the

district. He was selected for that position and served as assistant principal at the high school for six years. After four years working under the second principal during his six-year tenure, Principal 1 was encouraged to start applying to be a principal for the district. He said he was content being an assistant principal and enjoyed helping students through his position as assistant principal. He found the position interesting and ever changing. Despite his satisfaction with his then current position, Principal 1 was encouraged to begin applying to move up to a principal position to further his career.

Principal 1 was hired for his first leadership position as principal at the middle school level. After he was hired as principal, he learned that the school was on the verge of becoming a low-performing school, and district officials told him that having a low-performing school in the district was not an option. He was directed to get into the school and to get some things done to improve student performance.

Principal 1 described his knowledge of administration at that time as what he had learned in his master's degree classes, and he described that knowledge as theory. "The bottom line was the only way to learn administration and school leadership was to get one's feet wet and get into the thick of life as an administrator," Principal 1 said. Over the years, he had the opportunity to attend a variety of training classes and to learn from a variety of people. He learned new strategies and would come back to campus and try the new strategies. Some ideas worked in his school environment, and some did not work. He said that statistics show that a principal must have five years to turn a school around, but five years was not an option at the middle school where he had been selected as principal. Principal 1 was told he had one year to make something happen. Improvement occurred the first year, and, in approximately two years, the middle school became a "Recognized" school. The "Recognized" rating was based on a past rating system used

by the State of Texas for two decades, wherein schools were labeled “Exemplary,” “Recognized,” “Academically Acceptable” or “Academically Unacceptable,” based on results of standardized test scores, drop-out rates, and high school completion rates (Texas Association of School Boards, 2019).

Because of his success at the middle school, Principal 1 was asked during his fourth year there to apply for a high school principal position. Once again, the school to which he was asked to apply was on the verge of being labeled “Academically Unacceptable,” and he was directed to get in there and get some things done to improve student performance. During his time as principal, the school achieved school improvement, which led to an invitation to become principal at his current high school, a campus where 67% of the students were economically disadvantaged and 60% of the students were at risk.

Quality teachers. The first step toward school improvement was determining how to help the students who had not passed the standardized tests. The next step in helping these students was finding quality teachers who wanted to make a difference. Teachers had to embrace the campus education philosophy and be willing to do the hard work required to help students who were both economically disadvantaged and at risk. They had to be willing to collaborate and use the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) as the foundation of their lesson planning. The teachers had to demonstrate that they understood that the TEKS standards were established by the state and that teaching to the TEKS was not optional. They had to be willing to spend the time required to help the students succeed, to try different strategies and interventions, and employ differentiated instruction.

Community buy-in. The next important step was gaining buy-in from the community. Principal 1 tapped into every resource in the community. Gaining community support and buy-in

was essential to school improvement. Principal 1 became a member of the Lion's Club, the Rotary Club, and the advisory board of the local YMCA. He helped gain support for a metropolitan health building in the school community. He sold to these groups the concept that the school should be the hub of the community, and he told them he did not have the resources to get things done in order for the school to be that hub. Next, he went to the local churches, where the students attended services and youth programs. Principal 1 got to know the pastors and convinced them to go and walk the campus with him so that the students would know that he knew their pastors. Further, Principal 1 attended committee meetings at the local churches and talked about the school's needs. Principal 1 emphasized that everywhere he went and everywhere he was involved, he would talk about the great kids at the school and the unfulfilled needs of the students and their school.

In his efforts to gain support, Principal 1 reached out to the chamber of commerce and government officials as guest speakers and guests on campus. Speakers brought the real world to students, and visiting the campus helped city and state officials get a first-hand look at what the campus needed to help students succeed.

Principal 1 focused on changing the perception of the school and of the students who attended there. He encouraged the integration of school and community by offering that students participate in community activities that would be enhanced by a choir or band performance or the assistance of the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) in opening flag ceremonies. He was forthright with community groups in communicating that they and the school could help each other. Groups started to call him to ask students to perform for a variety of events and to help with volunteering too. Gradually, the perception changed, and the community began supporting the school and providing the resources the school needed to

improve. School partnerships grew substantially over the four years that Principal 1 was at his first high school in need of improvement.

At his second high school, also on the verge of becoming academically unacceptable, Principal 1 was faced with a transition from TAKS standardized testing system to the End of Course (EOC) standardized testing system. He said that the school moved from being ranked 12th among 40 schools with similar characteristics for the first year of being ranked under the EOC system to being ranked 7th among 40 schools with similar characteristics the second year. The move from 12th to 7th was considered by the district to be considerable school improvement.

Essential tools. From a leadership perspective, Principal 1 attributed a portion of his school's improvement to providing teachers the tools they needed to help the students succeed. He created a leadership team made up of the campus deans and department chairs, who studied the data on student performance. The leadership team then met with the teachers in the department to study the data and to determine what action should be taken to best help the students. Principal 1 emphasized that the last thing that a leader should do is pounce on teachers and department chairs when low scores come back with the data, showing low performance on an assessment like a benchmark. Most teachers were already working as hard as they could and making sacrifices to meet the needs of the students. Being angry about poor benchmark scores or berating teachers or department chairs serves no purpose. That kind of reaction upsets people and brings down morale. Instead, department chairs met with their teachers, studied the data, and made decisions about what they could do to improve student performance. The data was used as a tool in planning improvement. Each department was required to make a plan of action for each of the TEKS set forth by the State Board of Education as the curriculum requirements for each individual course and to use the data to identify learning needs.

Academic interventions. In another step toward school improvement, the assistant principals examined failure rates by individual teacher. If one teacher had a high failure rate, the first step was to examine the make-up of the class, looking for possible reasons behind the failure rates. The class could be made up of predominantly special education students or English Language Learner students. If another teacher had similar class populations, but the students were earning higher scores, the focus became learning about what the successful teacher was doing to help students reach a higher level of achievement. To facilitate conversations and the sharing of teaching strategies among teachers instructing the same EOC classes, Principal 1 created common planning periods for those teachers so that they could plan on a daily basis. Time was set aside for teachers to make sure they were on the same page and that they were implementing the plan of action. He said teachers were not expected to teach in exactly the same ways, but they were expected to be addressing the same challenges. Each teacher was expected to study the data and to understand the problems, what TEKS needed to be addressed, and then find a way to make things happen in the classroom to improve student performance. With these tools in place, Principal 1 said that the schools that he guided showed growth every year.

When growth did not occur with a teacher, Principal 1 gave the teacher the opportunity to ask for help. Sometimes during what he termed “hard conversations,” the leader learned that something challenging was happening in the individual teacher’s life, and that the teacher required additional emotional and classroom support from administrators and colleagues at that time. Principal 1 said the leader cannot lose sight of the fact that teachers are human. The challenge became getting the teacher and the students back on track. Together, the principal, the department chair, and the teacher determined what needed to be done differently. As long as the

teachers know that the principal and other colleagues cared about them, they were going to perform well and in the best interest of the students, Principal 1 said.

Improved discipline. In addition to improved test scores and lower failure rates, Principal 1's campuses saw fewer students sent to alternative school and experienced lower discipline numbers, which he attributed to defining the negotiable and non-negotiable guidelines for student behavior. For example, teachers did not waste their time picking up cell phones and requiring parents to retrieve them after school hours. Conversely, students were not allowed to wear hats on the campus because it was a safety issue. Principal 1 explained that the district purchased surveillance cameras for student protection. If students were all wearing hats and an incident occurred, the students who were wearing hats could not be identified. Once teachers and students understood the reasons behind campus rules, the non-negotiable guidelines were easier to enforce.

Campus goals. Campus goals were also essential to school improvement. A principal must set expectations. Every person on the campus must know the campus goals and be able to articulate them when asked. The same goals also must be maintained over time for those goals to be effective. If one of the goals was to improve student writing through writing across the curriculum, for example, then all classes must be writing, from physical education to international languages to JROTC. The academic dean at Principal 1's school attended department meetings to help teachers discover how they could include meaningful writing in their courses, and teachers were required to provide writing samples from each of their courses.

The leadership team(s) put together plans for improvement, based on the goals that they established together. Benchmark scores and later, EOC standardized test scores were viewed to identify which TEKS were not being met and what the educators could do differently to help the

students achieve at a higher level. Principal 1 asked the assistant principal for curriculum to meet with the deans and department chairs two or three times a week during the initial data analysis process. Each department developed a plan of action for each TEKS that was not being met by students in that department – first, after benchmark data was collected and, later, after the first administration of the EOC testing. These improvement plans became the roadmaps for student performance improvement on benchmarks and, later, on EOC standardized tests, primary measurements for student and school success.

If the campus was committed to a goal, evidence was required to show that the established strategies were being implemented to move toward that goal. If a campus goal was to increase the number of students in Advanced Placement (AP) courses and to improve Advanced Placement scores, more students had to achieve threes, fours, and fives on their AP exams. If that was the focus, and if teachers and students were working hard toward that goal with a great deal of focus and fidelity, increased scores would happen.

If a third goal was a district-wide goal to produce college-ready students through rigor, relevance, and relationships, strategies were established for that goal, too. The focus was on the relationships with the students first because a teacher had to establish a relationship with the students to help them discover the relevance that the learning had for their lives. Once the relationships and the relevance were established, then the rigor was added by challenging students to think by giving them more thought-provoking questions. That was the rigor that was expected, not more busy work, with true school improvement and student performance and learning as the vision.

Communication. Principal 1 identified communication as another key to school improvement. Principal 1 met with 31 people, identified as the leadership team, as well as with

his assistant principals every week. He asked each person to bring something to the table each week for discussion, problem resolution, ideas for improvement, and information to be disseminated to the rest of the faculty. The leadership team, which included the assistant principal in charge of curriculum, invested time examining student data, including benchmarks. If benchmarks were not where they needed to be for student success, Principal 1 asked, “What is going on here?” and “What are we going to do to improve student performance?” Teachers and department chairs were already working hard and investing long hours in their work, and the last thing they needed was criticism for scores that did not meet their own expectations. Principal 1 viewed the benchmarks as tools and communicated that to the leadership team, and their job was to communicate that to the teachers.

School improvement also required good communication that extended throughout the campus on an ongoing basis during the academic year. Principal 1 established many committees on campus to get everyone involved and to establish buy in from his teachers and leaders. Committees included a Campus Improvement Committee, a Faculty Advisory Committee, a Technology Committee, a Behavioral Management Committee, and a Hospitality Committee, with the expectation that every department was represented on every committee and that each committee member was required to bring something to the table at each meeting. When decisions were made, the information was taken back to the departments by the committee representatives for implementation. Minutes from those meetings were placed in Google Docs and distributed to all faculty members. Administrative team members attended each meeting to know what was going on, but they did not run the meetings, set the agenda, or take notes. Instead, the administrators attended the meetings to answer questions or facilitate, when needed.

Involvement of teachers on the committees improved communication on many levels and created buy in from the faculty members.

For student communication, Principal 1 recorded a broadcast message to air to students on a weekly basis. The message was also posted on the school's website for future viewing. In the broadcast, Principal 1 specifically congratulated students and organizations for their accomplishments during that week, keeping the messages positive. Another focus of the principal messages was the purpose of coming to school – to get an education. He emphasized that the teachers were there for their students and that tutoring was available before and after school for those who needed extra time. He also emphasized the importance of students being in class, paying attention, and doing the work to earn a passing grade. Instilling in students a can-do attitude helped them to believe in themselves and helped them plan for successful futures that included the need for a quality education. The repetition of key messages was important when speaking to the high school audience.

Communication with parents included a parent letter every Friday to keep parents informed about upcoming events, to give kudos to organizations, and to thank the parents for their ongoing support. Social media and telephone call outs were also used to communicate with parents and guardians.

Relationships. Building relationships was the bottom line for planning for school improvement. Relationships with students, teachers, community leaders, churches, the chamber of commerce, and government officials all contributed to obtaining the resources required to lead his school to the desired school improvement. The principal invested time with community leaders, the chamber of commerce, church leaders, and government officials to inform them about accomplishments and needs at the school. These relationships yielded donated supplies,

guest speakers, action on school zone signage, and general support for the school and its students. The principal walked visitors through the halls so that the visitors could see the school in action, and students could see important role models and people interested in their education. Relationships among administrators, teachers, and students were nurtured through conversations and listening, with the focus on the student and what the student needs to be successful. The principal reciprocated the community contributions to the school by offering the students to participate in community activities, like flag ceremonies, special events, and grand openings.

Leadership style. As a leader, Principal 1 was open to trying new strategies learned from professional journal articles and conferences that he attended. He learned by experimenting with what worked for the students and faculty on his campus and what did not. He believed and lived by, “Kids will do anything if they know that you care, and kids will read teachers and administrators and will know if they are sincere about caring.” One of Principal 1’s self-identified strengths was building relationships, not only with faculty members, but with the students. The students knew he was there for them, and teachers knew that he would provide them the support needed in order to help the students succeed. He believed in positivity, and he considered being positive as one of his leadership strengths. He avoided negative energy and negative people and encouraged people to “tell me something good.” His other self-identified leadership strengths include being a collaborator and a delegator and being willing to move people around to learn new skills. He emphasized the importance of surrounding oneself with people who know more than the leader in areas where the leader is weak. Principal 1 gave computer systems as an example of one of his weaknesses and the importance of hiring someone who has a depth of knowledge to shore up that weakness. He emphasized that leadership is not a one-person job.

Principal 2

Career path. Principal 2 started his career as a student teacher in a metropolitan-area school district, moving from a Midwestern state for the experience. In his first teaching experience after college graduation, Principal 2 coached soccer and football and taught a variety of social studies classes in a metropolitan-area school district. He said he learned a lot about leadership and teamwork during this time. At the conclusion of three years at the high school, Principal 2 decided to accept an opportunity to do missionary work through the Catholic Church in New Zealand. During the next year, Principal 2 lived in a rectory for priests and volunteered as a teacher at what Americans would term “an alternative high school.” The year in New Zealand as a volunteer teacher was a growing experience, and after that year, Principal 2 returned to the metropolitan area and was hired at a middle school, where he taught computer literacy and social studies for three years. The vice principal at that middle school encouraged Principal 2’s interest in administration, at a time when Principal 2 was debating between pursuing counseling or administration. He finished his Master of Arts degree in administration in May 2002 and was hired as an assistant principal at a high school of 3,300 students that fall. He said his experiences as a coach, as a classroom teacher at two secondary school levels, and as a teacher abroad combined to prepare him for his work as an assistant principal in a large high school. He later followed the principal at the high school to open another metropolitan-area high school, where he served as vice principal. He served as vice principal for eight years, where he expanded his career set, before being hired at the high school where he served as principal at the time of the interview.

Quality teachers. Principal 2 said hiring and retaining quality teachers was essential to student success. He said when he first arrived at his high school, he followed a beloved and

strong principal who had moved on to a central office position. He invested the first year in observing and assessing programs and departments and discovered many successful things happening on campus, as well as things that “needed tweaking.” He described his second year as a very tough year, when he began to make changes for school improvement. Moving the best teachers to work with low performing students, where they were most needed, was controversial and at first created some discontent. His leadership style was also different than his predecessor’s style, which required adjustment for all parties. Principal 2 preferred to hire good teachers and allow them to make decisions that were best for their classrooms and for the students. For example, if a teacher had a student with a discipline problem, the teacher was required to look at the options within the district guidelines, make a decision, and move on. A good leader surrounds himself with good people, including the administrative staff and the faculty, and allows them to do their jobs. Hiring the best people for the vacancies that occur was essential to current and future school improvement and success. Having good people in every corner of the building helped the campus and its students succeed and improve standardized test scores. Without good people, nothing would happen, and the school would not improve. The people that have been hired since Principal 2 joined the campus as leader have made the largest impact. He clearly communicated the expectations he had for his teachers and then followed up to make sure they were doing what he asked them to do and that they had the resources they needed to do their jobs. The great teachers in the classroom cared, offered hope, gave students multiple opportunities to succeed, and allowed students to show mastery of information in a variety of ways. Principal 2 emphasized that good quality administrators and good quality teachers are essential to student success and meaningful school improvement.

Community buy-in. Principal 2 believed that communication with the school community was important for student and school success. Principal 2 and his team used social media to promote the school, student and team accomplishments, and things that were going well on campus. The principal also used the online tool, Remind, to keep parents and students informed about upcoming events and important dates to remember. A principal column in the campus newspaper provided a periodic opportunity for the principal to communicate directly with students, teachers, and other readers. Communicating positive messages to the school community was essential for community support and buy-in, in good times and challenging times.

Essential tools. The tools that worked best to accomplish school improvement were putting the right people in the right places, studying and using data to guide instruction, investing money in the programs where the students needed the most help, and giving teachers and department chairs the autonomy to make decisions about how best to help students learn and succeed. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) gave teachers time to share ideas and build strategies for student success.

Academic interventions. Principal 2 said that failure rates and failure on standardized tests were priorities for the campus. The principal explained that the academic dean met with department chairs in the core areas to review data and to identify teachers whose students failed benchmarks and/or standardized tests in core areas. The department chairs met with teachers to determine the possible causes for the failures, examine the effectiveness of teaching strategies, and provide more training for the teacher if needed. After a period of time, another teacher might be moved to that area to make instructional changes or provide the interventions required to help the students succeed. Teachers in Professional Learning Communities also provided support to

other teachers who were struggling, and teachers worked together in the PLCs to create strategies to help students who required additional support or instruction.

Improved discipline. Principal 2 did not discuss improved discipline, thereby no data is provided here.

Campus goals. Principal 2 explained that his school district required each principal to develop a campus improvement plan each year, complete with focused goals and strategies. The annual improvement plan focused on the campus's core values and student performance and learning. For his campus, the areas that were most effective for planning purposes included (1) promoting and fostering academic and instructional growth, (2) providing strong extracurricular programs to keep students engaged in school, (3) believing that every student could be successful and achieve goals, (4) promoting and fostering the cultures and traditions of the campus, while creating new traditions, and (5) treating every person with dignity and respect all of the time. The SMART (specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, time-bound) goals were written to support these core campus principles, which were communicated often and widely. A major leadership challenge was to keep everyone informed and abreast of core principles as personnel changed throughout the year. The general public typically believed that school personnel were stagnant, or secure once teachers and employees were hired for the academic year, but that simply was not true, according to Principal 2. People moved up. Spouses got transferred. Staff members found better jobs. With personnel changes happening throughout the year, keeping everyone informed and educated about the core principles and the campus improvement plan amid the busy atmosphere of an academic year on a high school campus was an ongoing, but very important, challenge.

The campus plan for school improvement was built from the ground up, instead of being dictated from the administrative offices at Principal 2's high school. Each department, working with the content areas, created SMART goals, based on detailed student data that was received during the summer. The data included student performance by individual, by grade level, by ethnicity, and by special groups. To be effective, the SMART goals could not be rubber-stamped. The goals were frequently revisited to make sure that everything was on track, including what happened between the department chairs and the content leads, who were also monitored by the assistant principals and the academic dean. The purpose of the goals was to improve instruction, interventions, and processes to help students succeed and to assure meaningful school improvement.

Communication. Principal 2 identified good communication as imperative for student success and school improvement. Principal 2 wrote a column in each issue of the student newspaper, designed to motivate students to stay positive and to believe in themselves. In the column, the principal noted student successes and encouraged students to establish good study habits and make the most of their education. Formal monthly meetings with the administrative team, combined with more informal luncheon meetings, provided opportunities for open communication about progress and issues requiring administrative attention. Principal 2 sent out a Monday Message to all faculty and staff, where successes were celebrated, and important information was communicated to everyone in writing. Faculty meetings and administrative visits to department meetings and PLCs rounded out communication with teachers and staff. Administrators also maintained an open-door policy to discuss issues that were time sensitive.

Communication with parents and with the community at large took many forms, including a district news magazine distributed each quarter of the year, frequent social media

communication that was both district and campus specific, email communication, a campus website, and a campus-wide reminder system for important events and deadlines.

Communicating positive things about the school and its students to the wider community set the tone for school improvement and communicated that the school and the students were made up of much more than just test scores.

Relationships. Treating people well all the time, even when it was difficult to do so, had a meaningful impact on school improvement. In addition, building relationships that made people receptive when reminded of the goals, the mission, and the vision of the campus was critical. Expanding communication with parents and the general community was also an effective strategy for school improvement. Principal 2 encouraged administrators, faculty, and staff to only talk positively about the school to outside audiences and not to talk about the problems or challenges to people outside of the school community.

Leadership style. Principal 2 described his leadership style as situational leadership. Leadership and relationships came down to person to person, student to student, department to department, and teacher to teacher. Each situation required something different from the principal, the school leader. He said situational leadership was “the way to go.” Principal 2 did not have one way of leading. “It depends – kid to kid, teacher to teacher, subject to subject – you just have to make adjustments based on the needs.”

Principal 3

Career path. Principal 3 studied engineering at a major state university, during which time he earned high grades and was named to the dean’s list. He was writing computer code at the library at 4 o’clock one morning, when he looked up and realized that he would be writing code for many years to come. At that moment, he recognized computer engineering and coding

were not for him. Principal 3 changed his major the very next day. The dean understood, as Principal 3 explained that he was not a computer person but a people person. He moved to the College of Liberal Arts and became a Spanish Literature major. As he finished his bachelor's degree, people at the university asked him what he planned to do after earning his degree. When he said he did not know, the professors asked him why he did not continue and earn his master's degree. In all, Principal 3 invested 15 years at the state university, never missing a semester of study.

While completing his master's program, the fellowship he was under required Principal 3 to teach lower-level Spanish. Principal 3 said that it was while teaching lower-level Spanish that he discovered the "a-ha moment" when students understand a concept or idea, based on the way the teacher delivered the instruction. He said he was hooked on that feeling and that the "a-ha moments" kept him going. After he finished his master's degree, he went on to earn his teaching certificate and fell in love with teaching. His first teaching position was with a private school in the city where he had studied at the university, Later, he was hired by a small, public school district, where he served as the entire Spanish Department. He described his first year in the public-school classroom as "the worst year ever." He realized quickly that he was not ready for public education. He "learned and learned," and decided that he could "do this for a living." He moved his family to the small school district community and quickly discovered how difficult it was for a family to live on a teacher's salary.

Someone suggested that Principal 3 go into administration, where he would earn a higher salary, and he decided that would be a good step. He enrolled in the PhD program at the large university where he had earned his bachelor's and master's degrees and where he would earn his doctorate in Educational Human Resource Development. Through the PhD coursework, he was

able to take superintendent classes and more teaching classes. He also earned a second master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction and said he became completely enamored with the whole education system. While pursuing his PhD, Principal 3 continued to teach. When he completed the degree, he applied for assistant principal positions and said he failed in several interviews for assistant principal. The next year, he applied again and was hired as an assistant principal at the high school where he had been teaching Spanish. In retrospect, Principal 3 said taking a leadership position in the school where he had been teaching was not a good decision because of the difficulty of moving from peer to supervisor.

After one year as assistant principal, the principal at his school moved to a new school district, and Principal 3 was invited to follow him to that school district. Principal 3 became principal of an alternative high school, where students were able to graduate whenever their coursework was completed. From there, Principal 3 was hired by a large East Central Texas school district, where he served as deputy principal at a large inner-city school with a large demographic of Hispanic students. Over the years, his career experience included rural, urban, inner city, small 3A, large 5A, and private school education. His first principal position was as an elementary principal in the same large East Central Texas school district. Principal 3 later accepted the position as principal at a high school of approximately 3,400 students in a school building built for 2,800 students in the same school district, where he was interviewed for this study.

Quality teachers. Principal 3's high school where the interview was completed was the school where he influenced the most improvement. He said watching his first four-year graduating class mature and watching problem students mature and gain academic success was rewarding. He attributed much of the improvement to the teams of teachers that they have built

instructionally for the campus, with 65 new teachers hired in his first year as principal. He said making very good hires and building the instructional teams effectively resulted in student success and meaningful school improvement. The teachers were planning with attention to specific student needs and were delivering instruction effectively. The teachers also conducted meaningful and accurate student assessments. Those things together led to meaningful school improvement and increased student learning and success. His priority was to finetune the interaction between students and teachers.

Community buy-in. When Principal 3 arrived at the large, urban high school, he said the school had received a host of negative publicity about lack of funding, the loss of teachers, and poor student performance. Part of his job was to get the word out to the community about the positive things happening at the school.

Principal 3's leadership for his campus included protecting the brand, that is, the reputation and perception of the school as a whole. He invited parents and the community into the school for coffees, open houses, after-school information sessions, performances, and other activities. The parents and other visitors then became ambassadors for the school because they had seen the school and its students from the inside. The school also hosted student competitions and other events that brought notice to the school and its students. Over time, the reputation of the school and community involvement and support improved.

Essential tools. Among the tools that teachers needed to provide quality instruction for students to succeed was training. Principal 3 worked with the administrative team to provide quality professional development on days designated for teacher education. Knowing where the weaknesses were and what additional education was needed to make good teachers better required time and observation, as well as individual teacher conferences and one-on-one

conversations. Teachers came with different experiences, different backgrounds, and different needs, and part of the leader's job was to identify those needs and give teachers the tools they needed to help students succeed. Principal 3 and his administrative team were in the trenches with teachers – in the classrooms, in parent-teacher conferences, and in planning – to assist when needed. The leadership team did not work from an ivory tower. To know what teachers needed to be most effective, the leadership team had to observe first-hand, as well as listen to their teachers.

Academic interventions. When Principal 3 was hired as principal of the 3,400-student high school, he said the campus was two or three students away from being designated as a low-performing school. Failure rates were high, and Principal 3's first priorities were to observe teachers at work, examine student data, and work with the administrative team to make a plan for school improvement.

Improved discipline. Focusing on curriculum and instruction and delivering high-yield instruction to students takes care of discipline issues and everything else, according to Principal 3. A well-engaged classroom leaves no time for misbehavior and leaves no time for students not doing their work, which leads to failures. The teacher teams concentrated on increasing the rigor at the bottom and experienced considerable success with low-performing students.

Campus goals. Primary goals from the start of Principal 3's leadership at the large high school were to improve student performance, improve the overall campus rating that was nearing a rating of "low performing," and to "fix the instruction." The largest challenge, according to Principal 3, was to get everyone on board and keeping "the most important thing the most important thing." Most important was improving student learning and performance. Fixing core

instruction and elevating the level of instructional delivery resulted in 21-point jumps in standardized testing scores.

To improve instruction, the administrators and faculty members focused on the TEKS. When Principal 3 first arrived at the school, teachers were teaching units that they really wanted to teach, never really looking at the TEKS. The problem was not with what the teachers were teaching. The problem was that some teachers were not teaching students what they would be tested on at the end of the year. They were ‘spinning their wheels,’ according to Principal 3, and getting low results because they were not teaching students what they would be tested on at the end of the year.

Teaching the TEKS is Texas law, not something that the administration wants the teachers to do. When all the teachers understood that teaching the TEKS was law, the real work began, as teaching teams broke down the TEKS, to know exactly what each of the TEKS was asking, to understand how to assess student learning – both summative and formative, and to assure that checkpoints were in place. Planning around the TEKS became the standard, instead of planning around the unit of study. In planning for instruction, teachers then knew that they were required to start with the TEKS, follow up, write the essential questions, write common assessments, and then write the lesson plans. Teachers at the same grade level and subject shared common planning periods in order to complete planning during the school day, leaving the time after school for working with students, instead of with each other. Building common planning time into the school day is difficult because of the size of school but having common planning time improved teacher morale.

Communication. Principal 3 practiced an open-door policy for on-campus communication, which included his administrative team, teachers, staff, and students. He also

worked hard at getting back to people in a timely manner. He reached out to community leaders and media representatives to generate positive stories and messages about the campus and its students. School events to which parents and the surrounding community residents were invited served as a means by which to communicate positive messages about the school and its students.

Relationships. Principal 3 said he believed that positive and open relationships between administrators, students, and teachers were important to the success of the school. He said his door was open to anybody, and he said getting buy-in from teachers took time. The solutions to troubles on the campus when he arrived did not come with overnight solutions. He said that the teachers that were naysayers about his style of leadership and the changes that would be required to improve student performance left the campus for other teaching assignments, while others were open to the changes and welcomed new strategies and the renewed focus on the state-required TEKS. Principal 3 worked hard to keep one message clear in all decision making and teaming opportunities: Students First.

Leadership style. Principal 3 said, first, he did not “call myself an effective leader – yet.” He worked on being a better leader every day. A wise professor once told Principal 3 to hire good people, train them well, and get out of their way. A good leader takes the time to make good hires. Principal 3 made good hires at his large, over-crowded high school, and people naturally wanted to be a part of a winning team. When teaching teams worked hard and saw scores go up, that strengthened morale. Principal 3 explained that a smart leader takes those successful teachers to recruiting fairs to help attract more good people. A second quality for being an effective leader was learning to be a different leader to every person. He compared his leadership to differentiated instruction in the classroom, where each child was treated according to his/her needs and style of learning. He said the same was true for teachers. The leader must

know the teachers and understand what they need to become the best teachers they can be. Third, Principal 3 identified some of his behaviors that may have impacted change since he arrived at the high school. Clarifying that he could only speak of who he was and has been, Principal 3 said he never lies and always gets back to people in a timely manner. He said, “What I say is what I do, and what I do is what I say.” He said when setting priorities, he put his own family first and expected his staff to do the same. His priorities are (1) God, (2) family, and (3) work, and he preached that to his faculty, as well. If a teacher had something urgent come up during the school day with a child, Principal 3 encouraged the teacher to go and be with his/her child, and he found a way for that teacher’s classes to be covered. He emphasized that taking care of the teachers insured that they will take care of the students. The three things he would tell a new principal are to (1) let the handbook be the guide, knowing the policies, knowing the laws, knowing the leader’s accountability; (2) remember that no one works “for” the leader, they work “with” the leader; and (3) stay focused on the reality of public education, where educators must educate every student who walks through the door and parents are sending us their best. A great leader leads from the trenches, not from an ivory tower. A leader should never ask anyone to do something that the leader would not be willing to do himself.

Principal 4

Career path. Principal 4 completed his student teaching and held his first professional teaching assignment at the middle school level. Principal 4 identified two people as important role models. One was an innovative administrator who brought a new concept to the middle school and the other was his supervising teacher for his student teaching experience. The administrator set high standards and inspired him to want to lead a campus under an innovative model, and his supervising teacher later became an administrator and mentor to him.

Principal 4 moved from the classroom to an assistant principal position at a large high school in a major metropolitan-area school district. The principal at the high school was easy-going, yet successful, as the school was a Blue-Ribbon High School. The principal taught him that a principal could be friendly and still be successful. Principal 4's mentor principal had a people-oriented attitude and taught him that a principal can be himself and still have an impact on a school.

Leading a school with a student population of nearly 3,000 students, Principal 4's campus was the eighth campus where he served as either a teacher, an administrator, or both. At each campus, his goal was to study the characters, personalities, and the leaders on the campuses and to take away what he liked about each. He observed other characteristics and thought, "I am never going to do that." All of his experiences brought him to this point, and he emphasized that his leadership was an ongoing self-development process. Principal 4 has been the principal at his high school since its opening.

Quality teachers. Principal 4 personally selected the teachers hired when his campus opened in 2005. In choosing teachers, he sought teachers who believed that every student could succeed and teachers willing to go the extra mile to help students succeed. He asked teachers to embrace the "every student can succeed" philosophy of Dr. William Glasser, the author of *Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom*. Glasser's philosophy included seven caring habits: supporting, encouraging, listening, accepting, trusting, respecting, and negotiating differences. The philosophy rejected what were termed "Seven Deadly Habits," which included criticizing, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing, and bribing – rewarding to control. Interested schools were able to apply to become a Quality School if they were willing to embrace the Glasser (2019) criteria for Quality Schools:

- Relationships are based upon trust and respect, and all discipline problems, not incidents, have been eliminated.
- Total Learning Competency is stressed and an evaluation that is below competence or what is now a “B” has been eliminated. All schooling as defined by Dr. William Glasser has been replaced with useful education.
- All students do some Quality Work each year that is significantly beyond competence. All such work receives an “A” grade or higher, such as an “A+.”
- Students and staff are taught to use Choice Theory in their lives and in their work at school. Parents are encouraged to participate in study groups to become familiar with the ideas of Dr. William Glasser.
- Students do better on state proficiency tests and college entrance examinations. The importance of these tests is emphasized in the school.
- Staff, students, parents and administrators view the school as a joyful place.

Principal 4 sought to hire top educators who were willing to do the work required to successfully open a new school and embrace the Glasser Quality School model of education.

Principal 4 believed a professional teacher who cared about his/her kids and wanted them to succeed would go above and beyond to provide extra time for them, to make those connections, to communicate with parents, to get into the kids’ quality worlds, and to make a difference in their lives. He believed that a lot of personal pride went with being a teacher, and that pride translated to student success and school improvement.

Community buy-in. Community relationships were a priority for Principal 4. The principal made the campus resources available to the neighborhood community. The track and athletic fields on campus were used by a variety of non-school individuals and teams. The

campus cooperated with the San Antonio Food Bank to distribute food to area residents, with members of student clubs and organizations providing the volunteer labor for the food distribution. Principal 4 wanted the community to feel like the school was their school and to take pride in the school, the students, and the students' accomplishments. Teachers were encouraged to speak frequently with parents, and the Parent Teacher Student Association was active on campus. The campus auditorium was busy throughout the year with school and community activities, and the theater department invited the community in for children's theater and a Halloween Haunted House each year. Social media was used to keep the community informed of upcoming events and student activities and accomplishments.

Essential tools. Student success was something Principal 4 wanted engrained in his teachers' DNA. He wanted each year for his school to be better than the last. Principal 4 said that the teachers were fortunate enough to "stand by the stream and watch the students go by" each year. The teachers made their own continuous improvement. Students came in, they grew, then they left. The principal relied on his teachers, and the school's traditions, to make a difference in the lives and the accomplishments of the students while they were there.

The data gathered and studied on student performance were essential tools for school improvement. When the school met the high expectations of the district, state expectations were also met. The student was the top priority, and every decision was based on what was best for the student. The more personalized a teacher could make student improvement, the better. Taking time to talk and listen to the student might change the perspective, to make the underperforming student want to succeed.

Principals in the metropolitan-area school district received student performance data during a "data day," where results were reviewed and studied at a large district meeting

composed of district administrators. The data were then shared with the administrative team and department coordinators on each campus, who then shared the data with teachers. Each teacher learned of student performance on both aggregate and individual levels. In PLCs, grade level teachers studied the data and designed teaching strategies and interventions to overcome low performance areas. The ultimate goal was to help every student succeed, creating overall school improvement.

Principal 4 emphasized the need to treat data with sensitivity. If data were sent out to teachers without the context, they could think that the administrators were judging them. He preferred to approach data as a tool to help everyone figure out where the issues were and where improvement was needed.

Academic interventions. Principal 4 depended on his coordinators to sit down with the department and with individual teachers to discuss data and failure rates. He asked the coordinators to sit down with individuals and to emphasize that this data was very important. If a teacher's failure rate was consistently high, the coordinator worked with the teacher to improve teaching strategies and to discover interventions to help the students improve. The school standard was that a teacher could have no higher than a 10% failure rate. If a teacher had a higher failure rate, the teacher was challenged to self-evaluate and determine things that could be done differently to improve student performance. Part of the coordinator's job was to help the teacher improve, thereby helping his/her students improve their learning and meet the standards of the benchmarks and the end-of-course exams.

Improved discipline. Principal 4 felt strongly that interacting with students and treating them with respect were imperative for good discipline in the classroom and on campus. When students came back from alternative high school or juvenile detention, he talked with them to

frame the experience as a learning experience and an opportunity to change and to grow. He said mistakes were not permanent, if the students were willing to take what they could from the experience and improve.

Behavior guidelines were communicated to the students at the start of the year through assemblies and student announcements. District guidelines published in the student handbook stood as the official discipline guide, though campuses were allowed certain liberties to alter them to fit the campus community and student needs. Behavior guidelines were reinforced throughout the year in announcements broadcast to the entire campus each morning, through teachers, and in one-on-one conferences.

Principal 4 tried to be in the hallways and at activities to interact with students, so that relationships were established in a positive environment and not just when a student was in the office for a violation. Teachers on campus were encouraged to assist with discipline and community control by being in the hallways between classes and by participating in duty assignments at lunch time and before and after school. Between classes, hall monitors and administrators monitored hallway activity. District police officers were on duty every day and during campus events to assure safety for students and guests.

Campus goals. Campus goals began with standardized test scores. Administrators waited for their results and then started the planning process immediately. Results came in late in the year and during summer, and a first step was to get the students who failed to meet the end-of-course standards on the exam during the school year to register for the summer accelerated instruction programs, so that they could retake the tests during the summer administration of the exams. In accelerated instruction, teachers worked with students on specific skills to help them learn what they needed to pass the retake of the exam. The summer program was offered at no

cost to the students, but they were required to invest their time to learn what was missed during the school year and to work to pass the summer administration of the end-of-course tests.

Setting campus goals for an academic year began on “data day” when administrators received the data from the previous year. The data was then scrutinized by campus administrators, who then met with department coordinators well before the school year began. The goals evolved through this process, and a plan was developed for how administrators and coordinators would kick off the school year and what strategies would be used to resolve specific issues.

Continuous improvement was very important to Principal 4. Revisiting where the school or the individual students started was the key to getting better every year. Citing graduation as an example, Principal 4 challenged each year’s seniors to make the current graduation better than the last. He said the school has built accomplishment on traditions, and that foundation was something for the current students to stand on. When another high school opened in the area, the school population shifted because the change in boundaries took many of the economically advantaged families away, leaving the campus to serve a largely economically disadvantaged student population. With the change, administrators and teachers worked hard to help the students believe in themselves and to continue to achieve at a high standard, and the school’s students remained competitive with other, more affluent high schools in the district. The students continued to shine, and the teachers continued to have high expectations. The key factor was to help the entire school community understand that everyone could improve, everyone could learn, and everyone could continue doing well, no matter their backgrounds or economic status.

As an extra step in the improvement process, Principal 4 challenged his administrators to sit down with each of their teachers at progress report time to look at individual students under

their responsibility who were failing. The focus was to find out at progress report time what could be done to improve each student's performance and to determine the next steps before the actual report cards were issued. Questions considered during the meetings with individual teachers included: (1) "Have we called home?" (2) "Have the students come to tutoring?" (3) "Do we need to retest and reteach?";(4) "Do we need a contract with the student right now?" and (5) "What kind of thing is the best bet for this individual to succeed?" In communicating with his administrators and teachers, Principal 4 positioned the individual student approach as the most effective strategy for students in danger of failing.

With this process in place, each failing student had his/her own grade improvement plan. Without a plan, things just kept moving forward at the same pace. Having a plan for each individual student increased the likelihood for that student to succeed. No formula existed that the campus could use year after year because the students changed, and some of the teachers changed. The administrator's role was to assure that teachers were doing everything they could to help students succeed. Sometimes, the teacher-administrator interactions got personal, and the process of meeting with each teacher with failing students required a lot of time, work, and special effort to make the individual improvement plans work. Principal 4's intention was not to have the improvement process become a negative impact on the teachers or on the school community. Instead, he wanted his teachers to take on the personal challenge and to help the students succeed.

Communication. Principal 4 believed that on-going communication with students and teachers made it personal. For students, being around to talk to them, listen to them, and help them made them more likely to respond when performance or behavior issues arose. Principal 4 worked to be around in the hallways and at school events, like football games and dance

competitions, to be known to students. Students remembered when administrators took the time to show up and to show interest in them.

Relationships. Principal 4 maintained that having good relationships with students and letting them know that their teachers and administrators cared about them were imperative to their success and to keeping them in school through graduation. He believed that motivating students to join a club or organization gave them a tie to the school that they cared about. Research showed that students were more likely to graduate if they were actively engaged in a club or organization, beyond their work in the classroom.

Leadership style. Principal 4 said that his leadership style was constantly evolving and was “a work in progress.” The school changed each year, and his leadership style changed to meet the needs of current students, teachers, and administrators. Every year presented a different set of criteria and circumstances. He worked to meet high professional standards, while maintaining a friendly, caring attitude. Being a good leader was an elusive goal for Principal 4. He said, “I am never happy in terms of saying, ‘We are now a successful school.’” Every year presented new challenges and new opportunities to be a better leader.

Principal 5

Career path. Principal 5 was chosen for his position at the metropolitan-area high school campus of more than 1,700 students, when the position unexpectedly became available during the summer. He had applied and was selected for a middle school position and was looking forward to the challenge of transitioning the school from a junior high to a true middle school model. Administrators were planning to use academic teaming and many innovative strategies that were going on at the middle school level at that time. The then district superintendent

recommended Principal 5 for the newly available high school position. He was hired and was still serving in the position 22 years later.

Quality teachers. Principal 5 told teachers that he believed they were the professionals. The role of a teacher was to analyze the data, to plan the instruction, to conduct the instruction, to manage the environment, and to evaluate the progress. The process was one cycle, one circle, one system that repeated itself. Everyone followed the same cycle, and progress guided instruction.

Community buy-in. Community buy-in was built from the administrators' and teachers' recognition that the community paid the salaries of every person who worked at the school. Principal 5 communicated to his teachers that they should always remember who paid their salaries and who they served. The high school was located in one of the lowest-income areas of the city, with small run-down houses all around. Principal 5 said being cognizant of where the students came from each morning was important, as the faculty and staff educated and served the students. Many parents worked two or three jobs to make ends meet, and parental involvement at the high school was difficult. When parents were invited to the school, the experience had been worth their time. The economic circumstances of the area and the students created special circumstances, and the administration, faculty and staff worked to deliver the best instruction possible for the students, to give them the best future opportunities. Student progress was reported to parents at grade level parent nights, where data was presented to show individual and aggregated student progress. The superintendent also allocated funds for a student liaison to facilitate communication with parents.

Essential tools. Essential tools for school improvement included the teachers' expertise and academic knowledge, as well as leadership skills. Principal 5 communicated to his teachers

that he would not tolerate mediocrity. His philosophy was that the students deserved the best education that they could deliver, the best teachers, and the best instruction. He challenged teachers with the question, “Would you want your own child to be taught by you?”

Principal 5 said the classroom climate was also essential to school improvement. He said the teacher created the climate in his/her classroom. If the expectation was for the students to give their best, then the students would rise to the expectation. If the teacher was glad to be there and genuinely glad to see the students and to share knowledge and the day’s lesson, the students would pick up on that energy and attitude every time. If the teacher was tired, unprepared or just did not want to be there, the students would pick up on that, too.

Academic interventions. Principal 5 did not discuss academic interventions, thereby no data is provided here.

Improved discipline. Attendance was a priority goal for Principal 5. The school’s goal was to have at least 94.5% of students in attendance each day. In the previous year, the school achieved 94% attendance on a regular basis, and the goal was raised to 94.5% for the next school year, consistent with Principal 5’s commitment to continuous improvement. Students could only succeed if they were in attendance to receive instruction.

Campus goals. The campus received a mark of distinction in social studies in the previous academic year, and they set the goal to earn two marks of distinction in the succeeding academic year. The focus was on earning the additional mark of distinction in biology. Raising attendance to 94.5% was also an important goal, in addition to student achievement.

In working to meet campus goals, the assistant principals were partners with the principal in running the campus. Assistant principals were assigned to a grade level and were held responsible for their particular grade levels and the teacher and student performances at their

grade levels. Another strategy that led to school improvement was empowering the department chairs and the teachers to make decisions. By example, Principal 5 asked the department chair to interview four or five candidates for an opening in the department and to narrow the field to the top two candidates. The principal would then interview the top two candidates and meet with the department chair and ask him/her which candidate they would choose and why. Only at this point would the principal share his assessment of the candidates, but he would allow the department chair to make the decision because the department chair would be the one to supervise that teacher and to make that new teacher part of the existing department team. The department chair then knew exactly what was needed to mentor the new teacher that came on board. This strategy worked for Principal 5 over time in building solid teams and not having any grievances filed by other teachers. Principal 5 believed he was a successful leader because he encouraged collaboration and empowered department chairs and teachers to make decisions. He was a firm believer that people support what they help build.

In planning for improvement, Principal 5 followed the instructional cycle outlined for his teachers: (1) analyze data, (2) plan instruction, (3) conduct instruction, (4) manage the environment, and (5) evaluate progress. As the principal, he followed the same process he expected of his assistant principals, department chairs, and teachers. He (1) analyzed the school data, (2) created a plan of what the priorities would be for improvement, (3) executed the plan and inspected what he expected, (4) managed the campus environment, and then (5) evaluated the progress.

To improve student performance, the teachers met every nine weeks to review the district instructional calendar and to study the scope and sequence for the curriculum for the next nine-week period. They examined the readiness standards and supporting standards and determined

what they were going to teach. They analyzed the data for student performance for those standards to date, then collaborated to come up with 10 questions on which their instruction would focus for the next three weeks. The teachers wrote common assessments, and everyone knew and bought into what was to be taught and what the students would learn over the next three weeks.

The campus tested students every three weeks to determine where each student was in relationship to the standards. When the teachers created the common assessments, they had buy-in, and the students noticed, and the result was improved learning and improved scores. To facilitate the three-week testing cycle throughout the year, teachers had common planning time, and they met daily to analyze data, plan instruction, and to discuss how they conducted instruction, managed the environment, and evaluated progress.

Communication. Principal 5 had many systems in place to assure that communication was frequent and that essential information was shared between administrators, faculty, parents, and students. He met every afternoon with his executive team members, who were designated to assist with certain decisions. He presented problems and listened for their input, as problems were solved as a team. Communication with teachers was often one-on-one, as the principal visited classrooms frequently and preferred to be in the hallways before and after school. His communication with students was also one-on-one, as Principal 5 preferred eating lunch in the cafeteria with students to keep close to their concerns and to have the opportunity to encourage students. He also visited classrooms before testing days to encourage students and to motivate them to do their best. He said he preferred communicating with students in the smaller classroom environment, compared to a student assembly format. Communication with parents happened during frequent open houses and grade level events when parents were invited to campus. The

superintendent also provided funding for a parent liaison, who works with administrators and teachers in communicating with parents. Principal 5 believed that when one becomes a principal, the ego must be left in the parking lot, and the principal must trust the people that he puts in power. Principal 5 was as close to his departments chairs as he was to his assistant principals, because he made communication a priority.

Relationships. Principal 5 built relationships with his assistant principals, department chairs, and teachers by meeting with them regularly and by trusting them to make decisions. He was in their classrooms often to talk with them and to check-in with the students. He believed in management by walking around. He built relationships with students by being outside in the morning, in the hallways during the day, and in the lunchroom during lunch. Principal 5 preferred having lunch with students to eating with the teachers. He learned a lot about the students and their concerns by visiting with them over lunch. He maintained relationships with parents by being aware of their lifestyles and their needs and by communicating frequently. Principal 5 made good use of parents' time when they were invited to campus, and he made it a priority to take care of the parents' children, recognizing that they loved their children and were giving their best for their children.

Leadership style. Principal 5 described his leadership style as MBWA – Management by Walking Around. Instead of people coming to his office, he went out to them. He liked to visit classrooms, be in the hallways, and sit in the cafeteria for lunch with students. His leadership style was hands-on, and he believed in collaboration. Principal 5 sat down with his executive team every afternoon to solve problems and plan for improvement. The executive team was made up of his assistant principals, the lead counselor, and the instructional coach, and he relied on them to help lead the school. When he took a problem to them, they knew he wanted to listen

to their perspectives and advice and was willing to learn from them. The executive team sometimes took some risks, and if an idea failed, then they tried something different the next time. Principal 5 was not afraid of failure, as the school tried various strategies to improve the school and student performance.

Principal 6

Career path. Principal 6 started her career in human resources in the retail sector. In the early 1990s, she earned a Master of Arts degree in history. After earning her master's degree, she entered the field of education, where she had served for 18 years at the time of the interview. Her education career included nine years as a history teacher and nine years as an administrator. Her administrative positions included two years as academic dean and two years as a vice principal at an affluent metropolitan-area high school of more than 3,200 students and nearly five years as principal at a low-income, Title I high school in in the same school district, with approximately 2,700 students. Principal 6 was moved to the Title I high school to change the climate of the high school and to improve the graduation rate. In 2006, when she arrived at the low-income high school, only 75% of the students were completing high school, and the school had been labeled as a "dropout factory" by a widely read education publication. After her turnaround work at the low-income high school, Principal 6 also served two years as a central office executive director of secondary instruction.

Quality teachers. Principal 6 personally selected the team of administrators and department coordinators that were charged to change the school climate and improve the completion rate at the Title I high school. People who currently held administrative positions at the school were encouraged to apply, but continued employment at the school was not guaranteed. With the support of the district superintendent and the school board, and with the

expectation of a turnaround school environment, Principal 6 chose a new administrative team of seven, with only two of the existing administrators rehired to continue at the school. She also personally selected the department coordinators, who served on the leadership team, with the seven administrators and a group of school counselors. Individuals who were selected to help with the turnaround of the low-income high school were required to commit to the success of all students, especially those who were not on track to graduate in four years. Professionals who joined the turnaround team were required to accept that “we do not have failures.” The culture was all about not only changing what the students thought about themselves, but about what every single person, including the leadership team and each of the teachers, thought about whether a student had learned or not. The quality of teaching had to be first class and the commitment of each teacher had to manifest itself in a willingness to teach and reteach until the students had succeeded. Principal 6 said the philosophy was that no grade was final until the student had graduated. Every person on the team was required to work long and hard and to do what it took to help students learn and to succeed. Some teachers were required to change the subjects or levels they had been teaching for many years, and many at first were reluctant to make the required changes. After the first year of the turnaround, many teachers chose to retire or leave for other assignments within the district. Only the best and the most committed teachers remained.

Community buy-in. The focus for the turnaround school environment was on the students and their success. Principal 6 focused on relationships with parents and the community at large by answering phone calls and questions and by working with the school’s PTA. The majority of her time was invested on campus, working with the administrative team, the teachers, and the students to change the culture from one of failure to one where every student believed he/she

could succeed with the help of teachers and special programs that helped them dig themselves out of a system of failure. Principal 6 said the support of the superintendent and the school board was essential to bringing the leadership and teachers on board at the start, and parents had few complaints for a school that was spending extra time to help their children succeed and complete high school. The only registered complaint was that administrators were not in their offices when parents or community members called during the day, when they were in the hallways and classrooms interacting with students and teachers.

Essential tools. Essential tools for school improvement included an expanded administrative team, new department coordinators, and teachers who were willing to do the work required to substantially raise a completion rate of 75% and to change a culture of failure to a culture of success. Extra teachers were needed to work in credit retrieval, which was active every period of the school day to help students recover the learning and the credits that had been lost in years past. Students received almost one-on-one tutoring until they relearned and re-earned the credits for the classes they had failed in the past. Teachers worked in Professional Learning Communities to build effective lessons, using data to determine what the students had left to achieve. Teachers were required to build common assessments and to look at new and varied ways of assessing mastery of the material, as required by state standards for each course.

Academic interventions. When Principal 6 was selected to be principal for the Title 1 high school, only 79% of students were completing high school. Some students were taking a ninth-grade course for the third time. When Principal 6 and the academic dean studied the data, they learned that students earned lower grades in courses, each time the course was retaken. By example, she said that if students failed Algebra 1 with a 63% the first year, the second time they failed the course the score would be 58% and 45% the third year. They were challenged to find

another way for students to succeed in a past course, without having the student sit through the same class two and three times, which was obviously not helping the students succeed.

The every-period credit retrieval class was established to allow students time during the school day to work on one course at a time, until that learning was recovered and the credit for the class was earned. Principal 6 supplied faculty members who were experts in the subject areas to provide nearly one-on-one tutoring to the students during each credit retrieval period. Students took a pre-test that identified which standards the student had not yet mastered, and the student worked on those standards, one subject at a time, until the post test was completed with a passing score and the student had demonstrated mastery of the material. The leadership team and faculty stayed engaged with students during the credit recovery process, student by student. Students worked during the credit retrieval class period, on Saturday mornings, and after school until they completed the course work, demonstrated mastery, and received credit for the course. The school supplied late school buses on weekdays to make it possible for the students to work after school, and a Saturday morning bus was provided to take students to and from campus to work in credit retrieval. Once actively engaged, students could make up work for a course and earn the credit in about three months and then move on to the next course. The students made up two or three credits a year, and when they did these two years in a row, they made up an entire grade level.

As students experienced success, they became more engaged in the learning in the classrooms for their current classes. Teachers were challenged to provide learning activities that actively engaged their students and kept them motivated to learn and to succeed. The leadership team studied the data and challenged teachers to closely examine how they were assessing mastery. Principal 6 and the other leaders studied grade books on an ongoing basis and had long discussions with teachers about the way they were grading and assessing mastery. By example, if

students were passing the common assessments with an 80, but they received a 50 on a notebook test that assessed the student's organization, the leadership team challenged the teacher to think about if the 50 should count. The question became, "Should organization be part of the grade?" If a student earned an 80 on a unit test in biology, administrators questioned whether grade points should be taken off because the student had not yet matured in his/her thinking enough to be organized. Instead, bonus points could be awarded for superior organization that demonstrated clear lines of thinking. The culture of the school had to change for students to succeed, and that change required a major mind shift in how teachers thought about education, the delivery of that education, and how they assessed mastery.

Improved discipline. Students were held to a higher standard under the new administration. Attendance was closely monitored and followed up daily, with calls home and activity on campus closely monitored to assure that students were not skipping classes once they were there. Late arrival to class at first was a major issue that caused lost instructional time, and the school set up tardy stations, where students were required to go to obtain a pass to class if they did not arrive on time. Teachers locked their doors at the start of class, so that instruction could start on time. Tardy stations were placed in each building on the multiple-building campus to avoid extra time lost when students were required to obtain a tardy pass to get into class. Late arrivals were electronically tracked under this system, and when students exceeded three tardy occurrences in a week, they were required to attend Detention Hall, which required them to lose half of their lunch period. Students soon arrived at class on time because they did not want to lose half of the only free time they had during the school day.

Student behavior, overall, steadily improved as students experienced a taste of success and became more engaged in classroom learning. The environment was not perfect, as

administrators continued to deal with drug sales and conflicts on campus, but the behavior of students, overall, improved. The leadership team continuously observed and challenged teachers to keep classroom learning active and engaging for students. If students were skipping a class, the teacher was challenged to ask, “Why do they not want to be in my class?” The department coordinators and other teacher in the Professional Learning Communities helped teachers to change instructional strategies to actively engage their students.

Campus goals. Before the school year began for the first turnaround year, the leadership team met to establish goals for the academic year. The goal-setting process started with the data. Issues and problem areas were identified, and then the team worked together to identify those areas that had the greatest potential for improvement. They identified the possible barriers to the desired improvement and how to alleviate the barriers. If the issue that needed improvement was something they could do nothing about, they set it aside and moved on to the areas where they believed they could impact change. First and foremost, everyone who worked at the low-income high school that had been termed a “drop out factory,” would be focused on improving the completion rate that was at that time 75%. Other goals focused on students’ attendance, students’ on-time arrival to class, how teachers thought about and measured mastery, classroom engagement, credit recovery, and state standardized test scores.

Principal 6 identified the Professional Learning Community as the number one strategy put in place at the low-income high school that was charged with improving the completion rate. “If you can get teachers to sit down and talk in a subject level group about learning, you have changed the world.” If the teachers were not meeting to discuss why the whole group of students just did not study for the exam, but, instead, were talking about the data and why students missed

that one particular objective or that one question, improvement happened. If teachers were looking at the data and analyzing learning, then they were doing everything that was right.

Through the Professional Learning Communities, teachers learned to teach similarly, based on those strategies that worked best for most students, while still differentiating learning to meet the needs of those individuals who learned differently. They developed formative and summative assessments that measured mastery and worked together to improve student success and to work toward an improved completion rate.

Principal 6 said that getting students to pass could be easy, if the school philosophy was just to not fail any student, but the students still must pass the standardized tests. She said just passing students does not improve learning, and the Professional Learning Communities provided a forum where teachers held each other accountable for student and school improvement.

The creation of a “Ninth Grade House” was a concept designed to get freshmen off to the right start for their years in high school. The leadership team put the house together in a few short weeks, and the concept made a significant difference in achievement for the first-year high school students. The freshmen teachers had one common planning period, which became their PLC. Teachers worked together to find solutions for the issues that the freshmen faced in their transition to high school. The students’ classes were scheduled in the same building or areas of buildings to keep them together for their core classes – English, Algebra 1, Geography, and Science. The best teachers were selected to teach the freshmen or to teach students who were struggling. In the first semester of the Ninth Grade House, about one-half of the teachers said they would never teach freshmen again, but, by the end of the year, they changed their minds, when they saw how well the students did.

Another strategy that contributed greatly to school improvement was a method Principal 6 utilized when teaching at the university level called “progressive grading.” With this concept, a student turned in a major paper or product that had a complete rubric. The teacher graded the project or paper, keeping faithful to the rubric. If a student failed, the teacher discussed the assignment with the student and walked through every step of the rubric. The student then knew exactly what was required to improve the paper or the project. The student turned in the revised paper or project, with the first draft attached. The teacher graded the project again, and perhaps the grade was a C+. The student received the rubric and feedback from the teacher again, and the student could work to improve the project or paper one more time. Using the progressive grading methodology, students continued to learn and to improve their grades. In addition to the improved learning and grades, hope returned to the classroom when students knew they had more than one opportunity to succeed.

Principal 6 said that in the changed culture, teachers were asked not to consider an assignment absolutely over until the student graduated. The only way a student could fail was to walk away and never come back. The new culture, which included engaging classroom instruction, working with students one-on-one in credit retrieval, progressive grading, Professional Learning Communities, and intentional communication contributed to moving the completion rate from 75% in 2006 to 94.5% in 2011.

Communication. Principal 6 encouraged communication by meeting two or three times weekly with the administrators and at least twice monthly with the larger leadership team that included the department coordinators and the counselors. The meetings occurred more frequently in the beginning of the school year, and the frequency leveled out as the school’s new norms and

standards became established. Administrators met at 7:30 a.m. to allow them to be in the hallways and communicating with students when students arrived on campus.

Principal 6 chose to meet with faculty members in smaller groups, holding a faculty meeting each period of the day when teachers could attend during their conference periods. Small faculty meetings held throughout the day meant that teachers met together in cross departmental groups and were able to discuss solutions to problems that were brought to the table, instead of faculty meetings that gave outliers a stage on which to present their dissatisfaction with the new culture and the additional work required of teachers or their dissatisfaction with new course assignments. Principal 6 wanted to keep progress moving forward and preferred to discuss objections and dissatisfaction in a private setting. The only all-faculty meetings were at the start and the closing of the academic year, when goals were reviewed and accomplishments were celebrated.

Communication with students was improved when administrators were in the hallways between every class to communicate with students and to check in with them informally about their progress. Every member of the leadership team made it their business to know students and to follow the students who were working to retrieve credit and get back on track to graduate.

Between teachers and within departments, communication was improved as teachers met at least weekly in Professional Learning Communities to discuss common goals. Teachers met to analyze data, create common assessments, develop improved teaching strategies, and discuss student achievement.

Relationships. Principal 6 established relationships with her administrators, counselors, and department coordinators by meeting with them frequently and keeping communication between meetings open and frequent. Her communication style was honest, and she emphasized

that all decisions must be made based on what was best for the students and their greatest opportunities to learn and to graduate. Administrators built relationships with teachers by being in the hallways between classes, by doing their best to supply teachers the resources they needed in their classrooms, and by making frequent visits to classrooms.

The PLCs facilitated frequent and improved communication and collaboration among teachers in the same departments and who taught the same subjects and grade levels. The PLCs provided a forum for data analysis, the development of learning strategies, the resolution of problems, and the improvement of common assessments. Teachers brought final assessment results to the PLC meetings, compared results, looked at tests item by item, and intentionally improved instruction based on the information that was shared.

Leadership style. Principal 6 said the improvement in the low-income school's completion rate from 75% to 94.5% during her tenure can be attributed to the leadership team and teachers who made it happen. "I put together a team of people who raised the completion rate. I did not raise it, but I put together a team of people."

Principal 6 knew philosophically that students had to realize their own success, and, if they did, that success would make them work for the next level. She said she knew the hard work would be for teenagers and what she was most proud of was that she and her team, together, put a system together that would take students who had consistently failed to an experience of success.

Summary of the Description of the Data

The Description of the Data section of this chapter provides a written synopsis of the interviews with each principal and offers the reader the opportunity to reflect on the data and the common themes that emerged from the data. Further, the individual summaries provide the

essence of each principal's approach to leadership and school improvement. While common themes emerge from the data, no two approaches to school improvement are exactly the same, as each principal's perspective is impacted by the principal's education, past career experiences, tacit and explicit values systems, and the demographics of the campus which the principal served. By reading the interview summaries, the reader gains an understanding of the principals' leadership styles, specifically as the styles pertain to school improvement.

One other category that was described by Principal 1 only is worthy of consideration, regarding the motivation of students to learn and to improve their learning over the year before. Principal 1 spoke to showing students' life experiences outside of the classroom and outside of the neighborhoods, so that they could envision a different future. Field trips, competitions, guest speakers, and tours of different parts of the city gave students a visual image of another life and gave them another reason to work toward better scores and, ultimately, high school graduation.

Research Findings: Common Themes

From the research data, five common themes emerged as strategies and behaviors that high school principals identified as leading to school improvement. They include: (1) hiring and developing quality teachers, with the subthemes of essential tools and accountability; (2) setting and accomplishing campus goals; (3) building relationships, with the subtheme of community buy-in; (4) employing communication tactics, and (5) building effective teams. The common themes and subthemes that emerged are described in the findings.

Common Theme 1: Hiring and developing quality teachers. All principals identified hiring and developing quality teachers as a leadership strategy that was essential to school improvement. Hiring teachers who cared and who were willing to offer the students multiple opportunities to succeed were described as effective strategies for overall school improvement.

The selection of teachers who offered the students hope and who were willing to do the hard work to help students succeed were described as key to student success and campus improvement. Principal 4 summarized:

A professional teacher who cares about their kids and wants them to succeed will go above and beyond to provide extra time for them, to make those connections, to communicate with parents, to get into the kids' 'quality worlds,' and to make a difference in their lives.

Of paramount importance was the selection of teachers who understood that the role of the teacher was to analyze the data, plan the instruction, conduct the instruction, manage the environment, evaluate the progress, and then to begin the process all over again to take the students to the next level. Principal 5 said:

I always tell the teachers that the teacher is the pro. That's the bottom line. I also tell teachers that their role is to analyze the data, to plan the instruction, to conduct the instruction, to manage the environment, and then to evaluate the progress. It's one cycle, one circle.

Teachers described as quality teachers were willing to differentiate instruction and allow students to demonstrate mastery in many ways. Differentiated instruction recognized that all students did not learn in the same way and that the curriculum must be designed to meet the students where they are in their life experiences, learning styles, and cognitive and social development. Principal 6 said that, for her campus that was challenged to improve a 79% graduation rate, teachers had to change the way they thought about how they measured mastery and had to be committed to helping every child succeed, no matter how far behind they were. "The only way a kid could fail is to walk away and never come back, because we kept after every single kid." Over the principal's tenure at the campus, the graduation rate improved from 79% to 94.5%.

As described in the data, quality teachers understood that, in Texas, teaching the standards established in the TEKS was paramount to quality instruction and that adherence to the TEKS as the foundation of each subject of the required curriculum was not optional, but required, of every teacher and every school in the state. The best lesson plans were built around the TEKS, and quality teachers assured that each student achieved mastery of each TEKS objective, as set forth by the TEA.

Subtheme: Essential tools. The principals said giving teachers the essential tools they need to help students succeed also contributed to school improvement. The principals described the essential tools to include the ready availability of the data to assess student progress at both the benchmark and testing levels. Another essential tool for successful teaching and learning included common planning periods for grade level teachers that afforded teachers time to plan lessons, interventions, differentiated instruction, and common assessments. Because the demands were great and time was limited, providing teachers ongoing professional development and training was also identified as key to developing the best teachers, as they strived to meet ever-changing standards and testing thresholds.

Subtheme: Teacher accountability. Another subtheme to hiring and developing quality teachers presented by the principals was teacher accountability. All principals noted that they held teachers accountable for student success, which included their students' test scores, failure rates, and interventions. Teachers were expected to give students multiple opportunities to succeed and multiple ways to show mastery of the standards set forth in the TEKS. Principal 3 noted, "Teachers and coordinators must work together to find solutions for poor student performance and fix it." Holding teachers accountable included making sure that teachers were teaching, based on the TEKS established by the TEA. Principal 3 said teachers were required to

“start with the TEK [*sic*], follow up, write essential questions, write common assessments, and plan lessons from there.”

Describing teacher accountability, Principal 5, who led an inner-city campus, said he held his teachers accountable and was very honest with them:

It’s easy to go home to our nice homes. The school is surrounded by very small, impoverished homes. I remind teachers that these people pay our salaries. Some of the parents are working two jobs to pay the taxes that pay our salaries. They are sending us their best, and they deserve our best. I ask my teachers, ‘Would you want your child to be taught by you?’ I also ask myself, ‘What kind of principal do I want for my grandkids? What kind of teacher?’ That’s accountability.

Campus Accountability Reports (CARs) were also used by some districts to evaluate performance by campus, according to Principal 6. The CAR score appeared on the principals’ annual performance evaluations, though the evaluation measured performance of administrators, teachers, and students and not just the performance of the principal. The report compared high school campuses with other high schools in the district and to other high schools in the state. Performance ratings included attendance, graduation/completion rates, student test scores, performance of subgroups, and more. Principal 6 noted that the CAR no longer gave credit to schools for General Education Development (GED) completions, though the GED was the best choice for some students. The principals said everyone who works on a high school campus was responsible for campus performance and contributed to school improvement.

Common Theme 2: Setting and accomplishing campus goals. While the goal-setting process differed from campus to campus, all principals identified goal setting as imperative for school improvement. Goals were based on data from a variety of sources and included test scores, academic performance, school climate, attendance, communication, parent involvement, budget, student behavior and discipline, and completion rate. Principal 4’s district holds a data day each summer with key administrators, taking time to look closely at the data and how

campus performances compare with other high schools in the district and in the state. “We come away with a sense of what we need to do, what our goals are, how we are going to accomplish our objectives, what the plan is for improvement,” Principal 4 said.

Three principals worked with their administrative teams to set the goals for the year. Principal 2 used a bottom-up strategy for improvement planning and goal setting, with each department working with the department chair to build SMART goals to address areas in need of improvement. In using the SMART goal strategy, the department teams focused on making goals Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely. Principal 2 said the goals were revisited periodically, giving teachers, department chairs, and administrators an opportunity to celebrate successes and, when goals were not met, to ask the question, “What are we going to do about it?” Teams worked together to solve problems and create strategies to meet their goals.

Principal 1 said that every person on campus was required to know the campus goals and to be able to articulate them when asked. “Campus goals are huge. It’s an expectation,” he said. At the first meeting of the year, Principal 1 said he gave each teacher and administrator an index card and asked them to write down the campus goals. If they did not know them, they did after that meeting. “We keep it very simple. We have three campus goals, and we maintain those goals,” Principal 1 said. The top-of-mind awareness kept the goals clearly in focus until all goals were met. Principal 6 emphasized that the most improvement occurred at the campus when the administrative team studied the data and determined what things they could do nothing about and focused on what they could change. That focus made it possible to turn the campus from a low achieving “drop-out factory” to a school with a 94.5% completion rate in only three years. Principal 1 emphasized that the best goals are maintained over time, instead of changing them

each year. Most school improvement goals required more than a one-year effort and keeping goals consistent gave everyone the focus required to make a difference in students' lives.

Common Theme 3: Building relationships. All principals cited building relationships as essential to school improvement. Relationships named included relationships with the administrative leadership team, teachers, students, parents, and the community at large. Good relationships with the administrative leadership team were important because they are the people that help run the daily operations of the school. Those relationships could be the difference between effective collaboration and leadership dissonance. Vice principals and assistant principals were partners in leading the multiple facets of a campus, and school improvement required that the team members all worked together for the common good of the student. Keeping students in the center of every decision was cited as most effective in achieving school improvement.

The relationships between teachers and students were identified as critical to learning and school improvement. Principals saw their roles as facilitators of the teacher-student relationships. Facilitation included setting expectations, role modeling, and giving teachers the tools they needed to do their jobs. Principal 3 explained the importance of the teacher-student relationships:

I know fully that my job is to fine-tune the interaction between students and teachers. If we can work on curriculum instruction and deliver high-yield instruction to students, that takes care of everything else because a well-engaged classroom leaves no time for misbehaviors and leaves no time for kids not doing their work.

Characteristics of healthy teacher-student relationships included showing mutual respect, knowing students by name, establishing well-engaged classrooms, and offering differentiated instruction to meet the different learning needs of students. Showing interest in and attending student games and events were also identified as important to the teacher-student relationships. "Kids will do anything for you if they know you care," Principal 1 explained.

Establishing relationships with parents was also an effective strategy for school improvement, along with the involvement of parents in their students' learning and other school experiences. The principals cited keeping parents informed and inviting them to campus to be a part of the educational process as effective in achieving improved student performance and overall school improvement. Campuses held open houses to involve parents and used social media for frequent updates. Principal 6 noted that positive phone calls to inform parents of student improvement were as effective, or more effective, than the phone calls informing parents about the need for improvement or about resources available to help the students improve.

Subtheme: Community buy-in. Relationships with the community-at-large were also identified as effective in achieving and sustaining school improvement. Principal 1, whose campus was located in a low-income area, invested a significant amount of personal time building relationships within the community, including relationships with churches, government officials, service clubs, the chamber of commerce, and people who lived in the school neighborhood. For example, the principal invited clergy to campus and walked around the halls with them talking to students, to show the students that the relationships within the community were interconnected and that the adults in their lives knew each other and would hold them accountable for their actions. Inviting government officials to campus and visiting them in their city offices provided the opportunity to showcase student accomplishments and to show the needs of the school first hand. The relationships with government officials sometimes resulted in better allocation of resources, donations to the school, and safer school zones, through painting and signage projects.

Principal 1 joined and attended service club meetings as another means of touting student achievement, school improvement, and the needs of the school and the students. These

relationships resulted in donations of school supplies and equipment, as well as a mentoring program, matching students with service club members. Relationships with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce resulted in scholarship sponsorships for students on campus. Members of the churches, service clubs, and chambers of commerce also came to campus as guest speakers to expand students' knowledge of career opportunities available to them. A neighborhood fair brought area residents to the school campus, fostering positive relationships between administrators, teachers, students, and the neighborhood community. The principal's goal was to have the campus community feel like the school was "their school" and to support the school – in good times and in bad. The school that was the "community hub" included all aspects of the community, yielding support and resources for students and a positive campus climate.

Common Theme 4: Employing communication tactics. Employing communication tactics was effective in supporting school improvement and for maintaining positive relationships. In communication, a tactic is an action of strategy carefully planned to achieve a specific end. Principals explained that communication with all the campus' stakeholders was important, including communication with administrative teams, department coordinators, teachers, students, parents, and the community at large. Assigning individuals to oversee communication, or to be in charge of the communication, was also important to assure that communication did not fall by the wayside, as the academic year became increasingly busy. The principals identified a variety of communication vehicles, including phone calls, recorded call outs, emails, website postings, social media, electronic signs, open houses, newsletters, meetings, parent conferences, intercom announcements, and columns in the student newspaper.

Teachers were encouraged to communicate with parents frequently about student performance and attendance, with telephone and email as common types of communication with

parents. Principals cited their own need to communicate directly with students, with the topics of communication ranging from student accomplishment to discipline to what was going on in their lives. Principal 5 visited classrooms before standardized testing to motivate students to do their best. He challenges them to do better than students at similar high schools and gives them real-life examples of why they need to learn the information and do well on the test. “That’s how I motivate them. I like to go into the classrooms and talk to them. I enjoy that, because at an assembly, you’re going to lose the effect.” Common leadership behaviors for school improvement were the visibility of the leaders in the hallways when students were present and consistent, frequent communication. While most principals spoke of their presence in the hallways and at events, Principal 5 said that he chose to eat lunch with the students in the cafeteria every day to learn more about them and what concerns them.

Common Theme 5: Building effective teams. The principals all identified building effective teams as essential to school improvement. Leadership teams were composed of department coordinators and the administrative teams of principals, vice principals, assistant principals, and academic deans. On one campus, a parent liaison was also a part of the administrative team. Most activities and decisions were made through teamwork and collaboration, with the frequency of meetings varying from campus to campus. Strategic teams were developed to solve specific problems and to identify strategies for helping struggling students master skills and pass exams required for graduation. “Everyone on the campus must work together for the benefit of the students. Students must come first,” Principal 3 said. Teams met frequently and over different time periods, depending on the needs being addressed and the amount of time and data required to assess progress. Principals met with their administrative teams each week, and one principal met daily with the administrative team. The principal who

was sent to the campus to build a “turn-around team” had two teams that met consistently to study data, evaluate progress, and build strategy. The administrative team met twice weekly, and the larger team, which included coordinators of core-subject departments and school counselors met at least twice each month and sometimes more often. The core-subject departments included the state-tested subjects of English/Reading, Math, History/Social Studies, and Science. A third team that included all department coordinators, including electives and sports, met at least monthly to discuss how they could support the academic achievement of struggling students. The principal said the progress of struggling or failing students was monitored for each individual student, and all teachers were held accountable for the students’ success. The principal said the teachers were challenged to find new ways for students to show mastery, and formative assignments and summative assessments were closely monitored. The teams studied what strategies were working with students and found ways for other teachers to emulate those teaching strategies to maximize student success on the campus once described as a “drop-out factory.”

All principals identified PLCs as essential teams for school improvement. The PLCs brought grade level teachers together to plan and create meaningful and engaging instruction, plan interventions for struggling students, write common assessments, and study data that revealed student accomplishment and school improvement. The purpose of the PLCs was to assure all students learned and mastered the required knowledge and skills, through teacher collaboration and professional learning. The principals identified common planning time and learning resources as essential tools for the PLCs to succeed, which would then lead to student success and school improvement. Principal 3 provided time for his teachers to meet during the day.

We created common planning periods so all teachers ... all English 1 teachers are off the same period, and they're able to plan during the day. That really helped morale because teachers realized they did not have to stay until six o'clock to plan ... and we can now devote time in the afternoon to tutoring kids, rather than to working with each other.

For the principals in the study, the common focus was what was best for the student and the strategies that would lead to the success of each individual student.

Summary of Research Findings: Common Themes

This chapter described the qualitative analysis process, a detailed profile of each principal's interview data by categories, and the research findings. As the public high school principals, whose campuses were identified for achieving school improvement, described leadership strategies and behaviors they perceived to be most effective in achieving school improvement, five common themes emerged. Described in detail above, the common themes included (1) hiring and developing quality teachers, (2) setting and accomplishing campus goals, (3) building relationships, (4) employing communication tactics, and (5) building effective teams. These five themes emerged as primary contributors to school improvement for the six campuses and their principals who were included in the study. Subthemes to two of the major categories also emerged and contributed to the research findings. For hiring and developing quality teachers, the subthemes of essential tools and accountability were important to the research outcome. For building relationships, the subtheme of community buy-in was also of importance in the research findings. All of these, together, contributed to the preliminary theory grounded in the data and the school improvement model presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Interpretation of Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusions

In qualitative research, constructivism is a systematic, subjective approach to academic inquiry that is used to describe life experiences and to give them meaning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Constructivism was clearly the approach of this study. As described in Chapter 1, the purpose of this research was to explore the leadership of high school principals whose schools were identified by the researcher as achieving school improvement and to discover which behaviors and strategies the principals perceived to be most effective in attaining school improvement. Using the constructivist approach, the researcher interpreted the responses of the six participating principals.

Social constructivists maintain that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work, and their meanings are varied and multiple (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Consistent with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) description, the school improvement leadership experiences of the principals were multiple and varied. The researcher relied on the participants' perceptions of their leadership experiences on their respective campuses and the impact they perceived their leadership behaviors and strategies had in achieving school improvement. In the constructivist school of thought, no predetermined theory is presented or tested. In this study, the meaning is constructed through coding, theoretical sampling, and careful analysis of the data. Because of the time that elapsed over the course of this study, the researcher contacted the participating principals to verify that the data were sustainable over time, and those who responded confirmed that the data were accurate and offered no additions or changes to the data. This chapter will include a discussion of the central research questions and how the study answers those questions, a methodology review, a discussion of the common themes and subthemes, a discussion of how the theoretical framework and literature relate to the findings,

and a discussion of the meaning of the themes in the context of the preliminary grounded theory and school improvement model that emerged from the data.

Central Research Questions

Central research questions that guided the study were: (1) How do public high school principals, whose campuses are identified by the researcher for school improvement, describe their leadership? and (2) Which of their leadership behaviors and strategies do the public high principals perceive to be most effective in achieving the desired school improvement?

The researcher sought to learn and to understand the principals' leadership experiences and the behaviors and strategies that they perceived to be most effective in attaining school improvement. Five common themes were identified, based on the converging perspectives of the participants, including hiring and developing quality teachers, setting and accomplishing campus goals, building relationships, employing communication tactics, and building effective teams. In identifying these common themes through coding and analysis, the focus remained on the principals' perceptions and life experiences in achieving school improvement on their campuses.

As the study began, the researcher assumed that the study would be more complete with principal participants from different school districts because the experiences of principals from the same district would be too similar and would limit the study's results. As the study unfolded, this assumption was proven inaccurate. Each principal described unique experiences, even within the same school district, because the communities that they served varied greatly, as did their student populations. Though not by design, five of the six principals served economically disadvantaged schools. That is, more than 50% of the school's students were economically disadvantaged.

The paradigm with which the research was conducted included the perception that school improvement based on improved standardized test scores signaled a successful leader, and the researcher set out to learn what behaviors and strategies those successful leaders perceived to be most effective in achieving school improvement. The data revealed, instead, that improvement is achieved by an entire school community. The leader cannot do it alone. As Principal 1 clearly stated, “Leadership is not a one-person job.” The data showed that the principal’s role is as the facilitator of teams of people who lead the school to improvement and that the common themes are all part of a school culture that supports improvement and student achievement. This finding is not what the researcher expected to be the outcome of the study.

International speaker and scholar Sergiovanni (2001, 2004) presented that school improvement could be most impacted by focusing on the knowledge and skills of the teachers. Helping teachers get better at standards, assessments, alignment, data aggregation and disaggregation, and development of interventions would lead to school improvement, according to Sergiovanni (2001). Later, his leadership teachings included improving schools by building collaborative cultures (Sergiovanni, 2007). He held that organizational competence, not individual practice, would make schools better and would begin to link a culture of mutual obligation, accountability, and commitment among all professionals working on campus. Sergiovanni (2007) held that school improvement and increased student achievement occurred to the greatest extent when the principal leaders focused on building a school culture that emphasized community, shared values, traditions, meanings, and purposes.

The findings of this study mirror Sergiovanni’s added perceptions in that the researcher anticipated the discovery of a group of leaders’ behaviors and strategies that would be most effective in achieving school improvement. Instead, the principals described strategies that were

undertaken and delivered by teams of people and facilitated by the principals. Additionally, the data showed that campus cultures in which school improvement occurred supported the common themes: hiring and developing quality teachers, setting and accomplishing campus goals, building relationships, employing communication tactics, and building effective teams.

Methodology Review

Study selection. The researcher chose to study leadership and school improvement because of her lifelong interest in learning and education. The increased academic, public, media, and governmental interest in school improvement, student performance, and accountability, combined with the researcher's study of organizational leadership, ignited her interest in how principal leaders impact school improvement.

Methodology selection. The constructivist grounded theory methodology was chosen for this study because the inductive methodology was best suited to the intent of the study. The flexibility of the constructed grounded theory data analysis process was also a sound choice for this study. The use of the constant comparative process kept the researcher involved with the data throughout the study. The thorough analysis of the data through initial and focused coding began to lead the researcher to the school leadership model that eventually emerged from the study, and memo writing provided additional clarity. Though the grounded theory was localized and dealt only with the real-world experiences of the Texas high school principals interviewed, the model that emerged may be useful to other principals who seek school improvement. The constructivist grounded theory methodology was selected because a theory or model derived from the data would potentially have more implications for daily practice.

Study Participants

Six of eight public high school principals who responded to the invitation to participate in the study were interviewed in their respective offices and represented four different school districts in the metropolitan area surrounding the university where the researcher was pursuing her doctoral degree. Two principals who had originally responded positively for an interview were not available to participate in the study. The participating principals were leaders of high schools with student populations greater than 1,200, and the campuses showed improvement in the TAKS Campus Group Scores for All Tests for the period 2009-2011, as reported by the TEA (2009a, 2010a, 2011) and demonstrated continuous improvement for the STAAR All Test Scores for the period 2013-2015 (TEA, 2013, 2014, 2015).

During the extended time over which this study was conducted, the TEA transitioned from the TAKS standardized testing model to the STAAR student standardized testing model. Because the researcher used school improvement data to select participants at the start of the study, the researcher took steps to confirm continued school improvement with the new testing model. The researcher verified that schools from which the principals were selected all continued to show improvement under the new testing standards. All six campuses continued to show annual improvement. The researcher noted that the category name “All Tests” used in the TAKS model was changed to “All Subjects” in the STAAR model. The selection criterion was used only to identify Texas principals qualified to share information about effective leadership behaviors and strategies that lead to school improvement, and, though the selection instrument changed over the extended time period of the study, each principal’s school continued to show improvement, thereby supporting the original selection criteria.

Interview Process

Using the interview guide (Appendix E), the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with each principal. Interviews were audio recorded for later transcription, and the researcher also recorded notes during the interviews and noted observations of the environments and interactions with others on the campus. Conducting the interviews on campus provided the researcher an opportunity to make in-person observations of the principals and their interactions with faculty and staff and to notice signage and learning materials present in their offices. Presence in the principal's office space allowed the researcher to observe if the behaviors and strategies described by the principals were consistent with their actions. For example, one principal described giving teachers the essential tools they need to do their jobs, and on a side table in his office was an easel with instructional materials for better teaching practices, an example of his application of the philosophy of which he spoke. Another principal stopped the interview to take care of a staffing issue that had arisen unexpectedly that morning, demonstrating that he really does make every decision based on what is best for the students.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the constructivist grounded theory methodology championed by Dr. Kathy Charmaz (2014) and described by Creswell and Creswell (2018). As delineated in Chapter 3, the qualitative analysis methodology included constant comparative analysis, a description of the data, initial coding, focused coding, and memo writing.

Common Themes

Through the analysis, common themes and subthemes emerged from the data, including (1) hiring and developing quality teachers, (2) setting and accomplishing campus goals, (3) building relationships, (4) employing communication tactics, and (5) building effective teams.

The researcher identified these five themes from the data derived from the principal interviews, as primary contributors to school improvement. Subthemes that emerged in two of the major categories also contributed to the research findings presented here. Essential tools and teacher accountability were identified as important to the common theme of quality teachers. The subtheme of community buy-in was identified as important to building relationships. The five common themes and their subthemes contributed to the construction of the preliminary grounded theory that emerged from the data.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this grounded theory study was Fiedler's Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1967) that defined leadership effectiveness in terms of group performance. In his early work, Fiedler's Contingency Model (Fiedler, 1967) and, later, his Cognitive Resources Model (Fiedler & Garcia, 1987) described leadership effectiveness as the ability of the leader to get a group to accomplish its mission. Fiedler's work with Chemers (Fiedler & Chemers, 1974) held that leadership effectiveness could be evaluated on the achievement of clearly stated goals. Chemers and Skrzypek (1971) described Fiedler's Contingency Model of leadership effectiveness as the most widely accepted leadership model, as he asserted that the relationship of leadership style to group effectiveness was mediated by situational demands. That is, the leader must adjust his or her leadership style to the unique situation, culture, and groups of any given organization.

As this research study progressed and the constant comparative methodology was employed, the researcher found support for Fiedler's theoretical framework in the data gathered from the participating principals and in the common themes that emerged. Quality teachers contributed to group performance, as did campus goals. Building relationships, communication,

and building effective teams all contributed to the favorable environment that supports effective leadership and creating a “right situation” for a leader to succeed, which are all a part of the Fiedler framework. With the Fiedler model applied, the leadership style of a principal is impacted by the relationships shared with his/her teachers, the clearly communicated academic goals of the school, and the autonomy of the principal leader to praise the work of the teachers or to fire those who are not performing. In studying the data, the researcher recognized that the school leader, the principal, had the opportunity to create the favorable environment required for leadership effectiveness and, ultimately, for achieving the desired school improvement.

Hiring and Developing Quality Teachers

The principals identified hiring and developing quality teachers as one strategy that they perceived to be effective in achieving the desired school improvement. Hiring and developing quality teachers contributed to the school’s improvement because the quality teachers were willing to do the extra work and invest the time required to establish relationships with the students and their parents. Quality teachers had mastered the application of TEKS in their classrooms and differentiated instruction to meet the needs of the students, and, when the students did not learn, the quality teachers implemented interventions designed to help the student succeed. Hiring and developing quality teachers contributed to a positive school culture and helped to create the favorable environment required for a leader to be effective (Fiedler & Chemers, 1974). The strategy identified by the participating principals of hiring and developing quality teachers is supported in the literature, including the work of McKinney et al. (2015), who found in their study of principals who transformed the culture of National Blue-Ribbon Schools in a southern U.S. state that the teacher is the most important influencer on the success of the student, followed closely by the impact of the school leader. Thereby, hiring and developing

quality teachers that sign on to the philosophy and goals of a campus and to meeting the instructional needs of the students is imperative to meeting goals and improving schools. One principal in the study noted that if the best quality teachers are chosen for his campus, they will be willing to do the extra work, create interventions, and spend the extra time required to help students be successful.

In building a culture to support school improvement, creating a shared vision requires the involvement of teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders who are committed to school improvement for the long term. Once established, all parties must be committed to the organization's shared vision over time. The principal facilitates the process of writing the vision, and, at times, must put his/her own vision aside and embrace the vision that is written collaboratively with the teachers and other stakeholders. Hiring and developing quality teachers comes into play in this process, as teachers are needed who willingly participate in establishing the vision and in building a culture that will support continuing school improvement. In his work, Sergiovanni (2007) spoke of the importance of school culture and making schools more like social organizations than formal organizations, like banks and other corporations. In a social organization, people share ideas and beliefs. Success in social organizations depends on the development of the community, and, in the case of education, the school community. Sergiovanni maintained that communities help people connect and find meaning in what they are doing. In the school context, communities help people see themselves as important to the school and its success. Sergiovanni noted that community requires far more loyalty, commitment, caring, and sacrificing than are present in most of today's schools. He said the leader can work toward building the community, complete with its norms, values, beliefs, and mission. Sergiovanni noted that if the community is not intentionally formed and guided, then the students

and the teachers will build their own communities and their own cultures, which may not support the improvement and performance the principal and other leaders want for their schools. Hiring and developing quality teachers and engaging them to take part in building a healthy and vibrant school community positions a school for improvement and long-term success.

Essential tools. From the data, essential tools also emerged as a subtheme to quality teachers. Among the essential tools were access to the data needed by teachers to inform instruction and common planning time for teachers to: (1) create engaging instruction, (2) plan interventions for students who were struggling or who had not yet mastered a TEKS objective, and (3) for writing common assessments to build continuity in learning across the grade levels. The principals noted that teachers required time to plan for student success and to devise strategies for instruction when the students were not learning, if the desired school improvement was to be achieved. One principal described how difficult scheduling can be when working to give grade level teachers the same planning period and time to collaborate, build engaging curriculum, and plan interventions for struggling students. The principal explained that no matter how hard things are administratively, an effective leader must do what it takes to facilitate the change and improvement being asked of the teachers and their students. Teachers must have the tools they need to succeed. The principal explained that giving the teachers the common time in the context of the school day left them available for tutoring before and after school, instead of sitting in meetings with each other, and tutoring time is another tool needed to help students achieve academic success. Also identified as an essential tool was taking care of the human needs of the teachers, leaving them better prepared to take care of the needs of the students and able to help students accomplish the desired learning improvement. In their study, McKinney et al. (2015) found that

strong positive rapport between the principals and his or her faculty and staff was significant to improving school learning. The data in that study identified behaviors and traits present among successful principals, including, but not limited to: developing cooperative relationships among teachers, actively listening to teachers, treating teachers and staff members with respect and dignity, supporting progressive decisions made by teachers, and growing staff members through professional development. (p. 164)

During the interview process, the researcher observed, first hand, one principal taking care of the needs of his teacher when he agreed to personally cover a class, if other coverage could not be found, so that a teacher could leave to pick up a sick child from school.

Teacher accountability. Teacher accountability also was identified as a strategy related to hiring and developing quality teachers. Clearly stating expectations at the department, the school, the district, the state, and the federal levels and then executing the strategies designed to help meet those expectations were cited as strategies perceived to be effective for achieving school improvement. When teachers knew what was expected at each level from the start, they could plan to meet those expectations. Holding teachers accountable for student performance was described as a strategy the principals perceived to be effective in achieving the desired school improvement. In this study, principals described accountability in terms of meeting the requirements of the TEKS and in terms of student improvement from benchmark testing to the final standardized tests. Teacher accountability also took the form of grades and academic interventions designed to help students learn and achieve passing grades. At the campus level, accountability was measured in the number of students taking AP and duo credit classes and in the number of students passing the AP exams and earning dual credit for classes completed. Graduation and retention rates were also mentioned as accountability measures.

In considering teacher development, the principals described a school climate where quality teachers were given the opportunities and resources to improve instruction when students were not performing well and to collaborate with each other to improve instruction and student

performance outcomes. From Sergiovanni's (2005) perspective of building a school community's norms and philosophy that support student success and school improvement overall, teacher accountability must be jointly accepted as a community norm that everyone agrees to and supports, and not a measure with punitive results for teachers or for students. In this kind of environment, teachers are free to try new strategies, without fear of failure. In this study, one principal emphasized the importance of allowing teachers and staff to fail without repercussion, as they worked to innovate and to try new strategies designed to help their students meet and exceed testing standards and the learning standards established at the state, district, and campus levels. The principal explained that school leaders must allow trial and error, if they want improvement to be accomplished and sustained over the long term. He explained that not every strategy is going to be successful, and "That's okay." The principal said that if what they tried one week did not work, they would try something new the next week.

Setting and Accomplishing Campus Goals

While the participating principals described a variety of goal-setting processes, developing and accomplishing campus goals was perceived to be among the most effective strategies for achieving school improvement. The principals' identification of goal setting as among the most effective strategies is consistent with the theoretical framework of this study. Fiedler's Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1967) defined leadership effectiveness in terms of group performance. Fiedler and Chemers (1974) emphasized that whenever the goals were clearly stated, leadership effectiveness could be evaluated on the achievement of the goals. Fiedler (1996) described leadership effectiveness in terms of how the group accomplished its goals. Participating principals identified a variety of ways in which their schools were measured for achievement, and that measurement nearly always was based on data from the state and its

comparison to other schools throughout the state, to other schools in the district, and to the school's own performance, compared to previous years. School improvement goals were most often based on the data from the state. The goals were described as driven by the data. Principals were provided the data, and, from that data, they knew where they needed to focus for school improvement. Though the data was provided by the state and distributed by the district, specific goal setting was accomplished at the campus level. Some principals worked with their administrative teams to set the school improvement goals; others worked with their department coordinators and administrative teams to set the goals; and one principal chose what he described as the bottom-up method of goal setting. In the bottom-up method of goal setting, teachers met with their department coordinators to study the data and set goals for improvement. The department coordinator then presented those goals to the team of department coordinators for review and feedback. After revisions based on that feedback, the goals were submitted to the administrative team for consideration for the published school improvement plan. The principal who embraced the bottom-up planning method chose that process to encourage buy-in and ownership of the plan and its outcomes by the entire team – from teachers to department coordinators to administrators. Other principals found improvement planning to be more efficient with smaller groups of leaders.

Leaders must choose the goal-setting method that is right for their campuses. Factors that may impact that decision may include the timing of the receipt of the data, the availability of personnel at the time of goal setting, the requirements of the district, the leader's confidence in the knowledge and commitment of both formal and informal campus leaders, and the leader's time in the campus leadership position. Any one of these items could influence the goal-setting methodology chosen for an academic year. Another influencer could be the condition of the

school culture. A collaborative culture, where team members share values and belief systems and a common commitment to school improvement, would support a bottom-up goal-setting system, while a culture that is in turmoil and where norms have not yet been established may benefit from the efficiency of having the administrative team study and interpret the data and set the primary goals for the academic year. Whatever method is chosen for goal setting, the data for this study support the importance of campus goals of which all participants are aware and consistently work to achieve. The data of this study showed that goal setting is a common theme for achieving school improvement, and whatever goal-setting methodology is utilized, setting goals supports school improvement and enhances student achievement.

While one way to measure school improvement was the improvement in data supplied by the state for standardized test scores, the campuses often set additional goals designed to lead to overall school improvement, like improved involvement from the community, graduation rates, attendance rates, average SAT/ACT scores, and number of students taking advanced placement courses and passing the tests. College readiness, though more difficult to measure, could be another important measure. One principal noted that the campus must focus the energy on the few, most important goals and focus on those things that can be changed, like attendance, completion rate, and test performance. Not everything that impacts educational outcomes can be changed, like low economic status, one-parent households, and homelessness. Focusing on the things that can be changed or impacted at the campus level will make the most difference for the students and for the overall school.

Building Relationships

Building relationships also was described as a strategy perceived to be effective in achieving the desired school improvement. Positive relationships with students, teachers, and the

administrative team were described as essential to school improvement. The principals described treating people well, even when it is difficult to do so, and keeping students in the center of every decision as important to school improvement. Relationships with students, knowing them by name, and knowing their progress was described as “making all the difference” in achieving the desired school improvement. One principal said,

I know fully that my job is to fine-tune the interaction between students and teachers. If we can work on curriculum instruction and deliver high-yield instruction to students, that takes care of everything else because a well-engaged classroom leaves no room for misbehavior and leaves no time for kids not doing their work.

Relationships with the community, churches, government officials, service clubs, and the chamber of commerce were also described as important to the school’s overall success.

In their study on enhancing instructional leadership through collaborative coaching, Houchens, Stewart, and Jennings (2017) noted that one of the principals in their study discovered through coaching and self-reflection that having relationships with teachers that were nurturing and positive impacted his ability to employ differentiated instruction to support the new standards-based assessment approach adopted by the district. The principal reported meeting resistance from certain groups of teachers who would not employ his recommended instructional changes because they believed he would not take directive action against them because of the nurturing relationship he had worked to establish with them. He suspended the differentiation initiative for the year because of its limited results and planned to take a more directive approach to instructional leadership, beginning with the next academic year. Consideration of this case study found in the literature is an example of how leadership often must be adjusted to the situation, to the culture, and to the dynamics of the group and its members’ relationship to the leader, as held by Fiedler (1996).

Two principals in this study also emphasized the importance of situational leadership. Principal 3 pointed out that a principal cannot be the same leader to each teacher because each teacher is in a different place in his/her career and requires different leadership at different points in time, depending on the need and the situation. Principal 3 pointed to situational leadership as essential to effective leadership and school improvement yet challenging to employ. Principal 2 described that leadership comes down to acting as a different leader for each student, teacher, and administrator. He described effective leadership as “person to person.” Fiedler (1996) maintained that there was no wrong or right style of leadership, but that leadership must change with different circumstances. The views of the participating principals about leadership and relationships with those that they lead are consistent with Fiedler’s theory.

Community buy-in. The subtheme of gaining community buy-in was perceived by the principals as an effective strategy in achieving the desired school improvement. The perception of the school in the community was described as important. If people perceived the school to be a troubled school or a school full of troubled teens, they were less likely to support their children or grandchildren attending there. The principals worked actively to change the perceptions of their schools to positive perceptions by inviting the community in for special events, offering the campus facilities for community use, and generally opening the doors to let the community in. Open houses were held to invite parents to see their students’ accomplishments, and lines of communication were opened to help parents feel a part of the school community. One principal gained financial support, guest speakers, and other resources by joining community clubs and organizations, networking with government officials, and inviting local pastors and priests to campus.

Another principal acquired funding for a school/parent liaison whose only job was to interact and communicate frequently with parents and the community, building relationships and keeping student success in focus. An involved community was perceived as a group of school advocates who could contribute to the desired school improvement and a positive school culture. The literature supports the need for community buy-in, including parent engagement. In his work on school reform, McGuinn (2012) found that the communities most likely to have chronically poor-performing schools were the ones least likely to have large numbers of engaged parents. McGuinn's work reported the importance of the principal's role in schools becoming the community-centered organizations they needed to be to maximize student success and achievement.

Employing Communication Tactics

Communication with a school's many stakeholders was perceived by the principals to be a strategy important to achieving the desired school improvement. Communication was described in many forms, including communication with students, with parents, between administrators and teachers, and with the general community. McKinney et al. (2015) found in their study of national Blue-Ribbon schools in a southern state that the ability of a principal to communicate and to convey and model high expectations for student achievement and cultural goals were essential in achieving the desired school improvement and student achievement. Leithwood & Riehl (2003) reported in their research conclusions to The American Education Research Association's Task Force on Research in Educational Leadership that communication is a primary dimension of effective leadership:

Skillful leaders focus their attention on key aspects of the school's vision and communicate the vision clearly and convincingly. They invite interchange with multiple stakeholders through participatory communication strategies. They frame issues in ways that will lead to productive discourse and decision making. (p. 4)

The principals described respectful and positive communication as essential. Not talking down to students and treating them with respect in all circumstances were described as effective in achieving the desired school improvement. Communicating frequently with parents and other stakeholders was described as another effective strategy in achieving the desired school improvement. Involved parents support their children in their academic endeavors. The data in this study showed that principals communicated with parents to celebrate successes, remind them of deadlines, and signal upcoming testing dates. Sharing frequent, positive messages with members of the community, the parents, and the students was described as an effective strategy for achieving the desired school improvement. One principal noted that a positive message from the school about a student's improved behavior or academic accomplishment goes a long way in building the relationships needed to improve a school, overall.

Some schools sent weekly email messages and letters to the parents of their campus communities. Some principals provide a weekly message to students in the form of an in-school broadcast, newspaper column, or audio announcements. In addition to email, principals named Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Remind, and the school website as important communication tools. Messages ranged from team victories and academic accomplishments to the importance of doing well on the upcoming standardized test. Emphasis was on frequent and positive communication to all stakeholders. Managing the communication amid busy days, with competing priorities, was identified as a challenge for school leaders.

Building Effective Teams

The data revealed building effective teams as a school improvement strategy. Campuses created a variety of teams for a variety of purposes, with all aimed at the campus' improvement goals. Building a strong administrative team to support teachers and students was perceived to be among the most effective strategies for achieving the desired school improvement. Building effective teams is supported in the literature as an effective school improvement strategy. Leithwood et al. (2008) reported that one way that leadership impacted student achievement and school improvement was to make use of the potential that already existed within the school and to distribute the leadership widely for the greatest impact on schools and their students. The work of Fullan (2001) and Sergiovanni (2001) showed that a means to achieving the desired school improvement was in building the knowledge and skills of those already in the school and expanding the leadership paradigm. All principals in this study named building effective teams as a means by which to achieve the desired school improvement. Key terms when discussing teams included collaboration, support, and joint strategy. One principal teamed department coordinators and teachers to plan for school improvement, to execute the plans, and to assess the progress. Another urged collaboration among team members to solve problems and to determine how to best serve struggling students. One principal noted that everyone on campus must work together for the benefit of the students, who must come first in all actions and decisions. Another principal explained that all activities on the campus are done through teamwork and collaboration and that frequent meetings and supporting each other builds strong teams. The principal hired for a school turnaround said the desired school improvement required two strategic teams – one of all administrators with specifically assigned tasks and another, larger team, that included the department coordinators and counselors, all of whom were needed to turn the school around to one of student achievement.

The increasing focus on accountability – for schools, their leaders, and their teachers – on both the state and federal levels have motivated school leaders to seek different ways of looking at school leadership and the desired school improvement. The literature presented instructional teacher leadership as a strategy that contributed to school improvement. Instructional teacher leadership expands who participates in school leadership and makes use of already existing human resources to improve school performance (Portin, 2005). The shared leadership strategy is also referred to in the literature as distributed leadership, and Leithwood et al. (2006) noted that leadership impacts student achievement most when the principal uses the human resources that already exist in the school community to share in leadership capacities. For the principals in this study, expanding who participated in school leadership took many forms, including school leadership through participation on a variety of school committees, school leadership through regular participation in a Professional Learning Community, and school leadership through innovation of new teaching strategies and interventions that would move the school toward the desired improvement. Mangin and Stoelinga (2010) noted that one of the most pressing factors influencing the rise of instructional teacher leadership to improve school performance was the current emphasis on accountability by state standardized tests and the requirements of the Federal ESSA (TEA, 2017b). With accountability in the forefront for districts, schools, principals, and teachers, the principal leaders must engage their teachers and staff in the planning and implementation of strategies required to achieve the desired school improvement.

A common strategy identified by all principals in the study for building effective teams was the implementation of PLCs. PLCs were designed to impact teacher effectiveness and student achievement and were made up of groups of people engaged in common work focused on student achievement and school improvement. The group operated collaboratively, and the

group shared values and norms adopted by the members and most often congruent with the values and norms of the campus. Supported in the literature, DuFour (2004) described PLCs as high-functioning, goal-achieving teams that worked diligently and interdependently to meet the school's goals.

Timely interventions when students did not learn or understand were the responsibility of the PLC members. Teachers worked quickly to identify students who needed additional support or time to master the TEKS established by the TEA. Instead of using remediation like summer school or make-up classes, interventions were started immediately upon recognizing that a student did not master the information or skills. In their PLCs, teachers used data to identify where the needs were for each student and worked quickly to intervene. PLC members worked together to analyze and improve classroom practice, sharing ideas and strategies for intervention. Common assessments were also created to measure the students' mastery of the essential outcomes, consistent with the description of PLCs by DuFour (2004).

One principal described PLCs on the campus as common planning time to meet daily to look at data, plan instruction, and evaluate progress. The principal described the process as "very important." PLC members wrote common assessments and monitored student attendance. The PLC structure was formalized on the campus, and each teacher on the same grade level was required to teach the same lesson on the same day. Another principal explained that not all teachers bought into the PLC concept when it was first initiated on the campus. The PLCs looked closely at the data to identify which objectives the students missed on the standardized tests and what needed to be re-taught and re-learned before the next standardized test. The teachers with the highest scores became role models and mentors for those with lower scores. Teachers who were outliers to the process were counseled by their coordinators and administrators. Ultimately,

those who did not get on board with the process for student success were invited to find a new place to teach.

Theory of Effective Leadership for Improved School Performance

Grounded theory is the study of a concept (Glaser, 2012). The concept sometimes generates a pattern that often applies in various circumstances, once discovered in specific research. Grounded theory translates new meaning to experiences by asking questions like (1) What's going on? (2) What is the main problem? and (3) How are they going to solve it? (Glaser, 2012).

For this study, the more specific central research questions were:

- How do public school principals, whose campuses are identified for school improvement, describe their leadership?
- Which of their leadership behaviors and strategies do the public high school principals perceive to be most effective in achieving the desired school improvement?

Theories try to answer questions. They state relationships between abstract concepts and may aim for either explanation or understanding (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). The grounded theory that emerged from this study is constructivist in nature, combined with interpretivism (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interpretivist theories aim to understand meanings and actions and how people construct them. With the interpretive approach, the researcher interprets the participants' meanings and acknowledges her subjective interpretation of those meanings (Charmaz, 2014). The theory that emerged from this study is grounded in the data gathered from the one-on-one interviews with the participating principals.

The common themes that were identified from the research form the foundation of the grounded theory that began to emerge from this study, and the common themes are strategies that

other public high school principals may employ in their working toward school improvement, as measured by standardized test scores and evaluated in other ways at the campus, district, state, and federal levels. While more research is needed in other environments, the five common themes contribute to the body of knowledge as qualitative information based on the experiences of these six principals who were leaders on high school campuses where school improvement was achieved.

Fiedler's Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1967), the theoretical framework for this study, defined leadership effectiveness in terms of group performance and the ability of the group to achieve its goals. This theoretical framework was supported throughout the study. The principals facilitated strategies that were carried out by teams of administrators and teachers who were committed to school improvement and worked to achieve that improvement on behalf of the school and the students who attended school on those campuses. The school improvement was measured by group performance and the ability of the group to achieve its goals.

The intention of this study was to derive inductively from the data a theory or model that was grounded in the data and that would be useful to other principals as they worked to improve their schools, thereby improving student achievement and learning. The grounded theory is localized and deals with the real-world experiences of the participating principals, and the findings contribute to the body of knowledge and provide a basis for future research.

Theory

The school improvement theory that emerged from the data presents that five leadership strategies support school improvement and improved student learning and achievement. Those behaviors and strategies include (1) hiring and developing quality teachers, (2) setting and

accomplishing campus goals, (3) building relationships, (4) employing communication tactics, and (5) building effective teams.

Favorable environment. Perhaps most significant to this study is the importance of the school environment and culture and the principal's ability to influence that environment. In his Contingency Theory, Fiedler (1967) maintained that the leader's opportunity to influence a group's performance was dependent on situational favorableness and that if the leader found the current circumstances unfavorable that the leader should move on to a more favorable environment. For education, the researcher is suggesting that the principal has the ability to create a favorable environment where school improvement can occur. By studying the current environment and identifying changes that will be required to make the environment ready to undertake school improvement, the principal can have great influence on the school's readiness to accept the challenge and the work required to accomplish improvement.

Building a school culture where teachers and students thrive and seek continuous learning requires time and intentional focus. The researcher suggests that building and sustaining a healthy and positive school culture is essential to accomplishing and sustaining school improvement. The principal leader is in a position to facilitate the change required to build a student-focused, collaborative culture – over time. A shift in culture will take time and the collaboration of all administrators and teachers on campus. The students, too, can work to improve culture. The key is to define the desired culture and to undertake the work required to get there. That said, culture is ever-changing, and the vision of the desired culture will change over time, as the high school campus hosts a dynamic culture that should grow and change to meet the needs of the students and the educational objectives set forth at the federal state, district, and campus levels. As Sergiovanni (2007) explained in his work, the greatest accomplishment of

school improvement and increase in student achievement occur when the leaders focus on a school culture that emphasizes community, shared values, traditions, meanings, and purposes.

Sergiovanni (2001) devoted his career to the study of leadership and strategies to improve organizational achievement. In some of his work in educational leadership, Sergiovanni held that building the skills and knowledge of teachers and other tactical strategies were required for school improvement. In his research, he found that schools approached improvement two major ways. The first type of leader sought improvement by focusing on professional development, like helping teachers better understand and know how to teach to standards, how to align instruction and assessments to the standards, and how to use developmental interventions. The second type of leader first sought to change the environment in the school to support improvement. The focus, still, was on strategies that were most effective in impacting the standardized test scores. Sergiovanni warned that schools that turn their focus entirely to mandated standards and high-stakes testing were turning over their curriculum to the agencies or companies that developed the tests.

Sergiovanni (2007) published that his own views on leadership had changed dramatically. Sergiovanni emphasized the importance of the school culture in determining the quality of the school and the achievement of the students who attended there. He described schools of character as schools that (1) know who they are; (2) have developed a common understanding of their purposes; and (3) have faith in their ability to achieve goals. He said that schools of character have local control and distinctiveness that enhance their sense of purpose.

The work of Fullan and Pinchot (2018) also emphasized the importance of the school environment or culture in preparing an underperforming school for improvement. In the case of a low-performing school near Los Angeles, Pinchot, the school's newly appointed principal,

invested her first months on campus listening to different groups to identify the challenges that needed to be changed in order to improve the school. She then went about building a new culture, that was evaluated each year over a three-year period. The culture turned around in a very short time and school improvement was evident in even the first year, by employing these culture-changing strategies developed by Fullan in a lifetime of study and consulting with schools for improvement: (1) establish multiple permanent teams led by teachers with defined responsibilities and committed to long-term goals; (2) providing a variety of specific teacher professional development opportunities with follow-up; (3) developing a school-wide behavior plan; (4) using instructional rounds to collect data on instructional practice; and (5) being highly visible in teacher-led teams and in classrooms on a weekly basis for encouragement and assistance. These six steps were addressed with focus and intention and served to create a school turn around over a three-year period.

Fullan and Pinchot (2018) reported that competence in schools is too often divided among different people, with each operating independently. Teaching in these kinds of schools, by example, is regarded as individual practice, in contrast to other successful organizations that rely on collaboration. In their work, Fullan and Pinchot demonstrated that using the collective intelligence of an organization and building a culture of collaboration is the only way to achieve sustainable school improvement. They maintain in the literature that with using the collective intelligence of the school, closing the achievement gap and resolving systemic problems is not more than wishful thinking. They emphasize the organizational competence makes schools better because those schools with collaborative cultures share the responsibility for student learning and the obligations are mutual.

Sergiovanni (2007) emphasized that schools are more like social organizations than they are like businesses and building their cultures should be nurtured accordingly. He said the successful leader will focus on building the school's culture, including the values, traditions, meanings, and purposes. He holds that as the school's character builds, the capacity of the school to serve the intellectual, social, cultural, and civic needs of its students and the school community increases. In the end, the school's character is linked directly to the school's effectiveness.

Power of the Environment

In studying the work of Sergiovanni (2007) and Fullan and Pinchot (2018), along with the findings of this study, the researcher found that getting the environment right is the essential foundation for creating sustainable school improvement. With the combined knowledge gained from the literature, from the case studies in the literature, and from the data gathered in this study, the theory grounded in the data is that the power for school improvement and increased student achievement is in the environment that the leader and the collaborative teams create. Creating a culture where people know why they are there, they understand and take ownership of the organizational norms, and where they feel valued and cared for is essential to school improvement and sustainable student achievement.

In his work, Simon Sinek (2014) went to the Middle East to work with military officers on leadership. He wanted to learn more about the unique sense of team and trust that military comrades shared that did not seem to be present in other organizations with whom he worked. He observed that these men and women called each other "brother" and "sister," and not "co-worker" or "colleague." He reported that, at first, he observed that perhaps the military comrades were just better people than most people and they cared about each other. Sinek discovered the longer that he observed the group that it was not the people, it was the environment. He observed

at lunch that the most senior officers stood at the back of the line, allowing lower-ranking men and women to eat first. A general with whom he spoke told Sinek that it was all about taking care of the people in one's charge. Sinek reported that, at that moment, he gained great insight into the environment that led to the trust and care that the military unit shared. He emphasized in his work that this example is why leadership is so important. Leaders have the power and the opportunity to create an environment that can create the relationships that will lead the people in the organization to meet goals and to accomplish the mission. When leaders take care of the people in their charge, teachers may perform better, students may learn more, and schools may achieve the improvement that they desire.

Fiedler (1967) described the environment as the favorable circumstances required for a leader to achieve success when the group reaches its goals. While Fiedler would have a leader in unfavorable circumstances move to an organization with more favorable circumstances, the researcher presents that, instead, the principal leader has the organizational position and opportunity to create the favorable environment needed for school improvement and the opportunity to create a culture that will sustain that improvement over time. People respond to the environments they are in, and when leaders work collaboratively with their teams to get the environment right, humans will do remarkable things" (Sinek, 2014).

The theory that emerged from the data is that the environment and culture are paramount for achieving school improvement. In the model, school culture and the power of the environment take center stage. The five common themes of hiring and developing quality teachers, building relationships, building effective teams, employing communication tactics, and setting and accomplishing campus goals are strategies that happened simultaneously, with the principal serving as facilitator for the simultaneous activities. The strategies and the school

culture feed off each other, as teams of people work collaboratively and with the same vision to achieve school improvement. With the energy created through collaboration and shared vision, the environment becomes more and more powerful, and the synergy created among administrators, faculty, staff, and students begin to yield the desired results of school improvement and increased student achievement.

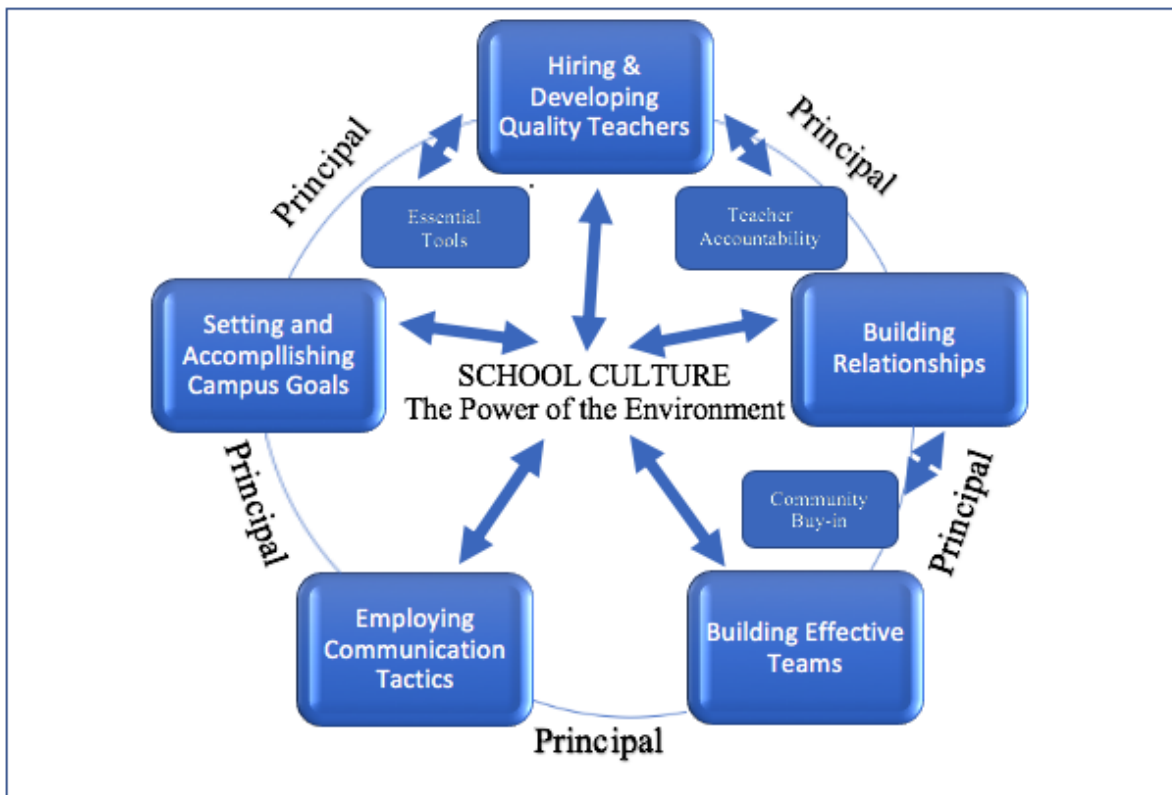


Figure 2. The School Improvement Model. This model includes all five common themes derived from data. The interrelated concepts provide the foundation for a school culture that will support school improvement and increased student achievement. Nurtured over time, the continued development of these strategies will support the culture required for sustained school improvement and the culture will support the strategies.

Discussion of the Model

The School Improvement Model that emerged from the data includes five categories, which were common themes derived from the interview data through initial coding, focused coding, memo writing, and data analysis. The model shows that the themes and sub-themes are a

collection of interrelated concepts that emerged in this study as behaviors and strategies that work together to create school improvement and increased student achievement. In the model, the behaviors and strategies do not create a linear model, where the school improvement is accomplished in sequential steps. Instead, the model illustrates a theory that key strategies must be employed concurrently and over time to yield the desired school improvement. In the center of the model, the school culture is labeled “The Power of the Environment.” As emerged from the data and from the literature, a school’s culture or environment has significant impact on a school’s ability to achieve improvement – for the campus overall and for the individual students. The principal’s leadership role in a culture supportive of school improvement and increased student achievement is to facilitate the collection of strategies that are identified in the model and by the principals in this study as most effective in achieving school improvement. Those strategies include hiring and developing quality teachers, setting and accomplishing campus goals, building relationships, employing communication tactics, and building effective teams. Additional components important to the model are the subthemes of hiring and developing quality teachers – essential tools and teacher accountability and the subtheme to building relationships – community buy-in.

Hiring and developing quality teachers. The data showed that hiring and developing quality teachers is essential to school improvement. With the teachers with the desired qualities, knowledge, and commitment in place, school improvement can be achieved. While the principals each described quality teachers in their own unique way, quality teachers were described as knowing the application of the TEKS standards in building engaging lessons and interventions, caring for students and their success, willing to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of individual students, willing to collaborate with other teachers in the best interest of the student,

and willing to put in the extra time required to make meaningful connections with the students and their parents. The principal's leadership role is, first, in hiring knowledgeable teachers who are dedicated and willing to do the extra work to achieve school improvement and to continuously facilitate teachers receiving what they need to provide the best possible instruction, including the essential tools of common planning and PLC time, instructional materials, and ready access to data to know where students are and are not succeeding. The principal's role in developing quality teachers is in facilitating the availability and presentation of professional development seminars, in coaching or finding mentors for new teachers or teachers whose students are not meeting testing standards and/or passing their classes, and in collaborating with the teachers to build the school's vision and campus goals. Creating an environment where the teachers feel respected and valued will support school improvement and giving teachers the tools that they need to do their jobs is essential for the teachers to meet the differentiated learning needs of the students.

Teacher accountability is also an important part of the school improvement model and emerged in the study as a subtheme of hiring and developing quality teachers. The principal's leadership role in teacher accountability is to provide clearly stated expectations for student achievement and teacher performance on the campus, district, state, and federal levels from the start. With the clearly defined expectations, the essential tools needed to do their jobs, and coaching and mentoring available for teachers who require assistance, the school is in a position to achieve school improvement and increased student achievement.

Setting and accomplishing campus goals. Setting specific goals, based on the data, and identifying the areas in most need of improvement are essential to achieving school improvement and increased student achievement. The principal's leadership role in setting and accomplishing

campus goals is to work with the teams of people on campus and to provide a setting where the administrators, teachers, and other staff can work collaboratively to set the campus goals. Once established, the principal and other leaders must work to consistently keep the goals top of mind for all stakeholders. In teams, the leaders must build strategies to meet the goals, and periodically measure progress and report accomplishment of the goals. Everyone in the school must know, understand, and be committed to the goals for the desired school improvement to occur. As Principal 6 emphasized, one of the most important things to remember in goal setting is to identify the most important goals that the administrators, teachers, and staff can actually impact. Focus on the goals that will result in the biggest gains for students and for campus improvement is imperative.

Building relationships. Building positive relationships among all stakeholders—administrators, teachers, students, parents, consultants, and the community at large—is essential to achieving school improvement. All stakeholders contribute to the improvement at some level and must share in the responsibility and the celebration when success is achieved. Relationships born of a “right” culture or environment will make the school a place that administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the community at-large will value and will work to sustain. The principal’s leadership role in building relationships will vary from campus to campus. As discovered in this study, demographics and unique characteristics of a school community will guide the principal’s facilitation of building relationships. For some campuses, the principal may invest time joining civic groups like Rotary or the local chamber of commerce in order to gain their support and to generate human and financial resources to support the students and the school. Two principals emphasized business and governmental relationships that generated mentors and guest speakers to enhance the students’ education and expand their support systems.

Positive relationships on campus were identified as important to school improvement, as stakeholders worked toward a shared vision and common goals for school improvement and increased student achievement.

A subtheme to building relationships that emerged during the course of the study was community buy-in. Two principals who were working to improve the perceptions of their schools and their students in the communities they served noted that building good relationships and gaining community buy-in yields good results when things are going well or when things are not going well. He elaborated that inviting the community in to do things like use the cafeteria for a craft fair, helps people feel like the school is their school. Then, when it's time to enroll their children or grandchildren in school, there is no question about where they want the children to go to school. One principal explained that the school is in the best position when it is seen as the community hub. At that campus, the community held National Night Out and community events on campus, and the band, JROTC Color Guard, choirs, and other groups made themselves available to perform at community functions, further establishing community buy-in for the school and its students. The principal's leadership role in helping to generate community buy-in includes support of school organizations going out to support and participate in community groups and providing the infrastructure, human resources, and communication required to host community functions on campus.

Employing communication tactics. Disseminating and receiving frequent communication among all invested stakeholders is imperative in meeting goals, building relationships, and achieving and sustaining school improvement and increasing student achievement. The communication must be inclusive and two-way in nature, and not top down, as the school community shares in the responsibilities and obligations for school improvement.

Communication will be delivered and received many ways, and the success and the needs of the school will be communicated on a regular basis through a variety of channels. The school leaders must also create ways for the stakeholders to send messages to the school and its leaders and to create opportunities for discussion and problem solving to occur in a collaborative environment. In the best school environment, all stakeholders have a voice. The principal's leadership role in the communication process is to communicate by example and to provide the human and electronic resources required to execute the communication tactics. Tactics, by definition, are communication items in an action plan that have a specific purpose. By example, a tactic would be for the principal to inform students, parents, and teachers of the latest school report card from the state, showing how students performed as a campus for the past year. In his leadership position, the principal may first communicate the results with teachers and then send the information in a letter to parents, as well as post the information on the website.

The principals in this study identified many audiences with which their campuses needed to send and receive information, including other administrators, teachers, students, parents, the community at large, government officials, mentors, business leaders, and more. The communication on all of the campuses in the study was carried out by many individuals, including administrators and teachers for outgoing messages, and most incoming messages were received at the campus main office, then disseminated to the person best able to answer the question, as needed.

Building effective teams. The principals in this study perceived that sharing leadership among teams of people for problem solving and innovation would lead to sustained school improvement. Whether they are instructional leaders or distributed leadership teams for specifically designed purposes, campus teams described by the principals found solutions to

existing problems, designed interventions for struggling students, and collaborated for improved instructional and systemic processes. The principal's leadership role in building effective teams was, with the other administrators, to determine what teams are needed for what purpose and then to facilitate appointing or asking for volunteers for those teams. The principals in the study noted that effective teams will lead to a more productive and healthy school environment and to school improvement. PLCs are used on campuses as a means by which to analyze data, plan engaging instruction, guide student learning, write common assessments, and intervene when a student is not learning. PLCs also serve to improve teaching practices throughout the campuses, and literature showed that the principal involvement in the PLCs will promote continuous improvement and a collaborative culture. Other teams on campuses in the study focused on improving instruction, improving standardized test scores, student discipline and dress code, improving attendance, and improving parental involvement. Other teams focused on hospitality and campus policies and guidelines. The kinds of teams that existed on campuses varied, depending on the needs and goals of the campus.

Learning

As a qualitative research study, the contribution of this research to the body of knowledge is not statistical, but empirical. Two questions guided the research: (1) How do public high school principals, whose campuses are identified for school improvement, describe their leadership? (2) Which of their leadership behaviors and strategies do the public high school principals perceive to be most effective in achieving the desired school improvement?

The data gathered describe the experiences of six high school principals in four different school districts in the metropolitan area surrounding the researcher's university. The researcher learned through the one-one-one interviewing protocol that, though the principals

provided leadership in campus environments that were very different from each other, they shared five common leadership behaviors or strategies that they perceived to be most effective in achieving the desired school improvement. While it cannot be claimed that the five strategies that provide the basis for the School Improvement Model are statistically significant and can be applied to other populations, the model that was derived from the data has value and may be useful for future research and for educational trainers as they develop curriculum for principal training and preparation or for current principals seeking to improve their schools or their own leadership.

The foundation of the model is the power of the environment, or the culture, that impacts everything about the school and its ability to accomplish school improvement and increased student achievement. Then, the model includes the five dynamic components that necessarily co-exist as the school begins its mission for school improvement. Hiring and developing quality teachers, setting and accomplishing campus goals, building relationships, employing communication tactics, and building effective teams must happen simultaneously, without interrupting the day-to-day operations of the school and student accomplishment. The use of the model will require the principal's leadership as facilitator of planning and collaboration. Even more, for the School Improvement Plan to be successful, attention to its many components and to development of the culture must be consistent and the work intentionally focused. The unexpected day-to-day events cannot be allowed to distract from the school's commitment to school improvement.

Though not part of this study, the researcher learned in listening to the way the principals spoke about the five components of the model that they had very different leadership styles that may impact the existing campus environment or school culture. By example, when making the

point about the importance of hiring and developing quality teachers in the context of accountability, one principal described that a quality teacher would be expected to have the knowledge to provide quality instruction and interventions, to go the extra mile to do what was needed for the students to succeed, and to spend the extra time outside of school to prepare the students to pass the standardized test. In contrast, when another principal talked about hiring and developing quality teachers and accountability, he talked about shared accountability, and teachers and administrators working collaboratively for the benefit of the students until they found the processes or strategies that would best help the students succeed and the school to improve. Another principal noted that on that campus, it was okay to fail. He said that if one strategy was not successful, then the team would come up with another idea to try the following week. The researcher questioned how the leadership style of the principal impacted the culture that existed on the campus, which could be a topic for future research.

This constructivist grounded theory study contributes to the body of knowledge by providing insight into behaviors and strategies perceived to be most effective in achieving school improvement, as described by the six participating principals whose schools had achieved improvement as measured by standardized test scores. The School Improvement Model that emerged from the study may be used as a tool in new principal training or by seasoned principals seeking school improvement on their campuses. For example, individuals who are training to become administrators could look closely at the five themes and consider how each would influence their own leadership in practice on a high school campus. Their own deep consideration of each theme, combined with class discussions with both new and experienced principals could inform the beginning administrators' own future practice. Focus on the importance of building a collaborative, supportive culture that includes a shared vision, shared

goals, and shared purpose is essential to school improvement. The importance of the school culture and the power of the environment emerged as the foundation of school improvement. Principals who know and understand the importance of culture and the power of the environment will work intentionally with the administrators and teachers on their campuses to nurture the kind of environment that will lead to school improvement and increased student achievement.

Recommendation for Future Grounded Theory Researchers

For future grounded theory studies, the researcher agrees with Creswell & Creswell (2018), who describe hand coding as “a laborious and time-consuming process, even for data from a few individuals” (p. 192), and the researcher recommends that future researchers consider the use of one of the software programs for coding the data from a qualitative study. Any concern for lost data when using the computer program for initial coding can be overcome by verifying transcripts against the information provided by the computer program. Using a computer program will save future researchers hours of valuable time and allow them to focus on the meaning of the data and the emergent theory and to not be as consumed by the hand-coding process.

Future Research

New research for school improvement is still needed, as education systems continue to shift and change to meet the educational needs of an ever-changing society. Educational leadership models must meet the changing needs of the educational system itself and the accountability measures that citizens, government officials, districts, school leaders, and educators, themselves, put in place for continuous improvement of schools and increased student achievement. As individual school communities change, the role of the leader must also change.

Culture. For future research, a possible qualitative study would be to conduct one-on-one interviews with principals about the established school culture and then to survey or interview the teachers to determine if the perceptions of the school culture were the same or different for the principal leader and the teachers. Another step would be to interview or survey the students to determine if their perceptions about the school culture were the same or different than those of the principal and the teachers. The purpose of this kind of qualitative study would provide benchmarks in an organization that sought to establish the environment where all stakeholders knew the norms, values, and goals of the organization to maximize performance and growth and to build a positive school environment or school character (Sergiovanni, 2007). This type of study might be best conducted as mixed methodology, with a combination of surveys to collect data from the administrators, principals, and students, with follow-up, qualitative one-on-one interviews or focus groups. In a related study, a researcher could also explore how the leadership style of the principal impacts the culture that exists on his/her campus.

Situational leadership. The concept of situational leadership in the educational setting warrants consideration for a future study. Situational leadership calls for different leadership styles for different stakeholders, based on their needs, their stages of career development, and other unique characteristics. A qualitative study could explore the viability and potential impact of situational leadership in the school setting.

Teacher accountability. Another area of study that warrants consideration in today's climate of heightened teacher accountability is the definition of "quality teacher." In the political arena, discussions continue on connecting teacher compensation to student outcomes and paying "quality" or "master" teachers on a different scale than others. An academic study to discover the

definition or qualities of a “quality” teacher could be useful and have an impact on state or federal guidelines.

School improvement model. To expand the grounded theory and School Improvement Model derived from this study, the model can be shared and implemented by a principal challenged to go into a low-performing school for turnaround action or a principal just taking a position at a campus that is new to him or her. Being new to the campus affords a one-time opportunity to evaluate the existing culture and then to capitalize on the behaviors and strategies with focused intent. After an assessment of the existing school culture, the principal, with teams, could devise strategies for building the desired environment or culture, while also employing the strategies included in the School Improvement Model as a way of testing and possibly fine tuning the model. Sergiovanni (2007) likened the complexity of building a new culture, or school of character, while exercising strategies for improvement as “a little like the proverbial flying an airplane while building it” (p. 6).

Alternate measures. While current emphasis for the measurement of school success seems focused on standardized test scores, a study about other measures of school and student success warrants attention. In the technology-driven world where students are living and will live in the future, their educations and preparation for careers must change and adapt to the business and cultural transformation currently in process. In this changing environment, different measures of student success must be created to reflect the changes in education content and delivery. In concert, the organizational practices facilitated by the principal must be examined.

Future Practice

Principals of the future may use the findings of this study as they form or refine their own leadership styles, including strategies that may be most effective in achieving school

improvement and increasing student achievement. The six principals who participated in this study identified many strategies that were effective in achieving school improvement, with five emerging as common themes and three emerging as subthemes. Those common themes included hiring and developing quality teachers, setting and accomplishing campus goals, building relationships, employing communication tactics, and building effective teams. The power of the environment, or school culture, that encompasses the life of the campus and its people emerged as of critical importance to school improvement and increased student achievement. This study projects that principals of the future will be most successful if they invest the time that is needed to build the desired culture that will promote and support student success, as well as the success of teachers and all stakeholders, while also giving focus to the five strategies perceived by the principals in this study as most effective in achieving school improvement.

Implications and Conclusions

The need to improve education and educational leadership will continue because education is dynamic and must change to meet the social, technological, economic, and infrastructure changes of the societies in which students and educators work and learn.

While educational leadership has been studied and well documented, many gaps in knowledge still exist. The impact that expanded definitions of diversity and gender roles will have on educational leadership are unknown. The impact of the changing landscape of school choice among public, charter, and private schools has yet to unfold. The future impact of unknown levels of funding from state and federal governments looms, as does the controversy over expanded dependence on local property taxes to fund schools. Educational leaders will also continue to face instructional changes mandated at the district, state and federal levels and will be challenged to change their instruction to meet those needs. The social implications of student

achievement will continue to change, as more and more students are from households where parental engagement is lacking and early skills like reading are not supported. Immigration will also continue to challenge our schools in the area of improvement, as schools in some areas are admitting children who do not know the English language and who are experiencing a new culture. The needs are many and existing knowledge gaps in the field of education will broaden as the educational landscape and the need for effective school leadership expand to meet the growing needs of the students the educators serve.

While gaps in knowledge persist, this study generated a model that principals may use, as they build their leadership skills and face the many challenges of school improvement. The power of the environment, or school culture, emerged as perhaps the most important element for school improvement and student achievement. The principal of the future may find the best investment to be in developing a campus culture that supports student learning in all facets and that provides for hiring and developing quality teachers, setting and accomplishing campus goals, building relationships, employing communication tactics, and building effective teams.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Letter of Invitation to Participate

Dear Principal _____:

Because you have been identified as a leader that has guided your school to improvement, I am writing to you today to invite you to be a part of an important research study.

I am a teacher at John Paul Stevens High School, which is a part of Northside Independent School District in San Antonio, and I am also a PhD student at The University of the Incarnate Word. My PhD will be in Education, with a concentration in Organizational Leadership.

As an educator, I am very interested in learning more about how leadership impacts school performance and improvement, and you have a success story to share.

You have been selected for this study because you are a public high school principal at a campus with a minimum 1,200 student population and whose TAKS scores reflect at least a 3% improvement for the academic years 2008-2010 for the All Tests category. This selection criterion was used to identify principals like you who are qualified to share information about effective leadership behaviors and strategies that lead to school improvement. Your participation in this qualitative research study will require 45 minutes to one hour of your uninterrupted time, during which we will discuss your school leadership. Our conversation will take place at your school office or the location of your choice.

During our conversation, I will ask you questions about your leadership behaviors and strategies that you perceive to be most effective in leading your school to improvement. You can be assured that the research study will follow the requirements of academic research, including

your anonymity as a source of information. If required, I will also confirm with your District representative that I have permission to meet with you for this academic purpose.

As information is gathered, you will be free to discontinue the interview at any time without prejudice. During the analysis phase of my research, the information that I gather during our discussion will be combined with information gained from others over the course of the study. The findings will be published in a dissertation and may also be published in academic journal articles or presentations.

You may request a copy of the dissertation at its conclusion; however, I cannot guarantee any benefit derived from the study. I know that your time is your most valuable resource, and I thank you, in advance, for your consideration as a participant in this study.

You may reply by returning the enclosed card or by sending an email message to ckeyserf@gmail.com. If you prefer to reach me by phone, you may call 210-332-7552. Upon confirmation of your participation, I will send you three or four questions for your advance review. Thank you, again, for your consideration.

With best regards,

Christine L. Keyser-
Fanick
PhD Student
University of the
Incarnate Word

Appendix B

Letter to Request Permission of Administrators

Dear [District Office Administrator]:

I am a teacher at John Paul Stevens High School, which is a part of Northside Independent School District in San Antonio, and I am also a PhD student at The University of the Incarnate Word. My PhD will be in Education, with a concentration in Organizational Leadership.

As an educator, I am very interested in learning more about how leadership impacts school performance and improvement, and one of your principals, _____, has a success story to share.

With your approval, I would like to invite _____ to be a part of this important research study.

_____’s participation in this qualitative research study will require 45 minutes to one hour of his/her uninterrupted time, during which we will discuss his/her school leadership. Our conversation will take place at _____’s school office or the location of his/her choice.

You can be assured that the research study will follow the requirements of academic research, including your principal’s anonymity as a source of information.

During the analysis phase of my research, the information that I gather during the discussion will be combined with information gained from others over the course of the study. The findings will be published in a dissertation and may also be published in academic journal articles or presentations.

I know that your principal's time is his/her most valuable resource, and I will honor the time commitment that is requested at the start of the interview. You may reply by returning the enclosed card or by sending an email message to ckeyserf@gmail.com. If you prefer to reach me by phone, you may call 210-332-7552. If I do not hear from you, I will follow up in a reasonable time frame to learn of your decision. Upon confirmation of your approval, I will send _____ three or four questions for his/her advance review. Thank you, again, for your consideration.

With best regards,

Christine L. Keyser-Fanick
hD Student
University of the Incarnate Word

Appendix C
Participant Confirmation Letter

Dear Principal _____:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study regarding the impact of leadership on school performance. You have a success story to share, and I look forward to hearing it from you.

As indicated in your invitation to participate, your participation in this qualitative research study will require 45 minutes to one hour of your uninterrupted time, during which we will discuss your school leadership. Our conversation will take place at your school office or the location of your choice.

You can be assured that the research study will follow the requirements of academic research, including your anonymity as a source of information. If required, I have obtained approval from your Central Office for your participation in the confidential interview.

During the analysis phase of my research, the information that I gather during our discussion will be combined with information gained from others over the course of the study. The findings will be published in a dissertation and may also be published in academic journal articles or presentations.

I know that your time is your most valuable resource, and I will honor our time agreement.

I will call your office to schedule a convenient time to meet with you.

Thank you, again, for your participation.

With best regards,

Christine L. Keyser-Fanick
PhD Student
University of the Incarnate Word

Appendix D

Consent Agreement

Study Title: Effective Leadership Strategies and Behaviors of Public High School
Principals Who Lead Improved School Performance

Principal
Investigator: Christine L. Keyser-Fanick
Organizational Leadership in the Dreeben School of Education
University of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio, TX 78209

Phone: 210-332-7552

E-Mail: ckeyserf@student.uiwtx.edu or ckeyserf@gmail.com

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The study will take place from March 2011 until September 2016. In-person interviews, audio-recorded interviews, observation, and document review will be employed during the study process. Your signature on this consent form shows that you have been informed of the conditions and safeguards of this project and agree to participate in this study.

1. The study involves qualitative research. Data will be gathered through one-on-one interviews with principals who have been identified for school improvement. You have been selected for this study because you are a public high school principal at a campus with a minimum 1,200 student population and whose TAKS scores reflect at least a 3% improvement for the academic years 2009-2011 for the All Tests category. This selection criterion was used to identify principals qualified to share information about effective leadership behaviors and strategies that lead to school improvement.
2. The purpose of the study is to explore what leadership practices public high school principals perceive to be most effective in attaining school improvement.

3. The one-on-one interview will require 45 minutes to one hour of your uninterrupted time.
You are one of eight high school principals who will be interviewed for the purposes of this study.
4. Participation is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without penalty. A decision not to participate will not adversely prejudice future interactions with the University of the Incarnate Word.
5. There is no risk to individuals who participate in this research and complete anonymity is ensured. Your name will not be used. Instead, you will be given a code number in order to guarantee your anonymity. Your comments will be entered on a computer, and any identifying information will be changed for written reports. Only the principal investigator (Christine L. Keyser-Fanick) will have access to the transcript, which will be contained in a secure location.
6. You may request a copy of the dissertation at its conclusion; however, the researcher cannot guarantee any benefit derived from the study.
7. Questions concerning your participation in this study may be addressed to the investigator at the phone number or e-mail listed at the top of this page.
8. The University of the Incarnate Word committee that reviews research on human subjects, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), will answer any questions about your rights as a research subject. If you require additional information, please contact the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research at (210)-829-2757.

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

I have read the information provided and agree to participate in this study.

Signature of Subject Date Time / _____

Signature of Investigator Date Time / _____

Appendix E

Interview Guide

Intent: Create a conversation that puts the principal leaders at ease and makes them comfortable enough to share their experiences and the significance of those experiences with an unknown researcher.

Protocol: In accordance with the requirements of academic research, details of the Consent Agreement will be reviewed with each participant prior to the interview.

I am here today because you are a successful leader. You have led your school through and to improvement.

Key questions to be asked of all participants:

- Please tell me about the level of accountability that you have for your school's improvement.
- Who sets the accountability measures?
- How do you establish your campus goals?
- I want to know how you have become such an effective leader. What leadership strategies and behaviors brought you to where you are today in leading your school to improvement? (Follow-up questions will be generated, as the researcher listens.)
- How have these strategies (practices) impacted student (group) performance?

Additional questions to be asked if time allows:

- How would you describe the climate on your campus?
- How do you manage being held accountable by so many different factions – campus, school district, state government, and national government?

- Do you have some accountability measures that are more important to you than others?
- With so much to accomplish, how do you determine where to focus first?
- How do you motivate students to want to improve their academic performances?
- In education, every year brings a certain number of new and different students and new and different challenges. Each year is a fresh start. What will you do sustain the improvement your school has accomplished?

Appendix F

Interventions and Submissions: Improvement Required Year 1



2018-19 Interventions and Submissions: Improvement Required Year 1

Month	Interventions	Submissions
Aug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Superintendent identifies District Coordinator of School Improvement (DCSI) ▪ Superintendent selects Professional Service Provider (PSP) ▪ DCSI and Principal establish Campus Leadership Team (CLT) ▪ DCSI, Principal, and CLT complete Visioning Training ▪ DCSI and Principal attend Continuous Improvement Training at ESC (Focused Data Analysis, Guided Root Cause Analysis, Aligned Strategy Identification, Implementation Planning and Fidelity) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Superintendent uploads DCSI name and attestation statement in ISAM; DUE AUG. 31
Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and Principal hold public meeting(s) at the campus to discuss campus performance, campus performance objectives, and to solicit input on the Targeted Improvement Plan (TIP) ▪ DCSI, Principal, CLT, and relevant stakeholders engage in planning activities and develop TIP ▪ DCSI takes TIP to the board for approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI enters PSP name in ISAM; DUE SEPT. 7 ▪ DCSI submits board-approved TIP in ISAM; DUE SEPT. 28
Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI, PSP, ESC staff, and TEA staff hold phone conference to discuss initial plan submission ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress 	
Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress ▪ DCSI and principal attend training on implementation status and midcourse corrections at ESC ▪ Principal and CLT oversee STAAR interim assessment at campus (assessment window option 1) 	
Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress 	
Jan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress ▪ DCSI updates TIP for Middle of Year submission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI submits Mid-Year TIP update in ISAM; DUE JAN. 18 ▪ PSP emails PSP Progress Report to assigned TEA staff; DUE JAN. 18
Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and TEA staff hold phone conference to discuss January submission (PSP and ESC staff attend as needed) ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress ▪ Principal and CLT oversee STAAR interim assessment at campus (assessment window option 2) 	
Mar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress 	
Apr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress 	
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress 	
Jun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress • DCSI, PSP, CLT, and principal evaluate effectiveness of plan and propose revisions for next year • DCSI updates TIP for End of Year submission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCSI submits End of Year TIP update in ISAM; DUE JUN. 28 • PSP emails PSP Progress Report to assigned TEA staff; DUE JUN. 28
Jul/ Aug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCSI and TEA staff hold phone conference to discuss End of Year submission (PSP and ESC staff attend as needed) 	

Updated 8/15/2018

Appendix G

Interventions and Submissions: Improvement Required Year 2

2018-19 Interventions and Submissions: Improvement Required Year 2



Month	Interventions (Campuses that are IR2 or higher may be subject to a campus visit from agency staff or may be required attend a hearing.)	Submissions
Aug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Superintendent identifies District Coordinator of School Improvement (DCSI) ▪ Superintendent selects Professional Service Provider (PSP) ▪ Superintendent, DCSI, Principal, and Board Members view House Bill 1842 (Turnaround) webinar ▪ DCSI and Principal re-establish Campus Leadership Team (CLT) ▪ DCSI, Principal, and CLT complete Visioning Training ▪ DCSI and Principal attend Continuous Improvement Training at ESC (Focused Data Analysis, Guided Root Cause Analysis, Aligned Strategy Identification, Implementation Planning and Fidelity) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Superintendent uploads DCSI name and attestation statement in ISAM; DUE AUG. 31
Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and Principal hold public meeting(s) at the campus to discuss campus performance, campus performance objectives, and to solicit input on the Targeted Improvement Plan (TIP) ▪ DCSI solicits input on the development of the Turnaround Plan within 60 days of preliminary rating ▪ DCSI, Principal, CLT, and relevant stakeholders review and update draft TIP ▪ DCSI takes TIP to the board for approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI enters PSP name in ISAM; DUE SEPT. 7 ▪ DCSI submits board-approved TIP in ISAM; DUE SEPT. 28
Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI, PSP, ESC staff, and TEA staff hold phone conference to discuss initial TIP submission ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress ▪ Campus participates in Effective Schools Framework Diagnostic visit 	
Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI views Turnaround Plan webinars ▪ DCSI and principal complete Needs Assessment Report (Section I and II of Turnaround Plan) ▪ DCSI, PSP, ESC staff, and TEA staff hold phone conference to discuss Needs Assessment results and Turnaround Plan Strategy ▪ DCSI, Principal, CLT, and relevant stakeholders develop Turnaround Plan ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress ▪ DCSI and principal attend training on implementation status and midcourse corrections at ESC ▪ Principal and CLT oversee STAAR interim assessment at campus (assessment window option 1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI submits Needs Assessment Report; DUE NOV. 16
Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress ▪ DCSI posts Turnaround Plan draft to website for comment (30 days prior to board approval) 	
Jan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress ▪ DCSI updates TIP for Middle of Year submission ▪ DCSI takes Turnaround Plan (with comments) to the board for approval (may occur in February) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI submits Mid-Year TIP update in ISAM; DUE JAN. 18 ▪ PSP emails PSP Progress Report to assigned TEA staff; DUE JAN. 18
Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and TEA staff hold phone conference to discuss January TIP submission (PSP and ESC staff attend as needed) ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress ▪ Principal and CLT oversee STAAR interim assessment at campus (assessment window option 2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI submits Turnaround Plan in ISAM; DUE FEB. 15
Mar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress 	
Apr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress 	
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress 	
Jun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress ▪ DCSI, PSP, CLT, and principal evaluate effectiveness of plan and propose revisions for next year ▪ DCSI updates TIP for End of Year submission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI submits End of Year TIP update in ISAM; DUE JUN. 28 ▪ PSP emails PSP Progress Report to assigned TEA staff; DUE JUN. 28
Jul/ Aug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and TEA staff hold phone conference to discuss End of Year submission and potential Turnaround Plan implementation (PSP and ESC staff attend as needed) 	

Updated 11/15/2018

Appendix H

Interventions and Submissions: Improvement Required Year 3 and Up



2018-19 Interventions and Submissions: Improvement Required Year 3 and up

Month	Interventions <i>(Campuses that are IR2 or higher may be subject to a campus visit from agency staff or may be required attend a hearing.)</i>	Submissions
Aug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Superintendent identifies District Coordinator of School Improvement (DCSI) ▪ Superintendent selects Professional Service Provider (PSP) ▪ DCSI and Principal re-establish Campus Leadership Team (CLT) ▪ Superintendent, DCSI, Principal, and Board Members view House Bill 1842 (Turnaround) webinar ▪ DCSI and Principal attend Continuous Improvement Training at ESC (Implementation Planning and Fidelity) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Superintendent uploads DCSI name and attestation statement in ISAM; DUE AUG. 31
Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and Principal hold public meeting(s) at the campus to discuss campus performance, campus performance objectives, and to solicit input on the Turnaround Implementation Plan (TIP) ▪ DCSI posts Parent Petition notice to district website (IR4 recommended, IR5 required) ▪ DCSI, Principal, CLT, and relevant stakeholders make final edits to TIP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI enters PSP name in ISAM; DUE SEPT. 7 ▪ DCSI submits TIP in ISAM; DUE SEPT. 14
Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI, PSP, ESC staff, and TEA staff hold phone conference to discuss initial plan submission ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress 	
Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress ▪ DCSI and principal attend training on implementation status and midcourse corrections at ESC ▪ Principal and CLT oversee STAAR interim assessment at campus (<i>assessment window option 1</i>) 	
Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress 	
Jan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress ▪ DCSI updates TIP for Middle of Year submission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI submits Mid-Year TIP update in ISAM; DUE JAN. 18 ▪ PSP emails PSP Progress Report to assigned TEA staff; DUE JAN. 18
Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and TEA staff hold phone conference to discuss January submission (PSP and ESC staff attend as needed) ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress ▪ Principal and CLT oversee STAAR interim assessment at campus (<i>assessment window option 2</i>) 	
Mar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress 	
Apr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress 	
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress 	
Jun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and principal collect evidence of strategy implementation and progress ▪ DCSI, PSP, CLT, and principal evaluate effectiveness of plan and propose revisions for next year ▪ DCSI updates TIP for End of Year submission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI submits End of Year TIP update in ISAM; DUE JUN. 28 ▪ PSP emails PSP Progress Report to assigned TEA staff; DUE JUN. 28
Jul/ Aug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DCSI and TEA staff hold phone conference to discuss End of Year submission (PSP and ESC staff attend as needed) 	

Updated 8/15/2018

Appendix I
IRB Approval and Extension—May 23, 2018

May 23, 2018

PI: Mrs. Christine Keyser-Fanick

Protocol title: Public High School Principals' Perceptions of Effective Leadership
Strategies for Improved School Performance

Christine:

Your request for continued review of Expedited protocol 11-05-001 titled "Public High School Principals' Perceptions of Effective Leadership Strategies for Improved School Performance" was approved. This approval will expire one year from 05/23/2018.

Please keep in mind these additional IRB requirements:

Request for continuing review must be completed for projects extending past one year. Use the IRB Continuing Review Request form. Changes in protocol procedures must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Use the IRB Amendment Request form. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported immediately.

Approved protocols are filed by their number. Please refer to this number when communicating about this protocol.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol. Congratulations and best wishes for successful completion of your research. If you need any assistance, please contact the UIW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

Ana Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA
Research Officer, Office of Research Development
University of the Incarnate Word
(210) 805-3036
wandless@uiwtx.edu

Appendix J

Approval of Protocol Revision—June 29, 2017

UNIVERSITY OF THE
INCARNATE WORD

June 29, 2017

PI: Mrs. Christine Keyser-Fanick

Protocol title: Public High School Principals' Perceptions of Effective Leadership Strategies for Improved School Performance

Christine:

Your request for continued review of Expedited protocol 11-05-001 titled "Public High School Principals' Perceptions of Effective Leadership Strategies for Improved School Performance" was approved. This approval will expire **one year** from 06/29/2017.

Please keep in mind these additional IRB requirements:

- Request for continuing review must be completed for projects extending past one year. Use the **IRB Continuing Review Request** form.
- Changes in protocol procedures must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Use the **IRB Amendment Request** form.

Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported immediately.

Approved protocols are filed by their number. Please refer to this number when communicating about this protocol.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol. Congratulations and best wishes for successful completion of your research. If you need any assistance, please contact the UIW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

Ana Wandless-Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA

Ana Wandless-Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA
Research Officer, Office of Research Development
University of the Incarnate Word
(210) 805-3036 wandless@uiwtx.edu

Appendix K

Approval of Protocol Revision—June 1, 2016



6/1/2016

Christine Keyser-Fanick
4301 Broadway
San Antonio, Texas 78209

Dear Christine:

Your request for revisions to expedited protocol 11-05-001 was approved. The following revisions to your protocol have been approved:

- Duration of study: Extension of approved duration to May 31, 2017

Please keep in mind these additional IRB requirements:

- This approval is for one year from the date of the IRB approval.
- Request for continuing review must be completed for projects extending past one year. Use the **IRB Continuation/Completion form**.
- Changes in protocol procedures must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Use the **Protocol Revision and Amendment form**.
- Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported immediately.

Approved protocols are filed by their number. Please refer to this number when communicating about this protocol.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol.

Congratulations and best wishes for successful completion of your research. If you need any assistance, please contact the UIW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

Ana Wandless-Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA

Ana Wandless-Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA

Research Officer

University of the Incarnate Word IRB

Appendix L

Approval of Protocol Revision—December 3, 2015



12/3/2015

Christine Keyser-Fanick
8642 Wrexham Heights
San Antonio, TX 78254

Dear Christine:

Your request for continued review of expedited protocol 11-05-001 titled *Public High School Principals' Perceptions of Effective Leadership Strategies for Improved School Performance* was approved. The expiration date for this protocol is 12/31/2016.

Please keep in mind these additional IRB requirements:

- This approval is for one year from the date of the IRB approval.
- Request for continuing review must be completed for projects extending past one year. Use the **IRB Continuation/Completion form**.
- Changes in protocol procedures must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Use the **Protocol Revision and Amendment form**.
- Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported immediately.

Approved protocols are filed by their number. Please refer to this number when communicating about this protocol.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol.

Congratulations and best wishes for successful completion of your research. If you need any assistance,

please contact the UIW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

Ana Wandless-Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA

Ana Wandless-Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA

Research Officer

University of the Incarnate Word IRB

Appendix M

Approval of Protocol Revision—November 7, 2014

11/7/2014



Christine Keyser-Fanick
 8642 Wrexham Heights
 San Antonio, Texas 78254

Dear Christine:

Your request for revisions to expedited protocol 11-05-001 titled *Public High School Principals' Perceptions of Effective Leadership Strategies for Improved School Performance* was approved. The expiration date for this protocol is 05/31/2015. The following revisions to your protocol have been approved:

- Addition to the investigative team: M. Alison Buck
- Deletion from the investigative team: Dorothy Ettling
- Duration of the study: Anticipated study duration extended to 5 years

Please keep in mind these additional IRB requirements:

- This approval is for one year from the date of the IRB approval.
- Request for continuing review must be completed for projects extending past one year. Use the **IRB Continuation/Completion form**.
- Any desired changes in proposal procedures must be approved by the UIW IRB prior to implementation except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Use the **Protocol Revision and Amendment form**.
- Prompt reporting to the UIW IRB of any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
- IRBs are filed by their number. Please refer to this number when communicating about the IRB.

Suspension or termination of approval may be done if there is evidence of any serious or continuing noncompliance with Federal Regulations or any aberrations from the original application.

Congratulations and best wishes for successful completion of your research. If you need any assistance, please contact the UIW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Ohnemus, MAA, CRA
 Rebecca Ohnemus, MAA, CRA
 Research Officer
 University of the Incarnate Word IRB

Appendix N
Approval of Protocol Revision—March 17, 2014

**The University of the Incarnate Word
IRB Continuation/Completion Form**

In accordance with Federal Regulations 45CFR46, the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects must review research protocols at least annually, or more frequently if warranted. All approved research must submit a continuing review request to the IRB prior to the expiration of their IRB approval. Sufficient time must be allowed for IRB review of these continuation requests. Please contact the IRB at 829-3036 if you have any questions.

IRB #: 1-05-001

Project Title: *Dublinia High School Principals' Perceptions of Effective Leadership Strategies for Improved School Performance*

Principal Investigator: *Christine L. Keyser-Fanick*

PI Tel. and e-mail: *210-686-6819 H ckeyserfanick@sbcglobal.net*
210-332-7552 M

Co-Investigator(s)/Faculty Advisor (if applicable): *S. Dorothy Etting*

Tel. and e-mail: *210-829-2764 etting@uicwtx.edu*

RECEIVED
MAR 17 2014

If research is funded, please provide information about source of funding and grant number:

Study is Completed

If you have finished enrolling subjects, performing study interventions, collecting data, and **the only data that you will be working with is deidentified**, you may close your study and continue to analyze the deidentified data.

The study listed above has been completed.

Total number of subjects enrolled in the study since the study began:

Go to signature box on next page.

Study is Being Continued

You must have active, on-going IRB approval in order to enroll any subjects, perform any study interventions, collect new data, and/or analyze identified data. Any changes to the originally approved protocol must be approved by the IRB *before* implementing the changes.

This study will (*select only one option*):

continue to involve human subjects during the next approval period. If the study will continue, please answer questions starting with "Risk assessment".

not involve human subjects directly, but **will involve analysis of identifiable data**.

(Continues on next page.)

Risk assessment.

Does the study involve any of the following *vulnerable categories* of subjects (**select all that apply**):

- Children Pregnant Women Prisoners Elderly Cognitively Impaired Other
(If other, please describe):

Since reviewed, have any subjects experienced any adverse effects (social, financial, legal, psychological, and/or physical) as a result of participation in the study?

- No Yes (If yes, please describe):

Since reviewed, have you had to withdraw any subjects from the study, or have any subjects decided to withdraw from the study?

- No Yes (If yes, please describe):

Since reviewed, has any new information become available, either through the study itself or through outside sources (e.g. journal articles, conferences) that may indicate a possible increased risk to subjects in this study?

- No Yes (If yes, please describe):

Informed Consent.

Since reviewed, have there been any problems in obtaining or documenting informed consent?

- No Yes N/A (If yes, or N/A, please explain):

Copies of informed consent and/or assent are securely stored as described in the approved protocol.

- No Yes N/A

If no or N/A, please explain:

Modifications to protocol.

Since reviewed, have any changes been made to the approved protocol (including recruitment methods, research sites, methodology, alterations to informed consent/assent, changes in PI or Co-PIs).

- No Yes

If yes, please attach a copy of the **IRB Revision and Amendment form**.

I certify that the information above is accurate and complete. I will request prior IRB approval for any changes to the approved protocol and/or informed consent forms, and will not implement those changes until I receive IRB approval. I will report any adverse effects to the IRB immediately. I agree to comply fully with the ethical principles and regulations regarding the protection of human subjects in research.

<u>Christine L. Keyser-Fanick</u> Principal Investigator's Printed Name	<u>Christine L. Keyser-Fanick</u> Principal Investigator's Signature	<u>3/14/14</u> Date
<u>Sorothy Ething</u> Faculty Advisor's Printed Name (If applicable)	<u>Sorothy Ething</u> Faculty Advisor's Signature	<u>3/14/14</u> Date

Appendix O
Approval of Protocol Revision—January 2, 2014

The University of the Incarnate Word
IRB Continuation/Completion Form

In accordance with Federal Regulations 45CFR46, the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects must review research protocols at least annually, or more frequently if warranted. All approved research must submit a continuing review request to the IRB prior to the expiration of their IRB approval. Sufficient time must be allowed for IRB review of these continuation requests. Please contact the IRB at 829-2758 if you have any questions.

IRB #: 11-05-001

Project Title: Public High School Principals' Perceptions of Effective Leadership Strategies for Improved School Performance

Principal Investigator: Keyser-Fanick, Christine

PI Tel. and e-mail:

Co-Investigator(s):

Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Ettlting, Dorothy

Advisor Tel. and e-mail:

If research is funded, please provide information about source of funding and grant number:

RECEIVED
JAN 11 2 2014

Study is Completed

If you have finished enrolling subjects, performing study interventions, collecting data, and the only data that you will be working with is deidentified, you may close your study and continue to analyze the deidentified data.

Completed.

has been completed and closed.

Total number of subjects enrolled in the study since the study began:

Go to signature box on next page.

Study is Being Continued

You must have active, on-going IRB approval in order to enroll any subjects, perform any study interventions, collect new data, and/or analyze identified data. Any changes to the originally approved protocol must be approved by the IRB *before* implementing the changes.

Continuation.

This study (*select only one option*):

will continue to involve human subjects during the next approval period. If the study will continue, please answer questions starting with "Risk assessment".

will not involve human subjects directly but will involve analysis of identifiable data.

(Continues on next page.)

Appendix P

Approval of Protocol Revision—April 30, 2012

Risk assessment.
Does the study involve any of the following *vulnerable categories* of subjects (**select all that apply**):
 Children Pregnant Women Prisoners Elderly Cognitively Impaired Other
 (If other, please describe):

Since reviewed, have any subjects experienced any adverse effects (social, financial, legal, psychological, and/or physical) as a result of participation in the study?
 No Yes (If yes, please describe):

Since reviewed, have you had to withdraw any subjects from the study, or have any subjects decided to withdraw from the study?
 No Yes (If yes, please describe):

Since reviewed, has any new information become available, either through the study itself or through outside sources (e.g. journal articles, conferences) that may indicate a possible increased risk to subjects in this study?
 No Yes (If yes, please describe):

Informed Consent.
Since reviewed, have there been any problems in obtaining or documenting informed consent?
 No Yes N/A (If yes, or N/A, please explain):

Copies of informed consent and/or assent are securely stored as described in the approved protocol.
 No Yes N/A
 If yes, please indicate storage location:
 If no or N/A, please explain:

Modifications to protocol.
Since reviewed, have any changes been made to the approved protocol (including recruitment methods, research sites, methodology, alterations to informed consent/assent, changes in PI or Co-PIs).
 No Yes
 If yes, please attach a copy of the **IRB Revision and Amendment form** and describe modifications here:

I certify that the information above is accurate and complete. I will request prior IRB approval for any changes to the approved protocol and/or informed consent forms, and will not implement those changes until I receive IRB approval. I will report any adverse effects to the IRB immediately. I agree to comply fully with the ethical principles and regulations regarding the protection of human subjects in research.

<u>Christine L. Keyser-Farick</u> Principal Investigator's Printed Name	<u>Christine L. Keyser-Farick</u> Principal Investigator's Signature	<u>12/19/2013</u> Date
<u>Dorothy Atling</u> Faculty Advisor's Printed Name (If applicable)	<u>Dorothy Atling</u> Faculty Advisor's Signature	<u>12/19/2013</u> Date

The University of the Incarnate Word

IRB Continuation/Completion Form

In accordance with Federal Regulations 45CFR46, the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects must review research protocols at least annually, or more frequently if warranted. All approved research must submit a continuing review request to the IRB prior to the expiration of their IRB approval. Sufficient time must be allowed for IRB review of these continuation requests. Please contact the IRB at 829-2758 if you have any questions.

IRB #: 11-05-001

Project Title: "Public High School Principals' Perceptions of Effective Leadership Strategies for Improved School Performance"

Principal Investigator: Christine L. Keyser-Fanick

PI Tel. and e-mail: 210-332-7552 ckeyserfanick@sbcglobal.net

Co-Investigator(s):

Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Dr. Dorothy Etting

Advisor Tel. and e-mail:

If research is funded, please provide information about source of funding and grant number:

Study is Completed

If you have finished enrolling subjects, performing study interventions, collecting data, and the only data that you will be working with is deidentified, you may close your study and continue to analyze the deidentified data.

Completed.

has been completed and closed.

Total number of subjects enrolled in the study since the study began:

Go to signature box on next page.

Study is Being Continued

You must have active, on-going IRB approval in order to enroll any subjects, perform any study interventions, collect new data, and/or analyze identified data. Any changes to the originally approved protocol must be approved by the IRB *before* implementing the changes.

Continuation.

This study (*select only one option*):

will continue to involve human subjects during the next approval period. If the study will continue, please answer questions starting with "Risk assessment".

will not involve human subjects directly but will involve analysis of identifiable data.

(Continues on next page.)

Risk assessment.

Does the study involve any of the following *vulnerable categories* of subjects (***select all that apply***):

Children Pregnant Women Prisoners Elderly Cognitively Impaired Other

(If other, please describe):

Since reviewed, have any subjects experienced any adverse effects (social, financial, legal, psychological, and/or physical) as a result of participation in the study?

No Yes (If yes, please describe):

Since reviewed, have you had to withdraw any subjects from the study, or have any subjects decided to withdraw from the study?

No Yes (If yes, please describe):

Since reviewed, has any new information become available, either through the study itself or through outside sources (e.g. journal articles, conferences) that may indicate a possible increased risk to subjects in this study?

No Yes (If yes, please describe):

Informed Consent.

Since reviewed, have there been any problems in obtaining or documenting informed consent?

No Yes N/A (If yes, or N/A, please explain):

Copies of informed consent and/or assent are securely stored as described in the approved protocol.

No Yes N/A

If yes, please indicate storage location:

If no or N/A, please explain:

Modifications to protocol.

Since reviewed, have any changes been made to the approved protocol (including recruitment methods, research sites, methodology, alterations to informed consent/assent, changes in PI or Co-PIs).

No Yes

If yes, please attach a copy of the **IRB Revision and Amendment form** and describe modifications here:

I certify that the information above is accurate and complete. I will request prior IRB approval for any changes to the approved protocol and/or informed consent forms, and will not implement those changes until I receive IRB approval. I will report any adverse effects to the IRB immediately. I agree to comply fully with the ethical principles and regulations regarding the protection of human subjects in research.

Christine L. Keyser-Fanick
Principal Investigator's Printed Name

Christine L. Keyser-Fanick
Principal Investigator's Signature

4/30/2012
Date

Faculty Advisor's Printed Name
(If applicable)

Faculty Advisor's Signature

Date

Appendix Q
Approval of Protocol Revision—May 13, 2011



May 13, 2011

Christine L. Keyser-Fanick
8642 Wrexham Heights
San Antonio, TX 78254

Hello Christine,

The UIW IRB has approved your IRB application titled "Public High School Principals' Perceptions of Effective Leadership Strategies for Improved School Performance".

Enclosed with this letter is your IRB Application form stamped with the UWI IRB approval number and approval date, as well as your letters of Invitation to Participate, to Request Permission of Administrators, and Participant Confirmation, and your Consent Agreement from stamped with the IRB approval number. Please use copies of these letters and consent documents with the stamp on them when you communicate by mail or consent your subjects.

Just as a reminder of what's in the UIW IRB Manual, your approval will be good for a year from the date it is obtained. At that time, you will need to submit either the form closing your study if you have completed it or the form requesting continued IRB approval. In the mean time, if you need to make any changes to your protocol, the IRB must be notified and these changes approved before they can be initiated.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Best of luck on your project.

Dr. Helen E. Smith



Helen E. Smith, RPh, MS, PhD
Assistant Professor, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences
Feik School of Pharmacy
University of the Incarnate Word
4301 Broadway
San Antonio, TX 78209-6397
hesmith@uiwtx.edu
210 883-1087

11-05-001

APPLICATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM
University of the Incarnate Word

1. **Title of Study:**
Public High School Principals' Perceptions of Effective Leadership Strategies for Improved School Performance

2. **Principal Investigator (type name, telephone number, e-mail address and mailing address):**

Christine L. Keyser-Fanick
8642 Wrexham Heights
San Antonio, TX 78254

Home: 210-681-6819

Mobile: 210-332-7552

Email: ckeyserfanick@sbcglobal.net or ckeyserf@student.uiwtx.edu

- Time line on CITI 8
- P. 42
- P. 58

3. **Co-Investigator; Faculty Supervisor; Thesis or Dissertation Chair:**

Dr. Dorothy Ettling

4. **Division/Discipline:**

Education

Concentration: Organizational Leadership

5. **Research Category:** a. Exempt b. Expedited Review c. Full Board Review

6. **Purpose of Study:**

The purpose of this study is to explore what leadership practices public high school principals perceive to be most effective in attaining significant school improvement.

7. **Number of Subjects:** 8 **Controls:** _____

8. **Does this research involve any of the following:**

	YES	NO		YES	NO
Inmates of penal institutions	_____	X	Fetus in utero	_____	X
Institutionalized mentally retarded	_____	X	Viable fetus	_____	X
Institutionalized mentally disabled	_____	X	Nonviable fetus	_____	X
Committed patients	_____	X	Dead fetus	_____	X
Mentally retarded outpatient	_____	X	In vitro fertilization	_____	X
Mentally disabled outpatient	_____	X	Minors (under 18)	_____	X
Pregnant women	_____	X			

For each "Yes", state what precautions you will use to obtain informed consent.

9. **Duration of study:**

The duration of the study is expected to be 11 months from the date of approval.

10. **How is information obtained? (Include instruments used)**

Data will be collected through one-on-one interviews with the selected public high school principals.

Interviews
with principals

11. **Confidentiality – Are data recorded anonymously?** (X Yes _____ No)

12. If #11 is answered "No", how will the study subjects' confidentiality be maintained?

13. **Benefit of research:** Researcher seeks to

- o derive preliminary theory of school leadership, grounded in data, which will lead to an in-depth understanding of leadership behaviors and strategies employed by the high school principals whose schools achieved significant improvement.
- o Add to body of knowledge.
- o Publish study for use by others.

14. Possible risk to subjects: Because there exists a potential for stress in the process of answering questions, ~~the~~ the interview and taping will be stopped if a participant becomes uncomfortable. The interview will only start again if and when the participant indicates a desire to continue. Participants may ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time.

IF CHANGE IN RESEARCH OCCURS THE BOARD MUST BE NOTIFIED BEFORE RESEARCH IS CONTINUED.

Principal Investigator signature Christine A. Kuper Janich Date 2-22-11

Responsible Faculty signature Deborah C. [unclear] Date 2-22-11
(Required if student is Principal Investigator)

IRB Approval signature M. [unclear] Date 4/29/11
Application # 11-05-001

Heber E Smith 5/13/11