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LEADING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE:

A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF EXPERIENCES OF

TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

By

NIKESHIA LEATHERWOOD

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the
College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Education
in Organizational Leadership
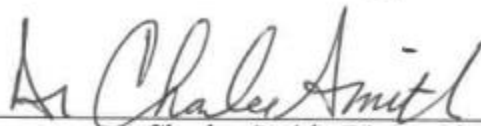
Southeastern University
August, 2019

LEADING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF

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by

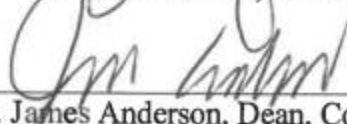NIKESHIA LEATHERWOOD

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Dr. James Anderson, Dean, College of Education

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Jason, who has supported me though all of my adult education and graduate studies. Your relentless support has allowed me to finish this capstone accomplishment. You have been a supportive husband and a phenomenal father. I appreciate you more than you will ever know. I look forward to spending the rest of our lives together enjoying life and making more memories. I also dedicate this dissertation to my children. I realize that you will choose your own paths in life, but I wanted to be an example of excellence for you. Always remember that you can accomplish anything you want to, if you put your mind to it and persevere until the work is finished. Jason, Joshua, Jamarcus, and Jakira, my prayer for you is that you do great things in the earth. Always remember to put God first. Additional family members include my mother, Nana Grant, my father, Marcus Andrews, my stepmother, Mary Andrews, and my mother-in-law, Louise Gambrel. Your relentless prayers, words of encouragement, and visible support breathed life into me. Mary, you have told me for years that I would do this. Thank you for believing in me when I did not see this for myself.

I would also like to thank the participants who gave their time by allowing me to interview them. I cannot name you here, but you know who you are. One of the most precious gifts a person can give another is time. Last, but definitely not least, I would like to thank my personal savior, Jesus Christ. I can do all things [which He has called me to do] through Him who strengthens and empowers me [to fulfill His purpose—I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency; I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses me with inner strength and confident peace (Philippians 4:13, Amplified Bible).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to acknowledge the faculty and my fellow doctoral colleagues at Southeastern University, all of whom have been a source of encouragement and strength throughout this journey. When I first began this journey, as an original member of Cohort C, Dr. Patty LeBlanc welcomed me and made me feel part of the Southeastern family. In her emails, she told me that this journey would make me fall in love with Jesus all over again. She was correct. I vividly remember the first class taught by Dr. Roth. I remember him holding the Bible in one hand and his dissertation in the other hand. As he placed the Bible on top of the dissertation, he encouraged us to view the dissertation work thought the lens of the Bible and not the reverse. All the professors were a joy to work with, including Dr. Johnson, Dr. Hawkins, Dr. Henderson, Dr. Anderson, Dr. Coscia, Dr. Smith, and Dr. Yates.

This journey would not be complete if were not for the relentless support of my dissertation committee and support faculty who helped me become a better version of myself. I am extremely grateful for Dr. Campbell and Dr. Lopez who spent hours of time editing my work. With each edit, I became a better writer and a more reflective person. Dr. Smith, Dr. Deck, and Dr. Rafidi were an excellent committee who helped me navigate this journey, one chapter at a time. Dr. Smith helped me through the refiner's fire. Dr. Smith, you were correct. Thank you for never giving up on me. We finished the course. You, Jesus, and me! We did it!

ABSTRACT

The Every Student Succeeds Act has set the course for new accountability measures for school and system leaders. How principals lead organizational change might be key to the success their schools experience and the achievement results of their students. This phenomenological study examined the professional experiences, leadership trainings, and strategic initiatives of traditional public school principals who led organizational change efforts that resulted in two academic rating increases within a three-year period. Five principals, representing elementary and high school, were interviewed to collect data on their experiences of leading successful organizational change. Using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological method, rigor was established through the application of member checking, bracketing, and validating. From 226 significant statements, six themes emerged. By examining the lived experiences of these principals, greater insights may be gained to assist other school leaders who are responsible for leading organizational change efforts. This research may be valuable for district leaders who are responsible for designing principal professional development programs and courses. Additionally, this research may assist principals who work in turnaround schools and those responsible for developing, training, recruiting, hiring, and retaining highly effective principals.

Keywords: principal, leadership standards, turnaround schools, transformational leadership, Every Student Succeeds Act, student achievement, school grades, strategic initiative, accountability, traditional schools

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

I. INTRODUCTION

Leading organizational change in today's public schools requires dedication, courage, and relentless commitment by those charged with steering the helm from the principal's seat. Blankstein (2004) stated that leadership and courage have been linked together for centuries. Principals are responsible for providing safe environments which are also conducive to learning opportunities. Principals also serve as the chief instructional leader within their schools. During the past 25 years, convincing evidence has supported the notion that the principal plays an inherent role in the success of a school and the achievement of its students (Streshly & Gray, 2008). The field of education does not have a consistent record for continuing practices that improve student outcomes (Strickland-Cohen, Kent, & Horner, 2014). Leaders who are stagnant, complacent, and unresponsive are often ineffective in leading turnaround schools and fail to turn average schools into high-performing schools. Ultimately, principals must effectively lead their organizations while also ensuring students learn.

The multifaceted role of the principalship requires strategic planning and intentional goal setting by those who serve as principals. "School personnel perceive that the role of the building administrator is singularly important to the sustained implementation of effective programs and practices" (Strickland-Cohen, Kent, & Horner, 2014, p. 20). Vooren (2018) reported that in order to build leadership capacity in others, the role of the principal required insight and explicit skills to train staff.

This ability to build leadership in others is known as the Courage Leadership Imperative (CLI). "The CLI is defined as acting in accordance with one's own values, beliefs, and mission—even in the face of fear, potential losses, failure" (Blankstein, 2004, p. 15). By leading systemic organizational change, effective principals are able to turn underperforming and failing schools into high-performing schools.

Background of the Study

Components of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) have set the course for new accountability measures for school and system leaders (Williams, 2018). The Every Student Succeeds Act was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015, and builds on key areas of progress focusing on a clear goal to prepare all students for success in college and careers (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Moore (2009) posited that the role of the principal is more challenging than it has ever been. Twenty-first century reform requires building leaders to embrace change and create high-performing learning environments for teachers and students in order to transform schools into "autonomous, systems-thinking organizations, revolving around professional learning communities" (Moore, 2009, p. 20). Moore (2009) surmised that "emotional intelligence, creating successful relationships and leading change will be the responsibility of all future principals" (p. 21). In a fast-changing era encompassing educational reform, principals must ensure opportunities for success are embedded in school cultures and successfully lead their organizations by increasing student achievement to remain in compliance with the laws. Burke (2018) cited Kotter's (2012) outlined model for leading change within organizations in the following eight steps:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
2. Creating the guiding coalition

3. Developing a vision and strategy

4. Communicating the change vision

5. Empowering employees for broad-based action

6. Generating short-term wins

7. Consolidating gains and producing more change

8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture. (Burke, 2018, p. 3)

Literature supports the opinion that principals build capacity within their organization and within others inside the organization (Huggins, Klar, Hammonds, & Buskey, 2017). Williams (2018) documented how ESSA sounds an urgent call to build the capacity of district and school leaders who are prepared to advance outcomes for historically underperforming students. Colleges and universities are challenged to provide intensive leadership development that better prepares aspiring administrators (Williams, 2018). "Leadership is the ability to inspire confidence in others and support among the people who are needed to achieve organizational goals" (Sairam, Sirisuthi, & Wisetrinthong, 2017, p. 144).

Additional research provided valuable insights about organizational change from the perspective of the change recipients (Oreg, Bartunek, Lee, & Do, 2018). The effect that change has on individuals and organizations is under examination. One of the biggest challenges faced by organizations is changing the behavior of others (DiDonato & Gill, 2015). McDonald (2005) asserted that implementing change is a more complicated process than is realized by many practitioners in the field of education. "Among the many changes facing public schools are high levels of principal turnover" (Rangel, 2018, p. 87). Vooren (2018) noted the "role of the principals has been evolving over the years" (p. 47). Fullan (2001, as cited in Rangel, 2018), addressed leading school improvement efforts and noted the crucial role played by principals

during the process. Rangel (2018) indicated school improvement can take five to seven years.

Strickland-Cohen, Kent, and Horner (2014) stated that building administrators play a significant

role in the sustained use of effective programs and practices. Rangel (2018) confirmed that

principals have an important effect on student learning and effective principals help "grow"

(p. 88) student's learning.

Ahmad, Khawaja, Hussain, Panhwar, and Farshad (2017) noted school researchers firmly

believe the fact that a significant factor of a high-performing school is an effective principal.

However, an increasing number of principals and assistant principals report feeling as if they are

unable to keep up with routine management responsibilities, including the upkeep of the school

building, while also being pressured and expected to encompass necessary skills of being experts

in assessment, curriculum, and instruction (Moran & Lawrin, 2017). In the state of Florida, the

effective principal is responsible for improving student learning results, prioritizing learning, and

overseeing instructional implementation. Additionally, the principal must recruit, retain, and

develop an effective and diverse faculty and staff. Principals must also monitor the school

learning environment, make good decisions, and cultivate a supporting culture within the school.

Other tasks encompass developing leaders, managing the organization and facility, and

appropriately communicating with all stakeholders. The principal must demonstrate personal

and professional behaviors consistent with quality ethical practices (Florida Department of

Education, n.d.).

Ahmad et al. (2017) outlined that literature supports the need for leadership and defining

effective leadership is difficult. "In a culture of change, emotions frequently run high" (Fullan,

2001, p. 74, as cited in Moore, 2009). Principals are instrumental in leading school improvement

efforts because they are responsible for "hiring effective teachers and other staff, setting

expectations vision for the school, fostering a positive school culture, and providing strong instructional and material leadership" (Kachel, 2018, p. 1).

A review of the literature revealed the importance of delving deeper into the topic of leadership effectiveness as shown by principals who have turned schools around. Increasing attention has been given to what principals in turnaround schools need to be able to do to lead improvement efforts (Hitt, Woodruff, Meyers, & Zhu, 2018). Additional interest has been given concerning the effects of leadership on student performance due to a shortage of high-quality leadership, school accountability, and organizational complexity (Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, & Ylimaki, 2007). Hitt and Meyers (2018) asserted that schools must continue to develop into healthy, high-functioning organizations that provide rich learning support and maintain high expectations for students and teachers in order to persist in an upward trajectory beyond the typical two- or three-year window of school improvement to prevent plateaus. Hitt et al. (2018) posited

> the specific personal resources, actions, behaviors, or characteristics effective leaders rely
> upon to enact effective leader practice has been understudied, but not nearly to
> inconsequential degree that turnaround leader resources have been examined, as a
> counterpart framework for turnaround leaders does not exist. (p. 58)

Theoretical Framework

The research study was rooted in transformational leadership theory. James MacGregor Burns is credited for the conceptualization of transforming leadership (Hickman, 2016). Burns first introduced the concept of transforming leadership in his descriptive research on political leaders, but the term is now used in organizational psychology (Hickman, 2016). Expounding on the transforming leadership theory, Bernard Bass used the term "transformational" instead of

"transforming" (Hickman, 2016). "Transformational leadership enhances the motivation, morale, and performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms. These include connecting the follower's sense of identity and self to the project and the collective identity of the organization" (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013, p. 356). Principals who lead systemic change and improvement often incorporate methods and best practices that can be followed by others who influence change in organizations (Hickman, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

The research study examined the experiences of traditional public school principals who led successful organizational change. Exploration and examination of turnaround and effective leader practice were useful in understanding these principals and their high-quality leadership efforts. Understanding what effective leaders do is helpful for others concerned with turnaround leadership because effective leader practice is relevant (Hitt et al., 2018). Hitt et al. (2018) discussed several factors which contributed to the effectiveness of a principal and contended these same factors can be used to describe what contributes to the effectiveness of a principal in a turnaround school. Factors contributing to principals included the "principal's prior experience, the principal's educational preparation program, and principal's disposition" (Hitt et al., 2018, p. 59). Research and examination of effective leader practices have initiated the need to explore the means by which principals have led successful organizational change in turnaround schools and how they accomplished the work (Hitt & Meyers, 2018).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the professional experiences, leadership trainings, and strategic initiatives of traditional public school principals who led organizational change resulting in two academic rating increases within a three-year period. For

the purpose of this study, leading organizational change that resulted in two academic rating increases within a three-year period was defined as a school's letter grade increasing by two letter grades, as determined by the governing state board of education.

Research Questions

Moustakas's (1994) stated, "The empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience" (p. 12). Aligning with Moustakas's phenomenological research methodology, the following questions were addressed in the study:

1. What are the professional experiences of traditional public school principals who have led successful organizational change?

2. What leadership trainings influenced traditional public school principals who have led successful organizational change?

3. What strategic initiatives did traditional public school principals implement while leading successful organizational change?

Significance of the Study

Hitt et al. (2018) asserted that the introduction of change for successfully leading and rehabilitating organizations requires a much different principal than a decently performing school requires. Therefore, the results of this phenomenological add to the conversations on ways traditional public school principals lead organizational change. Through this research model, principals described their experiences leading organizational change efforts that attributed to two academic rating increases within a three-year period. Additionally, the research revealed common themes derived from the shared experiences of traditional public school

principals who led organizational change. Furthermore, this study provided insights into leading organizational change in order to assist other principals who lead academic improvement efforts.

Overview of Methodology

Research Design

The research design was rooted in empirical phenomenology and further defined in transcendental phenomenology. The conceptual framework of transcendental phenomenology explores intentionality and intuition (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2013), citing Moustakas, asserted that transcendental phenomenology is focused on "the description of the experiences of the participants" (p. 79). A phenomenological study, as defined by Creswell, "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experience" (p. 76). The current research study described the lived experiences of traditional public school principals who have led organizational change that resulted in two academic rating increases within a three-year period. A qualitative methodology using the phenomenological approach was selected for this study. Because the primary emphasis of the study focused on the lived experiences of the participants, this approach was the most reasonable selection to answer the posed research questions.

According to Creswell (2013), the phenomenological approach is utilized when the researcher seeks to understand the shared or common experiences of several individuals. Creswell addressed the importance of understanding these similarities in order to develop protocol and develop deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The practice of bracketing potential research biases is a common method used in phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas described this bracketing as the Epoche process. In the process, researchers investigate the phenomenon "free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). As a principal in the same district as the

participants, the researcher endeavored to recognize, bracket, and isolate those experiences from the experiences shared by the participants.

Data Collection

The researcher analyzed qualitative data to address the proposed research questions. After obtaining approval by the Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB), and the selected school district's Ethical Review Board (ERB), the researcher collected data by conducting semi-structured interviews asking open-ended questions using the provided interview guide (see Appendix A). The researcher conducted interviews at sites selected by the participants. Prior to the interview sessions, the researcher scheduled the sessions and obtained consent (see Appendix B) from the participants. During the individual interviews, follow-up questions were asked to elicit more details regarding the shared experiences of the participants. The researcher recorded audio files of each interview. Following each session, the researcher transcribed the interviews and returned the transcripts to the participants for validation. Final transcripts were coded for further analysis.

Sample

After approval by Southeastern's IRB, and the selected school district's ERB, the researcher purposefully chose a sample of traditional public school principals who had led organizational change resulting in two academic rating increases within a three-year period. Dukes (as cited in Creswell, 2013) recommended studying three to 10 participants and one phenomenon. Criterion sampling was used because the individuals selected were administrators who had "experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 155) of leading organizational change that resulted in two academic rating increases within a three-year period. The researcher invited elementary, middle, and high school principals to participate in the study. Four

elementary principals and one high school principal accepted the invitation and participated in the study.

Instrumentation

In phenomenological research, Creswell (2013) discussed manners in which researchers conduct interviews. The semi-structured interview questions were designed by the researcher (see Appendix A) to delve purposefully and intentionally into the lived experiences of the participants who experienced the phenomenon of leading organizational change resulting in two academic rating increases within a three-year period. Prior to their use, the researcher, in collaboration with the dissertation committee, reviewed, validated, and amended the interview questions.

Data Analysis

The researcher recorded, transcribed, and coded responses to the semi-structured interview questions. To ensure the interviews adequately depicted their responses, the researcher presented the transcripts to each participant individually for validation. After this step, the responses were coded and the themes that emerged from the responses were defined.

Limitations

The researcher identified the following limitations for this study:

1. Data collection was confined to traditional public school principals within one school district.

2. The sample size was limited to the number of willing school-based leaders who agreed to participate in the study.

3. This research was not intended to define or scrutinize any leadership practices, but rather examined the experiences shared by the participants in the study.

Definition of Key Terms

For clarity, the following terms were relevant to the phenomenon of discussion: traditional public school principals' experiences of leading organizational change resulting in two academic improvement ratings within a three-year period. The following terms are defined below:

Organizational Change: a process involving changes of organizations' mission, vision and processes with impact at the individual and organizational level (Bejinariu, Jitarel, Sarca, & Mocan, 2017).

Phenomenological Study: A phenomenological study "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experience" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76) .

Traditional Public School: A public elementary or secondary school which provides instruction and education services that does not focus primarily on special education, vocational/technical education, alternative education, or any particular theme associated with magnet or special programs (School and District Glossary, n.d.).

Summary

The purpose of this dissertation was to describe the experiences of traditional public school principals who have led organizational change that resulted in two academic rating increases within a three-year period. While no exact solution exists for turning around failing schools, school leadership was implicated in the rehabilitation of a school and has been cited as a contributing factor to school turnaround (Hitt & Meyers, 2018). By examining the individual experiences of traditional public school principals who have successfully turned schools around, valuable information was shared by current practitioners in the field. This information may be useful for other principals who are responsible for increasing student achievement levels in the

schools they lead. The researcher sought to answer: (a) what are the professional experiences of traditional public school principals who have led successful organizational change, (b) what leadership trainings influenced traditional public school principals who have led successful organizational change, and (c) what strategic initiatives were implemented by traditional public school principals who have led successful organizational change.

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the research study. In Chapter 2, the researcher examines scholarly literature on leadership preparation and effectiveness, leadership standards, accountability in leadership, transformational leadership theory in education, and leadership and student achievement. Chapter 3 describes the phenomenological methodology used for this study. The researcher introduces the participants in the study, defines her role as the researcher, and addresses measures taken to conduct a valid, reliable, and ethical study. Additionally, the researcher describes the instruments used to collect data and the procedures used to conduct the study. In Chapter 4, the researcher provides the results of the study relative to each research question and the themes that emerged from the data. Evidence of quality is also addressed in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, the researcher interprets the results of the study. Additionally, the researcher relates the findings to the supporting literature, discusses limitations of the study, shares implications for future research, and provides recommendations for future research.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Increasing demands concerning school accountability in the United States, specifically how the principal impacts student achievement, have surfaced as a major interest to those who research school leadership (Brown, 2016). In an era of accountability, the traditional role of the school principal serving as a manager has been exchanged for the role of an instructional leader (Barton, 2013). Additionally, the transition from the idea of principal as administrator to principal as leader has caused organizations to search for student-centered approaches to meet the changing needs (Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018). The concept of leadership has become widespread in organizations and serves an integral role in helping organizations achieve goals (Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018). Existing research substantiates that student achievement is significantly influenced by the leadership effectiveness of school principals (Hitt & Meyers, 2018). Principals influence various aspects of the school including teacher supervision, retention, curriculum choices, teaching techniques, student discipline, and student allocation to teachers and courses (Coelli & Green, 2012). The specific actions of principals and the impact of their behavior on teaching and learning has been the subject of research for decades; however, the magnitude of the principal's position in current school reform has become a topic of interest for practitioners, scholars, and those who influence educational policy (Davis, Leon, & Fultz, 2013).

Educational Leadership Selection and Preparation Outside the United States

School leadership, principal effectiveness, and a focus on increased student achievement are subjects of increasing interest in the United States and in the state of Florida. International leadership models have been developed as a result of research and may hold possibilities for professional associations, policy makers, and principals who desire to see increased student improvement in the United States (Stewart, 2013). Stewart (2013) posited that purposeful leadership was integral to increasing student achievement and led to significant school improvement, whereas weak leadership yielded lower rates of overall school improvement and marginal academic gains. Noting that efforts to bring about sustainable academic improvement in the United States have continued to fall short, Stewart focused her research on several international countries that have taken proactive approaches to leadership preparation in order to provide a framework for consideration in the United States.

England

In England, the National College for School Leadership shifted its focus from traditional leadership development to a more explicit focus on developing leadership competencies focused on improving challenging schools (Stewart, 2013). Stewart noted that school leaders who were identified as excellent were commissioned to support specific schools in need of improvement. In some instances, the highly effective school leader served as the principal of both schools, and in other cases, they served as consultants supporting the principal of the low-performing school (Stewart, 2013). This supportive approach, known as the London Leadership Strategy, raised student achievement in underperforming elementary and secondary schools in London (Stewart, 2013). Due to these successful leadership approaches, the support offered by consultants to school leadership teams was shifted towards supporting teachers and improving teaching

14

(Stewart, 2013). Within the framework of the London Leadership Strategy, exemplary teaching schools were designated to provide on-site professional development and coaching to teachers who needed support (Stewart, 2013). Stewart found that this style of professional development proved to be more effective than traditional professional development courses. Due to its success, the National College extended this approach to other cities, and, as a result, several hundred national educational leaders have been paired with schools who need support (Stewart, 2013).

Singapore

Documenting two decades of successful performance on international assessments, Stewart discussed Singapore's proactive and comprehensive approach to recruiting and developing educators. In Singapore, novice teachers are recruited and selected from the top one-third of their graduating cohorts and provided mentoring by master teachers. In addition to this mentorship, teachers annually receive 100 hours of professional development (Stewart, 2013). These talented teachers are not expected to remain teachers for the entirely of their career and are continually assessed for their leadership potential (Stewart, 2013). Opportunities to serve in middle management positions, including the assistant principal role, and extensive leadership trainings are provided to teachers who demonstrate leadership potential. After demonstrating leadership competency, the teachers participate in rigorous interview processes and experience simulations designed to further engage their leadership capabilities (Stewart, 2013).

Stewart mentioned that the aforementioned processes are prerequisite to entering educational leadership programs in Singapore. Once selected into the Leaders in Education program, teacher leaders spend six months (on a fulltime basis) at the National Institute of Education to prepare them for advanced school leadership roles, such as the principalship

(Stewart, 2013). The mission of the Singapore's leadership preparation program is to produce

school leaders who are capable of transforming schools into innovative learning communities

that nurture students and teachers to be successful in an economy driven by such advancement

and learning (Stewart, 2013). Singapore's leadership program is globally oriented and requires

pre-service principals to spend two weeks overseas in order to challenge and deepen their

thinking towards education with the expectation that they will share what they have learned with

their peers when they return (Stewart, 2013). Additionally, they are required to propose detailed

school improvement plans to Singapore's superintendents and then they are assigned to a school

to carry out the plans they proposed (Stewart, 2013). Stewart indicated that, once fully trained,

the Ministry of Education assigns them to schools and reserves the right to periodically transfer

principals among schools and within the Ministry of Education itself as part of Singapore's

continual professional development model. To assess their performance, principals in Singapore

are evaluated against standards and goals that reflect accomplishment towards the vision they

have set for the school they lead (Stewart, 2013).

China

Additional discussion of international leadership models highlighted the

accomplishments of leadership preparation for principals in Shanghai, the leading education

province in China. Schools in Shanghai are large and serve several thousand students with

leadership teams that include a principal and several directors who are responsible for curriculum

and instruction, student affairs, and logistics (Stewart, 2013). In Shanghai, the principal's

primary focus is the overall performance of the school, but the majority of the instructional

leadership responsibility is carried out by teaching and research groups composed of master

teachers (Stewart, 2013). Stewart remarked that master teachers teach the same subject as well

as grade level and meet for up to two hours a week to plan meaningful lessons, examine student progress, observe best practices in each other's classrooms, and provide feedback to improve teaching practices. Additionally, the research groups are responsible for selecting and researching current education issues and presenting a review of the literature to their peers (Stewart, 2013). Stewart commented that participation in research afforded teachers the opportunity to try new approaches in their schools and write papers and articles discussing their results. The research groups presented their finding to other members of teacher research groups as a method to share best practices and strengthen the system (Stewart, 2013). Stewart compared these practices to teacher practices in the United States and noted that teachers in the U.S. often work in isolated classrooms, whereas Chinese classrooms are often open and welcoming to colleagues so novice teachers can learn from master teachers.

Additionally, widespread migration has caused large socioeconomic disproportions in Shanghai; therefore, the government has shifted its focus towards improving its lower performing schools (Stewart, 2013). Similar to England's approach, principals and teachers from high-performing schools are relied upon to assist weaker schools (Stewart, 2013). Stewart stated the high-performing leaders help the leaders of the weaker schools focus on management, culture, and teacher effectiveness. Additionally, high-performing principals may be assigned to manage several schools instead of one (Stewart, 2013). Stewart mentioned the principals and teachers of the high-performing schools as well as the weaker-performing schools spend time at each other's schools developing clear targets focused on a clear expectation for improvement within two years. As a catalyst for systemwide improvement in Shanghai and other Chinese provinces, school leaders have clustered together to share resources and best practices (Stewart, 2013).

Canada

Stewart (2013) also described Canadian efforts to improve its educational system. In 2004, after a decade of slow improvement, new government officials in Ontario, Canada brought together all stakeholders and initiated major education reforms targeted at increasing literacy and elementary numeracy, raising high-school graduation rates, and reducing achievement gaps among its diverse student population (Stewart, 2013). Stewart noted another goal of this initiative was to increase public confidence in its 5,000 publicly funded schools. To support this initiative, teachers received extensive professional development related to their school's areas of weakness (Stewart, 2013). Schools demonstrating the greatest need for improvement were provided with additional resources, and, in high schools, student success officers were assigned to support students who were at risk of dropping out of school (Stewart, 2013).

Other components of this reform, the Ontario Leadership Framework and the Principals' Qualification Plan, focused on leadership development strategy. The Principals' Qualification plan changed the designation of the principal from administrator to instructional leader (Stewart, 2013). Support for core academic instruction became the major component of Ontario's principal preparation programs (Stewart, 2013). Stewart reported that experienced principals received training and provided mentoring to all principals and assistant principals in Ontario for two years. While this initiative is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education, the organization of mentorships is handled by local school boards. Similar to elements of the Shanghai principal evaluation model, Stewart noted that principals in Ontario are evaluated every five years based on their progress towards the challenging goals they have set for themselves and the strategies used to accomplish those goals. Comparable to London, Singapore, and Shanghai, Ontario's

leadership framework provided job-embedded professional development and peer-mentoring to strengthen its leaders (Stewart, 2013). Additionally, the ministry also provides funding to local school boards geared towards succession planning so that momentum is not lost as principals retire or move on to other career opportunities (Stewart, 2013). Stewart (2013) reported that the results of Ontario's reform actions led to a 14% increase in student proficiency by 6th grade by 2010. From 2004 to 2010, Ontario's graduation rate increased by 11%, and there was a 15% reduction in the number of low-performing schools. Within this same timeframe, the combination of all efforts decreased the attrition rate of new teachers by 66% (Stewart, 2013).

Possible Applications to U.S. Education

Stewart posited that the United States could learn from the successes and actions taken by the aforementioned international models. After conducting a comprehensive analysis of the new standards adopted by the mentioned countries, the following commonalities were noted:

1. Supporting, evaluating, and developing teacher quality.

2. Setting school goals for student performance, measuring progress, and making improvements.

3. Strategically using resources to focus all activities on improving teaching and learning.

4. Partnering with communities, social agencies, and universities to support the development of the whole child. (Stewart, 2013, p. 52)

Stewart noted that it is not entirely clear what specific experiences truly assisted the development of leaders, especially enough leaders to lead systemic change; however, places like Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Norway, and Hong Kong are exploring similar leadership models to strengthen their systems. In order to strengthen school systems in the Unites States, Stewart (2013) recommended that policy makers, school boards, and stakeholders

learn from the successes of high-performing countries by taking a comprehensive approach,

distributing school leadership, deploying effective principals in all schools, linking school

leadership to other successful reforms, and redesigning leadership for the future.

Leadership Standards

Within the last five years, the United States has also taken action to reform its policies

relative to education reform. The *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* outlines

guidelines and opportunities for principals and other school leaders to engage in high-quality

professional development (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). A high

turnover rate of principals and educational leaders across the nation may have been related to the

complex responsibilities and pressures of the job. These factors led to derailed school

improvement efforts and decreased student learning (National Policy Board for Educational

Administration, 2015). The authors of the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* have

realized that educational leaders, including veteran and novice school leaders, need ongoing

professional development and support to thrive in a career that is drastically changing (National

Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015).

The *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders*

Grounded in current research and the authentic experiences of educational leaders, the

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, formerly known as the *ISLLC Standards* and

abbreviated in the current research as the *Standards*, were developed to provide a student-centric

framework necessary for producing the desirable and equitable outcomes related to student

achievement in today's schools (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015).

The *Standards* were created to challenge professional associations, colleges and universities,

policy makers, and the education profession at large to stretch beyond established protocols and

current systems in order to produce better outcomes related to student learning. The *Standards*

focus on accomplished leadership practices and serve to encourage principals and other

educational leaders to strive for excellence in their practice at their present levels (National

Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). The profession of educational leadership

has developed significantly since the Council of Chief State School Officers first published

standards for educational leaders in 1996 (National Policy Board for Educational Administration,

2015). The *Standards* are the result of an extensive review of empirical research and synthesis

of survey and focus group results from more than 1,000 school and district leaders (National

Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). The leadership principles outlined in the

Standards are designed to provide school principals with a framework for understanding the

challenges and opportunities presented to them on a daily basis (National Policy Board for

Educational Administration, 2015).

Foundational to all levels of educational leadership, specifically school-level leadership,

the *Standards* provide a strong emphasis on student-centered learning. The *Standards* are

focused on what principals actually do in order to contribute to student learning and express the

critical importance of human relationships and the tasks performed by leaders (National Policy

Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Rooted in research, the *Standards* are organized to

reflect interdependent domains germane to effective leadership practices. Additionally, the

Standards are connected to student success with a clear emphasis on leadership and its

relationship to teaching and student learning. From a practitioner's standpoint, the domains are

not independent, but rather interdependent in order to propel each student to academic and

personal success (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). The *Standards*

are organized as follows:

1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values

2. Ethics and Professional Norms

3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness

4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

5. Community of Care and Support for Students

6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel

7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff

8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community

9. Operations and Management

10. School Improvement. (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 3)

In an era of emergent knowledge, new standards for school leaders were warranted to keep up with the changing demands of the job and for practical guidance and direction most beneficial to students (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Additionally, the *Standards* were developed to serve as guidelines for educational leaders who are faced with higher levels of accountability for student achievement and tasked with the responsibility of preparing students to be globally competitive in the 21st century workplace. The *Standards* are best understood in three related clusters or domains. The first cluster includes Standards 4 and 5. The second cluster includes Standards 6, 7, 8, and 9. The third cluster includes Standards 1, 2, and 3. Standard 10 is interwoven through the all standards to "reflect a theory of how educational leader practice influences student achievement" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 4) as shown in Figure 1.

Beyond the relationship between leadership practice and student learning, the *Standards* also serve as a guide for states that utilize the national standards to create state-specific educational leadership standards. The *Standards* are also used by college boards and "leadership preparation programs as they identify and develop the specific knowledge, skills, dispositions, and other characteristics required of educational leaders to achieve real student success in school" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 5). Figure 2 shows how the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* fit into context on a larger scale and displays how public expectations influence leadership practice, policy, and the development of the standards. Additionally, it displays how the *Standards* are used by professional associations and how the *Standards* drive leadership practice (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015).

The *Florida Leadership Standards*

Individual states also define leadership expectations within the context of professional standards. In the state of Florida, the Florida Principal Leadership Standards are statutory and serve as the state's core expectations for effective school administrators (Florida Department of Education, n.d.). Similar to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, the Florida Principal Leadership Standards are grounded in research relative to effective school leadership practices and establish the framework for school leader evaluations, professional development systems, school leadership preparation programs, and requirements for certification (Florida Department of Education, n.d.). In a comparison of both models, Florida's leadership model also encompasses 10 standards representative of the domains of effective leadership and dissimilar to the Standards, the Florida Principal Leadership Standards are sequentially clustered beginning with the first cluster as shown in Figure 3 (Florida Department of Education, n.d.). Additionally,

the Florida Principal Leadership Standards were developed to be used as sources for leadership

curricula development and proficiency exams in order to further fulfil their purposes (Florida

Department of Education, n.d.).
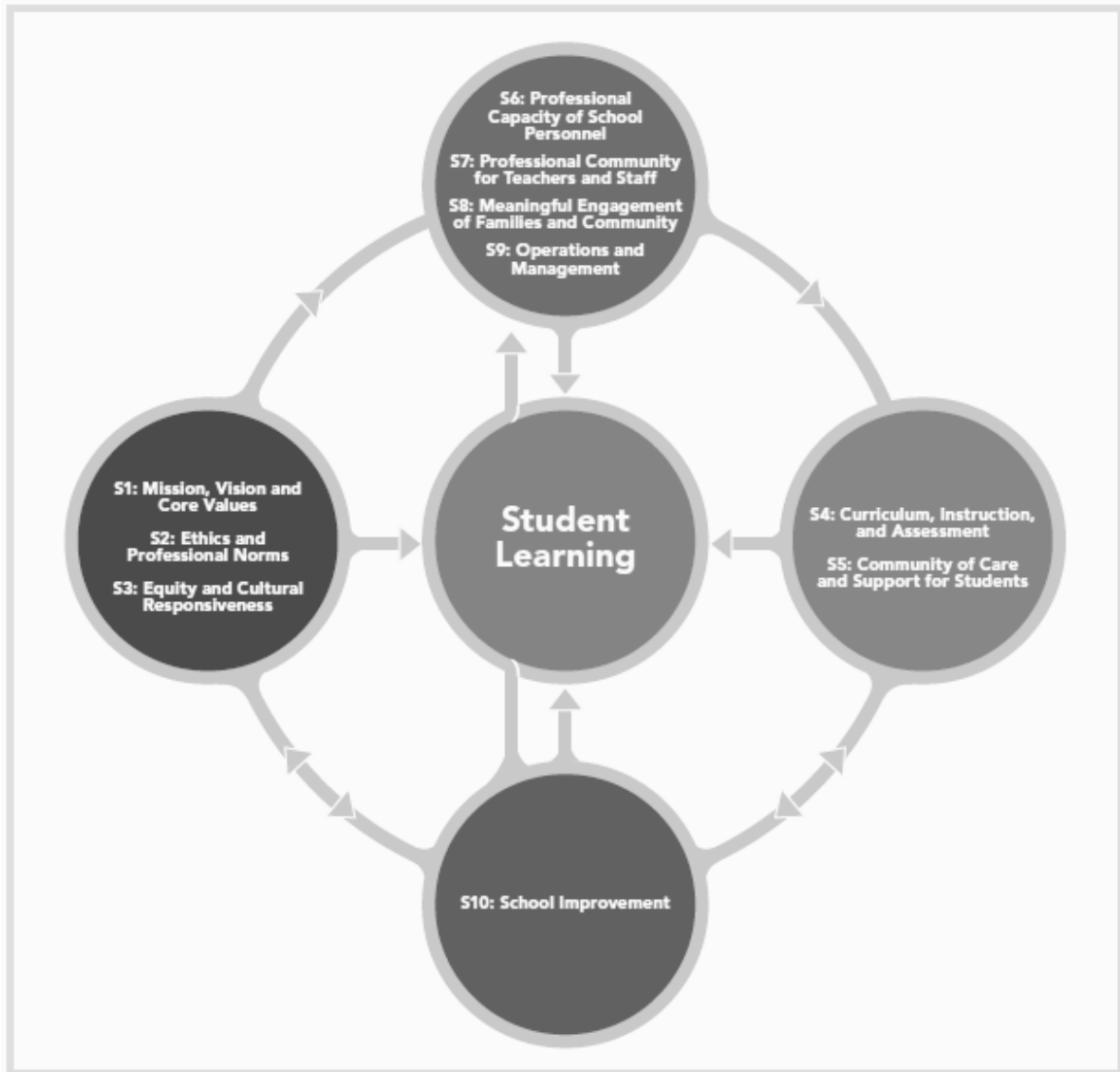
Figure 1. Student learning is shown as the core in this model and how it is influenced by educational leaders' actions according to the 10 Standards. Adapted from "Professional Standards for Educational Leaders," by National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 5. Copyright 2015 by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration.
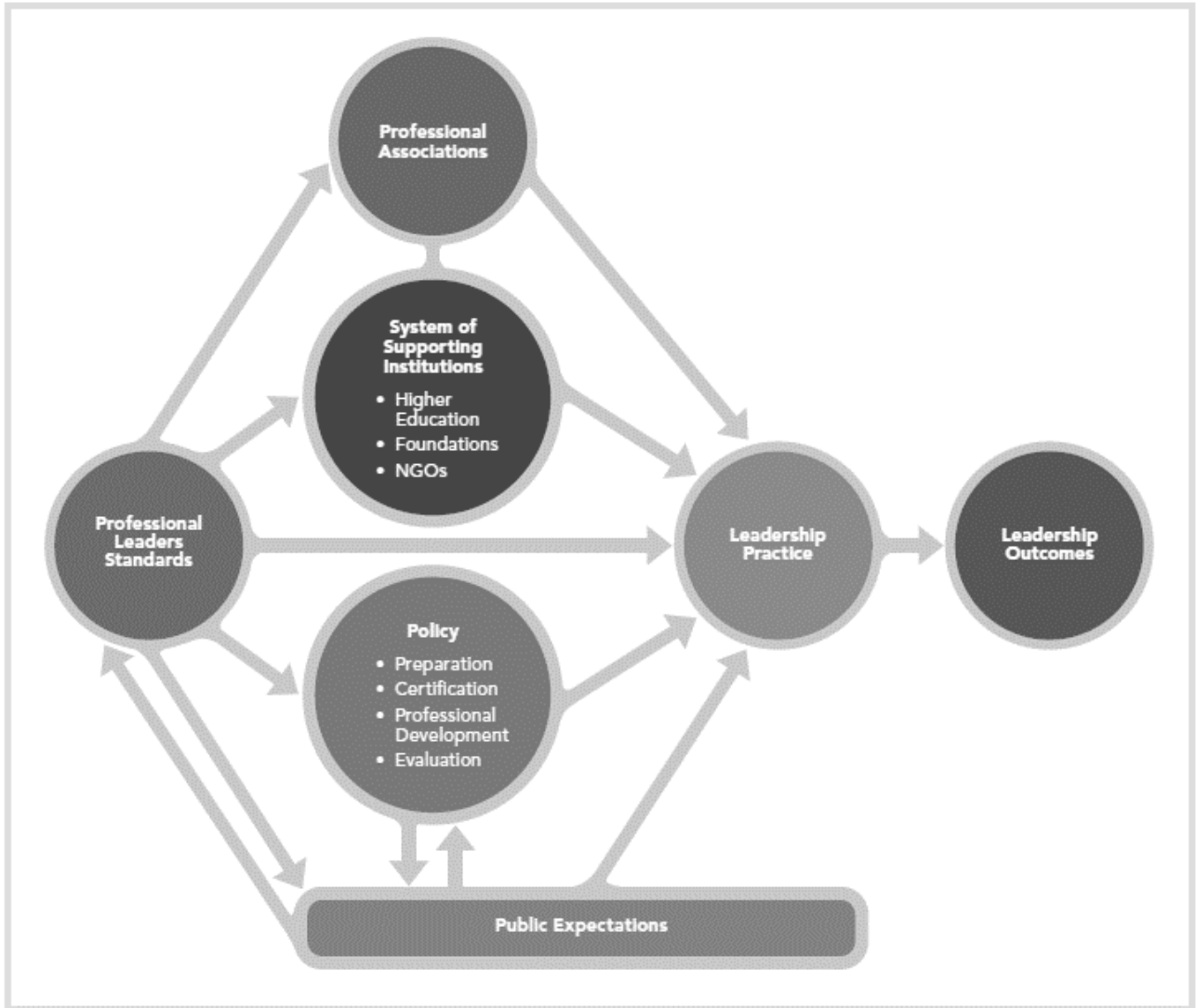
Figure 2. Leadership outcomes are shown as the result of leadership practice. A "Theory-of-Action of the role of the Professional Standards" is displayed. Adapted from "Professional Standards for Educational Leaders," by National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 6. Copyright 2015 by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration.
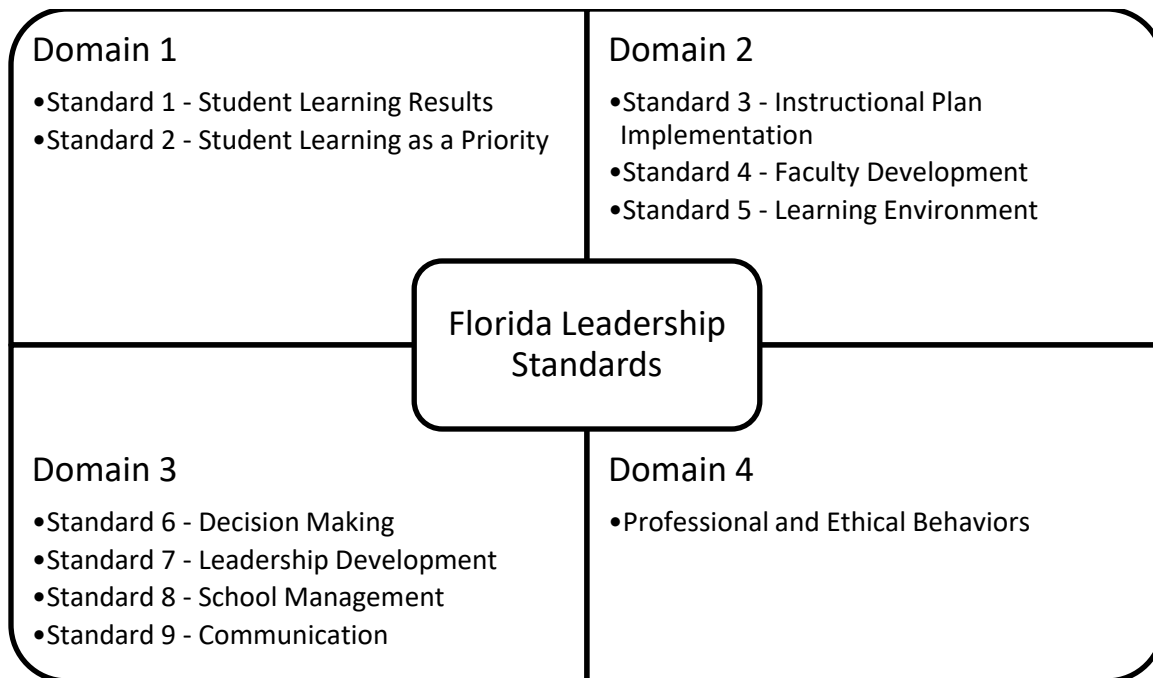
Figure 3. The *Florida Principal Leadership Standards* show a condensed list of the standards within each domain. Adapted from "The Florida Principal Leadership Standards." by the Florida Department of Education. Copyright by the Florida Department of Education.

Every Student Succeeds Act

Signed into law in December 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) became law, reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA), and replaced the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (Young, Winn, & Reedy, 2017). ESEA was established as law to ensure equitable educational opportunities were afforded to all children and authorizes the federal funding for K-12 schools. The two primary goals of ESSA are alignment between state educational programs and the standards for college and careers, and an extension of federal emphasis on equality concerning distribution of resources for students in specific subgroups. Subgroups include students with disabilities, English language learners, economically disadvantaged students, and minority students (Young et al., 2017).

In their research, Young et al. (2017) discussed the new pathways ESSA provides for states and districts concerning the use of federal funds for the development of school principals and other school leaders. Additionally, Young et al. agreed that the current focus of the federal level is warranted because leadership matters. Young et al., citing Leithwood et al. (2004), acknowledged the influence leaders have on student learning and development. This influence came from specific actions such as directing the organization, managing those within the organization, leading the vision of the school, and improving the instructional processes within the school (Young et al., 2017). Furthermore, Young et al. recognized the need to examine the treatment of educational leadership within the contexts of federal policy and state plans for leadership development in order to ensure alignment of new accountability measures on the significant roles principals and leadership development play in cultivating student success. Summarizing their review on ESSA, Young et al. examined the role of leadership development in federal educational legislation from 1965 to 2015 and surmised that ESSA presents opportunities and challenges for states in this new era of accountability.

The Every Student Succeed Acts necessitates that states provide classrooms with effective teachers and schools with effective leaders (Fuller, Hollingworth, & Pendola, 2017). In their research, Fuller et al. (2017) examined and analyzed plans submitted to the U.S. Department of Education (USDoE) by all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. The plans included identification of causes of inequitable access to educators within states and proposed solutions to address the imbalances in access to effective educators. The purpose of their research was to study the magnitude to which state equity plans associated the distribution of principals as a factor influencing leadership mechanisms affecting student access to effective teachers (Fuller et al., 2017). Fuller et al. addressed equity concerning the distribution of

teachers and school leaders among schools. Factors used to define inequities were determined by scores on licensure exams, highest degree levels, years of professional experience, competitiveness of teacher preparation programs, and student productivity represented in value-added measures (Fuller et al., 2017).

Fuller et al. (2017) posited that principals have the second strongest influence on student outcomes after the classroom teacher. Additionally, Fuller et al. asserted that the inequitable distribution of teachers and principals presented severe consequences for student outcomes in schools with high concentrations of minority students, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and lower performing students. Fuller et al. determined that states mentioned solutions to improving access to effective educators; however, those solutions do not align to the guidelines presented under the rules of evidence outlined in ESSA. Research concluded that states must address how principals are distributed, along with principal turnover, if they plan to improve access to effective educators, especially in high-need schools (Fuller et al., 2017).

Based on their empirical research and review of state plans, Fuller et al. offered five recommendations to facilitate processes that may bring states into alignment as presented in ESSA. First, Fuller et al. recommended that the USDoE create a competitive grant opportunity for states to build rigorous school leader data systems, which would require schools to provide information on the leadership experience of principals and the frequency of leadership turnover within the school over a three- and five-year timeframe. Second, Fuller et al. suggested that states collect data on school leaders, including years of experience and employment at the school and district level, to examine the distribution of inexperienced principals, principal attrition, principal turnover, and mobility patterns by school types. The third recommendation posited by Fuller et al. was for states to take advantage of the opportunity granted by ESSA to develop new

principal evaluation systems and remove or reduce the weights associated with student outcomes reported in current principal evaluation systems. Weiss and McGuinn (2016) noted that, under ESSA, federal mandates around accountability are decreasing and that states have more flexibility and authority than have been allowed in decades. Fuller et al. stated "research has shown there is no statistical method to identify the independent effect of principals on student achievement" (p. 749). Fourth, Fuller et al. recommended that states invite teachers and principals to collaborate in order to develop and revise current teacher and principal evaluation systems based on the latest research. The final recommendation presented by Fuller et al. suggested that states invite researchers into the conversation and development of the state plans. After a thorough review of each state's plan, Fuller et al. noted that states that included researchers in the development of submitted plans provided the most comprehensive and research-based plans, and those plans held the most potential for successfully improving access to effective educators. Table 1 presents Fuller et al.'s evaluation of one state's plan submitted to the USDoE and displays the data collected and coding scheme used to present their conclusions and recommendations.

According to ESSA, all states must annually assess students in grades 3 through 8 and a minimum of once while in high school. The assessment results, also referred to as indicators of success, must be disaggregated by student subgroups (Weiss & McGuinn, 2016). Accountability systems generally have three components which are publically shared with stakeholders. These components include indicators of success, identification of school quality based on the indicators of success, and consequences for the lowest-performing schools (Weiss & McGuinn, 2016).

Table 1

Coding Categories

Sample Coding Scheme for One State (All 52 Plans Were Coded).

Topic	Area Included in Plan			
	Mention	Data	Research	Solution
Principals/leaders	Yes	No	No	Yes
Principal turnover/attrition	No	No	Yes	No
Teacher turnover	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Inequitable distribution of principals	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Principal quality/effectiveness	No	No	No	No
Principal preparation	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Principal professional development	No	No	No	No
Coaching/mentoring	Yes	No	No	Yes
Teacher working conditions	No	No	No	No
Fiscal incentives/pay	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Human capital management	Yes	No	No	No
Equitable access to resources	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Equitable school funding system	No	No	No	No
Principal evaluation of teachers	Yes	No	No	Yes
Instructional leadership	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Evaluation system for principals	Yes	No	No	No
Evaluation System for principal preparation programs (PPPs)/improved PPPs	No	No	No	No
School accountability	No	No	No	No
Connects principal turnover to teacher turnover	No	No	No	No
Connects leadership behavior to teacher working conditions	No	No	No	No

Note. Adapted from "The Every Student Succeeds Act, State Efforts to Improve Access to Effective Educators, and the Importance of School Leadership," by E. J. Fuller, L. Hollingworth, and A. Pendola, 2017, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *53,* pp.24-25. Copyright 2017 by Sage Publications.

Accountability in Leadership

Additionally, state accountability systems have a wide range to operate within when determining key indicators of success, including but not limited to proficiency on state exams, high school graduation rates, growth from year to year, and English language proficiency indicator for English learners, and one or more indicators as determined by the state (Weiss & McGuinn, 2016). Furthermore, Weiss and McGuinn asserted that, in order for state reforms to be successful, "state policy changes must change district practice, district practices must change the behavior of principals and teachers, and school-level changes must deliver improved student performance" (p. 32).

In the state of Florida, "school grades provide an easily understood metric to measure the performance of a school" (Florida Department of Education, 2019, p. 1). Schools are graded on student outcome measures related to achievement, learning gains, graduation rates, acceleration success, and learning gains of the lowest 25% of students, as shown in Figure 4. For the 2017-2018 school year, a school grade could include up to 11 components. Additionally, Florida's school accountability system and school grading model includes various factors as indicators of student success. The current school improvement rating model uses learning gains as the basis of how improvement is calculated within the model (Florida Department of Education, 2018).

English Language Arts (FSA, FSAA)	Mathematics (FSA, FSAA, EOCs)	Science (NGSSS, FSAA, EOCs)	Social Studies (EOCs)	Graduation Rate	Acceleration Success
Achievement (0% to 100%)	Achievement (0% to 100%)	Achievement (0% to 100%)	Achievement (0% to 100%)	4-year Graduation Rate (0% to 100%)	High School (AP, IB, AICE, Dual Enrollment or Industry Certification) (0% to 100%)
Learning Gains (0% to 100%)	Learning Gains (0% to 100%)				
Learning Gains of the Lowest 25% (0% to 100%)	Learning Gains of the Lowest 25% (0% to 100%)				Middle School (EOCs or Industry Certifications) (0% to 100%)

Figure 4. The Florida School Grading Model illustrates how school grades are calculated. Adapted from "2017-2018 Guide to Calculating School Grades, District Grades and the Federal Percent of Points Index" by the Florida Department of Education, 2018, p. 1. Copyright 2018 by the Florida Department of Education.

As presented in the *2017-2018 Guide to Calculating School Grades, District Grades and the Federal Percent of Points Index* (2018), school grades are calculated by the points earned in each component within the grading model (as applicable for school type). The summation of points earned for each component are divided by the total number of available points to determine the percentage of points earned to calculate the school grade. Schools must test 95% of the student population to receive a school grade. Schools who are eligible to receive a grade, or academic rating, are assigned a letter grade of A, B, C, D, or F based on the percentage of points earned. When schools earn 62% or higher of possible points, a grade of A is assigned. Likewise, schools earning between 54% and 61% of points are assigned a grade of B, and schools earning 41% to 53% of points are assigned a grade of C. Schools earning 32% to 40% of points are assigned a grade of D, and schools earning 31% or less are assigned a grade of F (Florida Department of Education, 2019).

Transformational Leadership Theory in Education

A review of scholarly literature on leadership substantiates that there is a broad spectrum of different theoretical approaches to explain the complexities of the leadership process (Northouse, 2016). Northouse noted that some researchers have conceptualized leadership as a characteristic or behavior. In his book *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, Northouse (2016) stated the following:

> Despite the multitude of ways in which leadership has been conceptualized, the following components can be identified as central to the phenomenon: (a) Leadership is a process, (b) leadership involves influence, (c) leadership occurs in groups, and (d) leadership involves common goals. (p. 6)

Gorton and Alston (2012), citing Leithwood's description, stated that "transformational leadership is a form of consensual or facilitative power that is manifested through other people instead of over other people" (p. 17). Gorton and Alston asserted that critical skills pertinent for transformational leaders include the ability to see the whole picture, to have a clear focus on continued school improvement, to cultivate a sense of ownership within the entire school, and to create and facilitate teamwork. Additionally, Gorton and Alston linked transformational leadership with contemporary views of spiritual leadership. In the context of educational leadership, these concepts are expressed as principled leadership, pragmatic leadership, and purposive leadership and used in research centered on moral and social justice (Dantley, 2005, as cited in Gorton & Alson, 2012).

School leadership is integral to school improvement. Subsequently, this global belief has engaged policy-makers and researchers in examining the leadership practices that matter most. In some cases, researchers have searched for answers free of any theory; in other cases, the

searches were theory-driven (Leithwood & Jingping, 2012). Leithwood and Jingping stated that theory-based leadership approaches used in schools, such as constructivist leadership, instructional leadership, learning leadership, servant leadership, and strategic leadership, have often lacked empirical results substantiating their validity.

Leithwood and Jingping (2012) asserted that the most extensively adopted model used within the school setting is the transformational leadership model and stated:

Transformational leadership theory claims that a relatively small number of leadership behaviors or practices are capable of increasing the commitment and effort of organizational members toward the achievement of organizational goals. The values and aspirations of both leader and follower are enhanced by these practices. Unlike traditional models of leadership that are "transactional" in nature, transformational leadership theory argues that, given adequate support, organizational members become highly engaged and motivated by goals that are inspirational because those goals are associated with values in which they strongly believe—or are persuaded to strongly believe. Transformational leadership theory, then, identified which internal states of organizational members are critical to their performance and specifies a set of leader practices most likely to have a positive influence on those internal states. (pp. 388-389)

However, Leithwood and Jingping (2012) mentioned that transformational leadership does not predict future behavior of organizational members who were influenced by transformational leadership practices. Transformational leadership theoretically offers a partial solution to help leaders identify which practices most influence positive student outcomes (Leithwood & Jingping, 2012). Their research synthesized 11 leadership practices as shown in Figure 5.

1. **Setting Directions**
   a. Develop a shared vision and building goal consensus.
   b. Hold high performance expectations.
2. **Developing People**
   a. Provide individualized support.
   b. Provide intellectual stimulation.
   c. Model valued behaviors, beliefs, and values.
3. **Redesigning the Organization**
   a. Strengthening school culture.
   b. Building structures to enable collaboration.
   c. Engaging parents and the wider community.
4. **Improving the Instructional Program**
   a. Focus on instructional development.
5. **Related Practices**
   a. Contingent reward.
   b. Management by exception.

Figure 5. Adapted from the original source, "The Nature and Effects of Transformational School Leadership: A Meta-Analytic Review of Unpublished Research," by K. Leithwood and S. Jingping, 2012, *Educational Administration Quarterly: The Journal of Leadership for Effective & Equitable Organizations, 48*(3), pp. 399-401.

After conducting their meta-analysis, Leithwood and Jingping (2012) concluded that transformational leadership practices (TSL) had moderate effects on teacher internal states and behaviors and on school conditions. Though TSL may be a strong indicator in transforming organizations, Leithwood and Jingping noted that student achievement was higher and working relationships were stronger when leadership was shared between teachers and principals. Leithwood and Jingping recommended implications for future research based on their results, thus making the current dissertation topic relevant. In their first two recommendations, Leithwood and Jingping indicated that future research should avoid using exclusive whole leadership models, but instead assess the specific practices used by school leaders within various leadership models. In their third recommendation, Leithwood and Jingping argued that research aimed at assessing indirect leadership effects on students was complex and failed to

acknowledge or add to the existing research. Thus, Leithwood and Jingping recommended

avoiding complex research designs with complex statistical models; instead they suggested that

future researchers use simpler designs aimed at determining what practices have significant

effects on school and classroom factors. Leithwood and Jingping claimed that future studies

should use more in-depth measures consisting of fewer variables in order to produce stronger

results. In their final recommendation, Leithwood and Jingping cautioned that terms like

instructional leadership should not be claimed or used to declare a greater effect on student

leadership than transformational leadership. However, leaders must pay close attention to the

classroom conditions experienced directly by students and the "organizational conditions that

enable, stimulate, and support those conditions" (Leithwood & Jingping, 2012, p. 413).

Odumeru and Ogbonna (2013) declared that leadership is one of the most important

characteristics of management because it contributes to the overall wellbeing of organizations

and nations. Odumeru and Ogbonna asserted that leaders are influential and make things

happen. Their research also noted transformational leadership has one of two prominent

leadership theories. The second is transactional leadership. Odumeru and Ogbonna stated that

the transformational approach allowed leaders to serve as a role models by inspiring and

challenging followers to take greater ownership for their responsibilities. By doing so, leaders

were able to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the employees and used this knowledge

to align their tasks in order to enhance overall performance (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013).

Odumeru and Ogbonna, citing the works of Rubin et al., 2015; Judge and Bono, 2000, noted that

despite criticisms of transformational leadership, its popularity has grown and "has shown that

managers in different settings, including the military and business, found that transformational

leaders were evaluated as more effective, higher performers, more promotable than their

transactional counterparts, and more interpersonally sensitive" (p. 358). Odumeru and Ogbonna concluded that transformational and transactional leadership styles represented courageous attempts by researchers to explain the nature and effect of leadership, but more empirical work is needed to gain clearer understanding of the two concepts.

Northouse (2016) devoted an entire chapter to transformational leadership in *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. He presented six strengths of transformational leadership. First, he stated that transformational leadership has been widely researched from multiple perspectives and cited in many qualitative studies of prominent leaders and CEOs in well-known organizations. Next, he posited that transformational leadership is appealing to people because it makes sense to them. Third, transformational leadership treats leadership as a process that occurs between the followers and the leader. Fourth, the transformational approach provides a wider view of leadership that enhances other leadership models. Fifth, transformational leadership places a strong importance on the needs, values, and morals of the followers. Finally, there is substantial evidence that transformational leadership is effective (Northouse, 2016). Northouse (2016) also noted weaknesses of transformational leadership and stated that transformational leadership is difficult to define due to the wide range of characteristics, its potential to be abused due to its effects on people, and how the effects of transformational leadership are measured.

In more current research, Bush (2018) indicated that transformational leadership is one of the most used leadership models and has been globally used in numerous doctoral dissertations. In their attempt to reform educational systems, political leaders have grasped the concept of transformational leadership as a possible solution (Bush, 2018). Transformational leadership proposes a strong influential process, where leaders use persuasive measures in order to get followers to bring about the beneficial change needed in the particular organization (Bush,

2018). Mentioned in the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders*, the principal plays a

critical role in the effective development and exercise of leadership within the school (National

Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Presented in a different context,

transformational leadership is correlated to organizational performance (Birasnav, 2014).

Birasnav mentioned that transformational leaders establish supportive cultures and get

employees to understand the necessity of organizational change and its impact on improving

operational performance. Though presented in a different context, this same emphasis is

reflected in the *Standards* (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015).

Birasnav asserted that, in order for manufacturing firms to manage production processes and gain

competitive advantages, leaders must concentrate on human resource development.

Bush (2018) outlined three conceptions germane to transformational leadership practices.

First, he stated that principals' transformational leadership practices are more common in

national settings that are undergoing restructuring processes. Second, he emphasized that

transformational practices are more effective than transactional practices. Third, Bush asserted

that principals are either transactional or transformational. In his research, Bush noted that

transformational leadership was only second to instructional leadership. Bush (2018) concluded

that leadership conceptions, including transformational leadership, are complex and dependent

on the task and context in which they are presented.

Leadership and Student Achievement

Contemporary educational researchers, including Tim Waters (2003), John Hattie (2018),

Kenneth Leithwood (2012), Michael Fullan (2006), and Dallas Hitt (2018), have built their

research upon decades of educational research and analyses examining which leadership

practices had the most significant effects on student achievement. Waters, Marzano, and

McNulty (2003) conducted a theory-free meta-analysis of 70 studies, and the results of their meta-analysis identified 21 specific leadership responsibilities associated with student achievement. Waters et al. (2003) introduced the McREL balanced leadership framework as a comprehensive and useful integration of research and theory into a usable format for principals and educational leaders. Their results demonstrated that a significant relationship between leadership and student achievement exists (Waters et al., 2003). Additionally, Waters et al. correlated leadership responsibilities with student achievement and indicated that, as principals increased their leadership abilities exactly one standard deviation, the associated mean student achievement also increased 10 percentile points (Waters et al., 2003). Conversely, Waters et al. cautioned that leaders can have a negative impact on student achievement.

In *Turnaround Leadership*, Fullan (2006) asserted that there are 10 critical elements principals should use when faced with turning a school around. Fullan stated these methods were also promising for continued success once schools were headed in the right direction. Fullan interjected that turnaround leadership should not be an isolated facet but a part of whole-system reform efforts. Fullan delineated that leaders should:

1. Define closing the gap as the overarching goal.

2. Attend initially to the three basics.

3. Be driven by tapping into people's dignity and sense of respect.

4. Ensure that the best people are working on the problem.

5. Recognize that all successful strategies are socially based and action oriented—change by doing rather than change by elaborate planning.

6. Assume the lack of capacity is the initial problem and then work on it continuously.

7. Stay the course through continuity of good direction by leveraging leadership.

8. Build internal accountability linked to external accountability.

9. Establish conditions for the evolution of positive pressure.

10. Use the previous nine strategies to build public confidence. (pp. 44-45)

In current research, Leithwood and Azah (2016) focused their research on the characteristics of effective leadership networks, the contributions of those networks to leadership capacity of individuals within the networks, and the relative contribution of networks as compared to other sources of leadership development. This study is only one of a few studies in this context, but implications suggested that district leadership developers encourage network leaders to cultivate the forms of collaboration integral to professional capacity development in leaders within their networks (Leithwood & Azah, 2016).

In a continued effort to find out what specific tasks have the greatest effect on student achievement, Hattie (2018) expanded his earlier meta-analyses (Hattie, 2009) to include over 250 factors influential to student achievement. Using Cohen's *d* to measure effect size, Hattie's top five influential factors were collective teacher efficacy, self-reported grades, teacher estimates of achievement, cognitive task analysis, and response to intervention (Hattie, 2018). In his original work, Hattie (2009) studied six areas that influence learning, including the student, the teacher, the curricula, the school, the home, and teaching and learning approaches. The premise of the current dissertation is focused on leadership practices relative to student achievement; however, the research has indicated that leadership is second to the classroom teacher in terms of influence on student learning (Fuller, Hollingworth, & Pendola, 2017; Hitt & Meyers, 2018); therefore, the results of these meta-analyses were included for contextual purposes. Hattie (2009) found that the key to making significant improvements in student achievement was to make teaching and learning visible.

In their case study on successful principals who led school improvement efforts in urban high-poverty schools, Jacobson et al. (2007) concluded that they had a better understanding of core practices school leaders needed to contribute to student improvement, but they noted they knew less about how principals acquired the experience used in their practical application. Hitt and Meyers (2018) examined effective leadership practices and noted that principals who lead turnaround efforts accomplished their goals by different means than those who led schools that were not deemed to be in turnaround status. Hitt and Meyers stated that, though good intentions exist to advance school improvement efforts, the lack of empirical and theoretical knowledge continues to be a barrier for sustained improvement in the lowest-performing schools. Nikolaros (2015) concluded his research on strategies for effective school research by stating that the change process requires a transformational approach to leadership where leaders value the competencies of all staff members and align implementation practices to the abilities of the staff members. Nikolaros cautioned that all staff members should be included in the change process. Steiner and Hassel (2011) posited that two major elements of turnaround success are the characteristics and actions of the principals selected to lead the turnaround efforts and the support for the revolutionary change that the principal needs from the district and the state. Steiner and Hassel asserted that a special type of principal is required for turnaround to occur in a short amount of time. U.S. educational leaders must utilze the best techniques and explict strategy to hire and enable knowlegeable and powerful turaround school principals (Steiner & Hassel, 2011). Steiner and Hassel examined the research of other countries mentioned in this literature review and posited that competency-based selection is the approach the United States should take to improve its lowest-performing schools. According to Steiner and Hassel, principals may have similar educational backgrounds and significant autonomy in how they

handle complex tasks, but the art of their success is driven by underlying competencies that may

not be easily observed in day-to-day operations, as seen in Figure 6.

David McClelland (1970), a cognitive psychologist from Harvard University, claimed

that habits of work behavior and underlying motivations, which he referred to as

"competencies," separated the performance outcomes demonstrated by workers (Steiner &

Hassel, 2011). As a result of his and other researchers cited in this literature review, others can

understand not just what principals do to be successful, but how they lead successful

organizational change (Steiner & Hassel, 2011). Steiner and Hassel indicated that high levels of

competence regarding student achievement, impact, and influence are necessary characteristics

for school turnaround principals.

Figure 6. Observable characteristics vesus underlying competencies. Adapted from "Using Competencies to Improve School Turnaround Principal Success," by L. Steiner and E. Hassel, 2011, p.5. Copyright 2011 by the University of Virginia's Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education.

Summary

For this phenemological study, literature was reviewed exploring topics related to leadership effectivness, turnaround leadership, principal competencies, accountability systems, leadership standards, and international leadership models. Literature discussing leadership models used in the United States, China, Singapore, England, and Canada described diverse approaches to leadership development . In all countries, the research documented that leadership effectiveness is closely related to student achievement. Transformational Leadership Theory was defined as a theoretical framework to build upon. Chapter 3 presents the research methodolgy used to guide this study.

III. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the professional experiences, leadership trainings, and strategic initiatives of principals whose organizational change efforts resulted in two academic rating increases within a three-year period. A foundational component of this research inquiry was to synthesize the essences derived from the lived experiences of principals as shared by their firsthand accounts of the events. The primary purpose of phenomenology "is to study what it is like as we find ourselves being in relation with others" (Vagle, 2018, p. 20). The researcher selected a phenomenological approach to describe the experiences of the principals who led successful organization efforts. Yin (2011) defined phenomenology as a variant of qualitative research aimed to study the nature of human events as they are experienced within their real-world context.

Research Design

To determine the best research approach to explore this topic, the researcher examined the five qualitative approaches outlined by Creswell (2013). A narrative approach to this topic was not suitable at this time because the study did not focus on the experience individuals telling stories followed by the researcher "restorying" (Creswell, 2013, p. 74) them into a chronological order. The researcher was not interested in generating an explanation or theory of a process shaped by distinct steps or phases involving a large number of participants; therefore, a grounded theory study was not feasible as the research design, though this approach may be suitable for future research (Creswell, 2013). Because the researcher was not "immersed in the day-to-day lives" (Creswell, 2013, p. 90) of the participants, an ethnography was not the best research

approach. Case study research is a qualitative approach or methodology involving a study of a case "bounded by time and place" (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). If presented in a different context, this approach may have been suitable but was not the best approach to the topic of inquiry in the present study.

A qualitative phenomenological study examines the lived experiences of participants with the purpose of understanding the essence of their common experiences of the phenomenon of investigation (Simon & Goes, 2013), which in the case of this study is successful organizational change as experienced by traditional public school principals. Researchers use phenomenology as a philosophic method for questioning, not a method for answering or discovering fixed conclusions (Van Manen, 2014). Creswell (2013) posited that phenomenologists "focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (p. 76). In phenomenology, the researcher seeks to understand the experience of an activity or concept from the perspective of the participants (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011). Moustakas (1994) affirmed that researchers conducting a phenomenological study abstain from making suppositions, but, instead, approach the research topic with fresh perspective and derive findings that will provide the framework for additional research and reflection. Moustakas (1994) described two phenomenological approaches including hermeneutical phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology. The transcendental approach was best suited for this study. The researcher selected a phenomenon to investigate, bracketed her own experiences, and collected data from several participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Context of the Study

Interviews and data collection for the principals who participated in this study occurred within school settings for four principals and the private home of one principal. All interviews

occurred in the state of Florida, and all participants worked within the same school district. The schools served by the principals ranged from 10 to 45 miles in distance. The district is a large rural district with more than 150 schools and is one of the top 30 largest districts in the country. The district serves a diverse population of students and their families.

Research Questions

Adhering to Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological research methodology, the following questions guided this study:

1. What are the professional experiences of traditional public school principals who have led successful organizational change?

2. What leadership trainings influenced traditional public school principals who have led successful organizational change?

3. What strategic initiatives did traditional public school principals implement while leading successful organizational change?

Participants

Dukes (as cited in Creswell, 2013) recommended three to 10 subjects for participation in a phenomenological study. Adhering to the aforementioned recommendation, the researcher used criterion sampling to select the five principals who agreed to participate in the study. Of more than 150 principals within the district, the selected participants represented 50% of the total number of principals (10) within the district who met the criteria to be included in the study. The researcher retrieved data related to each participant's site using the 2018 Florida school grading model (Florida Department of Education, n.d.). The participants included one high school principal and four elementary principals. Creswell (2013) stated that criterion sampling is suited for a phenomenological study when all participants have experienced the phenomenon of

investigation. All five participants signed a consent form (Appendix B) and were aware that

their participation in the study was voluntary and understood they could withdraw from the study

at any time. The researcher assigned pseudonyms to protect the identities of each participant.

All participants' schools receive Title I funding, meaning that all students in their schools receive

free breakfast and free lunch. Students in ninth grade through 12th grade attended the high

school, and students in Pre-K through Grade 5 attended the elementary schools. Table 2 displays

the three-year school grade history for each participant in the study. Four of five participants

experienced the phenomenon within one year, and one participant experienced it within two

years. Table 3 displays the student population and demographics of each school.

Table 2

Participant School Grade Data

Name	School Type	# of Years Principal at Current School	2016 School Grade	2017 School Grade	2018 School Grade	# of Years to Increase by Two Letter Grades
Principal A	High	4	D	D	B	1
Principal B	Elementary	3	F	C	C	1
Principal C	Elementary	5.5	D	B	B	1
Principal D	Elementary	2	F	F	C	1
Principal E	Elementary	4.5	D	C	B	2

Note. School grade information adapted from http://www.fldoe.org.

Table 3

Participant School Demographic Data

Name	# of Students Enrolled	% African American	% Caucasian	% Hispanic	% Other Categories
School District	100,000+	20.6	40	34.4	4.9
Principal A	1,127	11.7	44.5	38.7	5.1
Principal B	535	19.4	55.7	21.3	3.6
Principal C	1,277	19.7	16.2	59.2	4.9
Principal D	640	42.8	20.9	33.8	2.5
Principal E	425	23.1	16.7	55.5	4.7

Note. Demographics included in "Other Categories" include Asian, Multi-Racial, Native
American, and Pacific Islander. Number of enrolled students may have varied throughout the
school year. Adapted from https://edudata.fldoe.org/.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher has 17 years of experience as an educator with eight of those years spent as an elementary classroom teacher. In addition to serving one year as a mathematics instructional coach, the researcher has eight years of administrative experience and is beginning her 5th year as a principal. During her tenure as a principal, she has served students in traditional Title I schools within the same district as the participants, but has not experienced leading organizational change efforts that resulted in two academic rating increases within a three-year period. However, she has experienced leading organizational change efforts that resulted in one academic rating increase within a three-year period.

Moustakas (1994) noted that researchers utilizing the transcendental approach to phenomenology should make concerted efforts to isolate their prejudgments of the phenomenon of investigation by engaging in the Epoche process. Additionally, Creswell (2013) described the Epoche process using the term "bracketing" (p. 80). LeVasseur (2003 as cited in Creswell, 2013) defined bracketing as a thoughtful activity where the researcher suspends their understanding of the topic of inquiry and cultivates fresh curiosity. To minimize researcher bias, the researcher bracketed her experiences as a principal in order to approach the lived experiences of the participants free from her own conceptions. Creswell emphasized the need to suspend personal understandings of a topic by being reflective and inquisitive during the research process. Additionally, Creswell posited that many researchers embrace the bracketing process by describing their personal experiences with the phenomenon prior to engaging with the lived experiences of the participants. Bracketing is essential in phenomenological research because the question of inquiry stems from an intense interest fueled by the researcher's curiosity (Moustakas, 1994).

Measures for Ethical Protection

Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board approved this study (Appendix D). Additionally, the school district's Ethical Review Board approved the study (Appendix E) and granted permission for the researcher to contact its employees as potential participants. Creswell (2013) confirmed that researchers take specific steps to conduct ethical research and that human subject review boards must grant permission prior to beginning research. All participants voluntarily agreed to contribute to the study and signed a consent form (Appendix B) confirming their willingness to participate. There was no potential risk to the participants who contributed to this study. The researcher informed all participants that audio recordings and notes taken during the interview process would be available only to the researcher, primary investigator, and the dissertation committee's methodologist. The researcher identified the participants by pseudonyms and ensured that no personal identifiable information would be included in the written results. Furthermore, the researcher stored all audio recordings and transcriptions on a password-protected computer and backed up the files using a USB drive. The researcher stored the USB drive in a locked filing cabinet and will permanently delete all files in five years.

Methods to Address Validity, Reliability, and Assumptions of Generalizability

Creswell (2013) addressed the interviewing process as a progression requiring several steps. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009 as cited in Creswell) highlighted sequential steps in qualitative inquiry that included adding a theme to the inquiry, designing the investigation, interviewing participants, and then transcribing those interviews, analyzing the data, verifying the validity of the results, addressing the reliability and general assumptions of the results, and sharing a report of the research. Adhering to the recommendations of the research committee, the researcher refined research questions and revised the interview protocol (Appendix A) to

ensure alignment within a phenomenology study. Additionally, Moustakas (1994) posited that interviews were the typical method used to collect data in a phenomenological study. Throughout the study, the researcher conferred with her committee's chair and methodologist, maintained records of her research activities, and carried out the activities as approved by the committee and both Institutional Review Boards.

Creswell (2013) described several challenges associated with conducting interviews. Challenges discussed related to the availability and organization of equipment used during and after the interview sessions. For example, a quality-recording device should be used during lengthy interview sessions. The audio recorder should be positioned in manner that captures the participants' responses without the device being viewed as intrusive or distracting. Following the interview sessions, the researcher should have access to an adequate word processor to transcribe the audio recordings (Creswell, 2013). Creswell noted that inexperienced researchers expressed "surprise at the difficulty of conducting interviews and the lengthy process involved in transcribing" (p. 172) audio recordings from the interview sessions. Additional challenges involved the researcher's ability to create and phrase good interview questions that allowed the participants to respond without the researcher interjecting or persuading the responses (Creswell, 2013). Creswell warned of researchers sharing personal experiences and stated this sharing by researchers minimized the bracketing necessary to create meaning derived from the participant responses. Endeavoring to bracket her own experiences as a principal, and observing Creswell's outline, the researcher asked open-ended questions focused on gaining greater insights to the phenomenon of investigation. She used criterion sampling to identify, select, and conduct one-on-one interviews with participants (Creswell, 2013). The researcher used a digital recorder to record one-on-one interviews with each participant. She and then transcribed and returned the

transcripts (Appendices F-J) to the participants for validation. Gay et al. (2011) highlighed member-checking as a method used to allow participants to review and validate the accuracy of the results. The researcher used additional validation methods, such as triangulation, by taking notes in addition to the audio recordings (Creswell, 2013). To remain unbiased, the researcher did not share any personal experiences with the participants during the interview process. Woolcott (1994 as cited in Gay et al., 2011) listed the following interviewing strategies to ensure the validity of the results:

- Allow the participants to respond without interjecting.

- Utilize methods to ensure you get an accurate account of the interview.

- Begin the writing process soon after conducting the interviews.

- Share primary data with those who will read the report.

- Be honest and truthful when reporting the findings.

- Be honest and reflect on any biases.

- Seek honest feedback to improve the quality of the study.

- Write accurately to ensure clear communication. (p. 387)

To ensure reliability within the study, the researcher used the same interview protocol (Appendix A) with all participants. This protocol allowed for consistency throughout the process (Gay et al., 2011). Additionally, study participants had no knowledge of other participants in the study; therefore, each shared their lived experiences without influences from other participants. The researcher addressed assumptions of generalizability by accurately reporting the accounts told by each participant. The researcher did not attempt to generalize the findings of the study to fit larger groups.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

Creswell (2013) asserted that accurately recording interviews in an essential part of the interview process. To investigate the phenomenon of inquiry, the researcher asked the participants six open-ended questions with appropriate subquestions. Moustakas (1994) posited that the phenomenological interview infuses social, informal, and interactive processes using open-ended questions. The researcher used a digital voice recorder to record all words stated during the interviews. Additionally, the researcher provided the participants with a copy of the interview protocol (Appendix A) to reference when proving answers. During the interviews, the researcher used a journal to write key words of emphasis, captured facial expression, displayed emotions, and other body language not captured using the voice recorder. The length of participant interviews ranged between 13 and 30 minutes.

Procedures

Moustakas (1994) explained a series of methods and procedures that fulfill the requirements of an organized phenomenological study. Utilizing this methodology, the researcher outlined her study after conducting an exhaustive review of the literature related to the purpose of the study. First, the researcher, in collaboration with the principal investigator, developed a relevant and appropriate topic of inquiry, research questions to fulfill the purpose of the study, and an interview protocol (Appendix A) to investigate and collect data. Moustakas confirmed that the "first challenge of the researcher, in preparing a phenomenological investigation, is to arrive at a topic and question that both have social meaning and personal significance" (p. 104). Simultaneously, the researcher collaborated with the methodologist to ensure the study aligned to the principles, characteristics, and approaches of a phenomenological study. After successfully defending the proposal, the researcher submitted applications to the

University's Institutional Review Board and school district's Ethical Review Board for approval of research involving human subjects.

Upon receiving both approvals (Appendix D and E), the researcher sent an email invitation (Appendix C) to the 10 participants who met the criteria to be included in the study. The email invitation listed the purpose of the study in addition to the rationale for the selection process to participate in the study. Six invitees responded to the inquiry, and four did not respond. Of the six who responded, the researcher was able to conduct five interviews. One potential participant canceled due to extenuating circumstances. Creswell (2013) confirmed that convincing individuals to participate in a study as well as gaining access to sites are challenges faced by the qualitative researcher. After receiving responses to the email invitation, the researcher contacted individual principals to set up convenient dates, times, and locations to conduct the face-to-face interviews. Upon arriving at each location, the researcher thanked the participants for their time and willingness to participate in the research investigation. The researcher reintroduced the purpose of the study and presented participants copies of the interview protocol (Appendix A) and adult consent form (Appendix B). Creswell addressed this step in the process by explaining the researcher's role in conveying the purpose of the study and protecting the anonymity of participants.

At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher thanked the participants and departed the location. Gay et al. (2011) stated the importance of establishing an audit trail within the research process. Within two days of each interview, the researcher transcribed the corresponding audio files. Once transcribed, the researcher simultaneously listened to the recordings while reading the transcripts. During this process, the researcher redacted omissions of identifying information shared by the participant and corrected any discrepancies within the

transcripts and audio files. The researcher repeated this process until there were no differences

between the audio recording and transcripts. At the conclusion of this process, the researcher

emailed participants a copy of his or her transcript (Appendices F-J) and asked them to validate

the findings (Appendix K). During the steps outlined above, the researcher cross-referenced her

journal to ensure she provided each participant with the correct transcript. One of the five

participants noted a mistake between one statement and the transcript. The researcher corrected

this finding according to the participant's statement. Finally, the researcher backed up all

transcript files from the password-protected computer onto a USB flash drive and placed it in a

locked filing cabinet.

Data Analysis

Moustakas (1994) posited that the organization of data commences when researchers

positions the transcribed interviews in front of them and familiarizes themselves with the

methods and procedures involved in phenomenal analysis. Utilizing aspects from Moustakas's

(1994) approach, the researcher used the process of "horizonalizing" (p. 118) to look at each

statement relevant to the purpose of the study and assigned it an equal value. The researcher

identified each relevant statement or significant phrase that pertained to the lived experiences of

principals who led successful organizational change. Additionally, the researcher read the

transcripts (Appendices F-J) intentionally to identify phrases or statements that aligned to the

research questions and relevant literature presented in this study. To organize the data, the

researcher used Microsoft Excel software in which she labeled column headers for each

interview question, for instance: Question 1, Question 2, and so forth. In a similar fashion, the

researcher labeled row headers with each participant, for example: Principal A and Principal B.

The researcher identified essential statements and phrases within each transcript and placed in

their corresponding cell within the spreadsheet. The researcher added additional columns to assign codes during the initial and follow-up coding sessions.

Saldana (2016) defined a qualitative code as a word or short phrase generated by the researcher that "symbolically assigns salient and essence-capturing" attributes to "a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 4). During the initial cycle of coding, referred to as *first cycle coding* by Saldana, the researcher assigned codes to the statements based on specific meanings and repeated this process until she coded all participant responses. Saldana documented that coding is an interpretive act and "not a precise science" (p. 5). The researcher coded the segments using words or phrases related to response. Then, she reviewed all codes and the corresponding participant statements for further analysis. Upon reflection, the researcher, recoded some items and combined previously coded items to generate new codes that were more descriptive. The following sentence is an example of a participant's statement and the researcher's initial coding: "In math, we really used formatives and those formatives were used to change the direction of instruction." The researcher initially coded this as a *best practice*. However, after reviewing the data more interpretively, the researcher recoded this same statement as *progress monitoring*.

Utilizing the codes generated during the *second cycle* (Saldana, 2016), the researcher clustered the data into descriptive categories based on specific attributes of data. In the final step, the researcher synthesized the meanings into common themes in order to develop the "textural and structural descriptions of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118). Moustakas posited that the essences of the phenomenon are derivatives of these descriptions. However, in recent literature, Saldana described this step in a process called "theming the data" (pp. 198-199). When qualitative researchers "theme the data," they categorize the codes and interpret new

meanings which are not coded. The researcher then presents this outcome, or theme, by using a phrase or sentence that identifies the overall meaning of the clustered data (Saldana, 2016, p. 198).

Summary

Phenomenologists approach research topics in order to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the grasp or essence of the phenomenon of investigation (Creswell, 2013). Chapter 3 encompassed a discussion of the methodology used in this study. Following Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological protocol, the researcher identified the purpose of the phenomenological study and bracketed her experiences prior to engaging in the research process. Next, the researcher adhered to methodological protocol and developed a topic, selected a purposeful sample of participants, conducted interviews with selected participants, collected data, transcribed interviews, invited participants to validate transcripts (Appendices F-K), and synthesized the data in order to find the essence of the phenomenon. The researcher took precautionary measures to ensure the study was ethical, reliable, and valid. Chapter 4 discusses an in-depth analysis of the data. The researcher shares codes and meanings used to analyze the data, the themes that emerged, and supporting evidence for those themes. Additionally, the researcher discusses limitations of the study and implications for future research.

IV. RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the professional experiences, leadership trainings, and strategic initiatives of traditional public school principals who led successful organizational change. The study examined detailed accounts of decisions, actions, and beliefs shared by participants as they experienced the phenomenon of investigation. The goal was to intentionally glean from firsthand accounts shared by the participants and present the findings in a synthesized manner.

Five traditional public school principals, who worked for the same school district, agreed to participate in the study. All experienced the phenomenon of leading organizational change efforts that resulted in their school grade increasing by two letter grades within a three-year period. The participants included one high school principal and four elementary school principals. The principals reported supervising between 50 – 200 staff members and having three to 11 years of experience as a principal. All principals described their schools as traditional public schools within the county, were actively serving as principals at time the study, and shared their recollection of lived experiences while leading change efforts. The researcher received approval from the school district's Ethical Review Board (March 2019) and the university's Institutional Review Board (May 2019). The researcher contacted participants and

conducted interviews during May 2019. Relevant to this topic of inquiry, Hitt et al. (2018)

indicated the need for researchers to build upon the collection of research that investigated how

principals lead successful turnaround efforts and asserted the need to take a closer examination

of the actions taken and dispositions of principals who have led successful efforts in turnaround

schools.

Methods of Data Collection

"A phenomenological approach to interviewing focuses on the experiences of the

participants and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 2013, p. 16). Creswell

(2013) discussed the importance of describing the meaning of the phenomenon for those who

have experienced it. Additionally, participants must be able to articulate their lived experience in

order for the researcher to find themes and the "essence of the experience" (Creswell, 2013, p.

149). The researcher used an interview protocol guide (Appendix A) consisting of six open-

ended questions to gather data relevant to the lived experiences of the participants. As discussed

in Chapter 3, participants signed a consent form (Appendix B) prior to partaking in the

interviewing process. Following the interviews, the researcher transcribed audio files of each

interview, prepared transcripts of the interviews (Appendices F-J), returned the transcripts to

each participant for validation of the contents (Appendix K), and stored all audio recordings,

anecdotal notes, and transcripts of this data on a USB file. The records will be permanently

deleted after a five-year period.

In order to reveal the themes from the data collected during the interview responses, the

researcher followed Moustakas's (1994) process of "horizonalizing" (p. 118) and assigned codes

to the significant statements and phrases relevant to the research questions and topic of study.

Initially, the researcher assigned 27 codes as displayed in Table 4. The initial data displayed 226

references coded from significant statements within the participant responses. Using the

highlighter function in Microsoft Excel, the researcher highlighted codes and corresponding data

the same color, organized the data accordingly, and analyzed the data in a systematic manner by

using the color codes. The researcher continued this process until no new codes emerged from

the data.

Table 4

First Cycle Descriptive Coding

Code	Description	Number of Participants Who Referenced Code	Combined Number of References
1	Application of Best Practices	4	8
2	Building Capacity in Staff	3	6
3	Building Relationships	4	7
4	School Culture and Climate	5	9
5	Celebrating Staff and Students	3	8
6	Setting Clear Expectations	5	9
7	Community Involvement	4	10
8	Consistent Practices	4	7
9	Continual Education	2	3
10	Core Instructional Practices	3	3
11	Effective Data Analysis	5	13
12	Leadership Team	5	8
13	Models Expectations	3	8
14	Outreach Activities	2	3
15	Ownership	3	8
16	Past Leadership Influence	2	3
17	School Perception	5	10
18	Principal Preparation Program	2	2
19	Prior Leadership Roles	3	4
20	Progress Monitoring Practices	2	7
21	Providing Students with Options	5	25
22	Reflective Thinking and Practice	5	25
23	Strong Sense of Leadership Ability	4	7
24	Strong Teaching Background	1	1
25	Sense of Trust in Others	3	10
26	Support from Groups/Sources/Others	5	17
27	Teacher Emphasis	4	6
	Total		*226*

In an effort "to create descriptive, multi-dimensional categories to form a preliminary framework for analysis" (Simon, 2011, p. 2), the researcher reviewed the transcripts and grouped specific codes and content that naturally fit together based on the similarity of the responses or function associated with the responses. After regrouping the data into six categories, the researcher renamed the categories based on attributes associated with the participants' responses. Saldana (2016) posited that, as researchers recode, the refined categories become conceptual and abstract. Figure 7 displays an example of a concept map created after the formation of new categories. Additionally, during this phase of analysis, the researcher reviewed the transcript excerpts from the new data sets purposefully looking for relationships among the data. Saldana believed that researchers should use qualitative codes to capture the essence of research, and then categorically cluster these codes together to develop categories and analysis of their relationships.
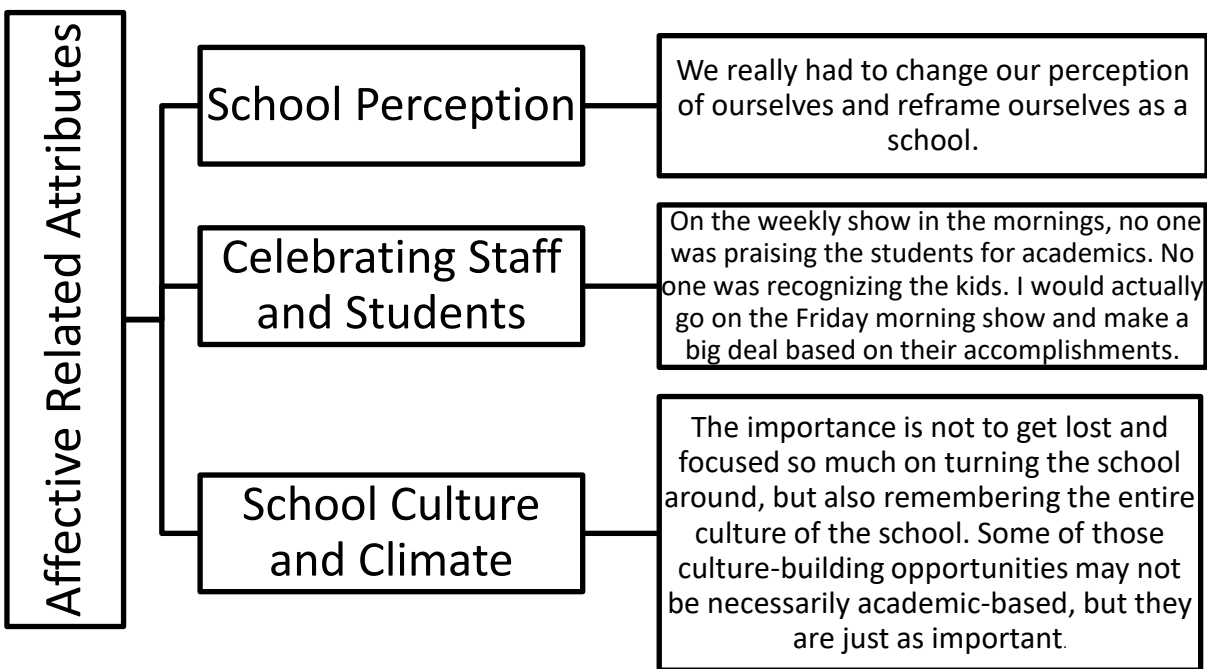

Figure 7. Concept map created after first cycle coding. The researcher regrouped the original 27 codes and formed six new categories. Supporting evidence from the transcripts was used to support the newly code assigned.

After careful and thorough examination, the researcher identified significant statements and then formulated associated meanings based on the concept referenced. Saldana (2016) posited that synthesizing the data moves towards a consolidated meaning. Figure 8 represents the categories created inclusive of the original 27 codes. Hierarchical codes were assigned based on the attributes of the categories. Creswell (2013) stated that hierarchical diagrams represent the abstraction of data in a visual form as interpreted by the researcher.

Affective Related	Self-Awareness	Instructional and Procedural	Leadership Influence	Supportive	Collaborative Activities
•School culture and climate •Celebrating staff and students •School perception	•Ownership •Reflective thinking and practice •Strong sense of leadership ability •Strong teaching background	•Application of best practices •Building capacity in staff •Setting clear expectations •Core instructional practices •Consistent practices •Effective data analysis •Models expectations •Progress monitoring practices •Provides students with options	•Continual education •Past leadership influence •Principal preparation programs •Prior leadership roles	•Community involvement •Leadership team •Outreach activities	•Building relationships •Sense of trust in others •Support from groups, sources, and others •Teacher emphasis

Figure 8. Graphic displaying original 27 codes grouped into six categories. Relationships among responses were used to create hierarchical codes.

Research Questions

The researcher asked six open-ended questions (Appendix A) during each interview. These questions aligned to the research questions in order to elicit a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Adhering to Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological research methodology, the following three questions guided this study:

1. What are the professional experiences of traditional public school principals who have led successful organizational change?

2. What leadership trainings influenced traditional public school principals who have led successful organizational change?

3. What strategic initiatives did traditional public school principals implement while leading successful organizational change?

Research Question 1: What are the professional experiences of traditional public school principals who have led successful organizational change?

All five principals shared about experiences relative to leading successful organizational change. Principal A attributed his success to the experiences he gained from working in the school setting. He was very reflective of those experiences and often drew from them to shape and guide current practices. Similarly, Principal B credited her mentors and the lessons she learned from them. She discussed having a variety of mentors with diverse skillsets who shared "nuggets" of wisdom with her. Comparable to Principal A, she also referenced the diversity of her prior experiences. She drew on experiences of working in both high-performing and low-performing schools. The pattern of strong mentorship continued as Principal C recognized the impact and leadership she gained from serving under effective principals. She discussed how her mentor principals modeled exemplary leadership practices and what she learned from those experiences. She also shared the importance of staying abreast of current practices in research and the benefits of having a strong network of collegial relationships. Principal D discussed her knowledge of best practices and professional development. She was adamant that her past and present experiences, along with professional development related to relationship building, were integral to building a successful organization. She referenced the importance of building a

positive school climate and culture. She also shared that she has learned helpful information by

earning an additional Master's degree in organizational leadership. Principal E provided a very

different approach from the other participants. She stressed the importance of spending a

significant amount of time in the classroom prior to becoming a school leader as a foundational

component to her success. She emphasized that some principals may be able to lead successfully

without having adequate experience; however, she considered her background knowledge and

multi-grade level experience as a classroom teacher as the keys to her success. Below are

exemplar transcript excerpts reflecting Research Question One.

Question 2 from Interview Guide (Appendix A): What professional experiences

contributed to your successful organizational leadership efforts?

Principal B:

I would say serving under effective principals. I've had some great principals in my path

who I worked for and was able to study. They were very effective in different ways. I

had a good instructional principal, a good managerial principal, and a principal who

understood how to take action and build capacity. Those were all the things, and the

trainings that I attended, which helped me. I was able to understand that there would be

different needs. I also became a dean in a high-performance school, which is very

different, so I think those things alone helped me shape the type of leader that I wanted to

be. I was able to take nuggets from every experience.

Principal C:

I have been blessed to have very strong mentors throughout my career. I believe these

that these mentors (principals) are now what we call turn-around principals and they have

lived that talk through their walk. Through their experiences, they were able to share

with me; both as they were turning their schools around and after they turned their

schools around, what strategies have worked for them. I was very in tune to the research

that they would follow and I had a very strong network of colleagues that were also in the

same situation that I was in (being a new principal also wanting to be a pivot of

change). We were just very blessed to have very strong mentors to help guide us in those

formative years as a new principal.

Research Question 2: What leadership trainings influenced traditional public school

principals who have led successful organizational change?

Participant responses revealed a diverse spectrum of leadership trainings and professional

development activities that were influential to them and relative to their role as principals.

Participants referenced trainings through Learning Sciences International, Learning Focused

Strategies, and other programs. Participants were influenced by well-known educational leaders,

such as Robert Marzano, Michael Toth, and Norman Webb. Principal A attributed a portion of

his success to his participation in the National Institute of School Leaders (NISL) program. He,

along with other principals, participated in this district-sponsored learning opportunity. While

participating in the NISL program, he gleaned ideas pertinent to organizing and casting a vision

for his school. He discussed the importance of prioritizing tasks, creating a sense of urgency,

and bringing alignment between the instructional staff and school stakeholders. He also

discussed how this knowledge enlightened his awareness of school perception and its impact on

student learning and community support. He specifically stated,

We really had to change our perception of ourselves and reframe ourselves as a school.

Many non-academic things did take place to improve our visibility in the community, our

relationship with external stakeholders. Our involvement in the community and our

openness to work with the community to have that exchange between a neighborhood

school and the neighborhood. A lot of work was done in that regard, just to change the

perception.

Principal B also highlighted school district opportunities and emphasized her

participation in professional development activities. She discussed assistant and principal

preparation programs the district offered as well as programs that the district provided through

collaboration with outside organizations. She shared information regarding several one-on-one

mentorships in which she was the mentee. She emphasized learning the essentials of the pillars

of change and discussed the development and growth of her analytic thinking skills. She

highlighted her participation in a school turnaround project based out of New York and provided

insights shared with her by her regional supervisor. She reiterated that the support she had

received from her colleagues was beneficial to her success.

Principal C attributed her organizational success to the foundational learnings she

received as a new principal. She recognized that best practices are best practices, regardless of

the different classifications given to them. Though she had received many trainings since her

beginning days as a principal and assistant principal, she noted the significance of adhering to

best instructional practices at all times. Principal D discussed district leadership trainings but

emphasized personal contributions to her learning as well. She discussed participating in book

studies, such as *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey (2013), and attending

self-funded leadership conferences. Principal E stated that the district offered a variety of

excellent courses, but she also mentioned a specific training she received while participating in a

district-sponsored principal preparation program as most beneficial. She commented on a

concept she learned during a session regarding school culture. She specified the learning she

gathered on building school culture was the most beneficial. Though Principal E provided this answer to a different question, it was highly similar a response Principal D provided during her interview. The discussion of culture and school climate became a repetitive pattern from the participants' responses.

Research Question 3: What strategic initiatives did traditional public school principals implement while leading successful organizational change?

A breadth of data related to the phenomenon of investigation centered on strategic actions taken by the five participants. Strategic actions included efforts taken directly by the participants and the efforts of individuals who supported them. Participants shared direct initiatives they led, as well as collaborative initiatives that they supported. The participants provided vivid and action-oriented descriptions of specific events. Participants enthusiastically shared about their methods of leading organizational change while paying careful attention to highlight the roles and actions of those who supported them during the processes. Participants provided detailed experiences regarding the results of the initiatives they implemented. Discussions focused on instructional delivery, collaborative team efforts, community partnerships, deliberate action, trusting others, reflective practices, decision-making techniques, and more. Relative to the phenomenon of investigation, participants addressed their leadership experiences and provided vivid descriptions of these accounts.

All principals discussed strategic initiatives and methods they implemented in order to lead systemic organizational change. Principal A described the actions he took to revamp his acceleration program and how adding rigorous courses to the master schedule attracted more students to his school. He stated that it "became a requirement" for his staff to earn credentials allowing them to teach industry certification courses. Regarding industry certification, Florida

Education Commissioner Pam Stewart stated that "industry certifications offer Florida students lifelong opportunities that will open the door to high-skill, high-demanding career opportunities" (Florida Department of Education, 2017, para. 3). He discussed how this decision boosted his school score and earned additional funding for the school through Career and Technical Education. Additionally, he discussed making tough decisions and dismissing staff members who were not working towards accomplishing the goals set for the school. He noted the success of developing a plan, presenting it the staff, and adhering to the plan as outlined.

Principal B focused on the learning environment, core instruction, and progress monitoring student data. She noted her team implemented consistent practices throughout the process and never wavered from the plan. She emphasized the deliberate actions taken to ensure the academic coaches understood how to analyze data and stressed their role in assisting teachers.

Question 5 from the Interview Guide (Appendix A): Describe strategic actions taken by key people who assisted you in leading organizational change.

Principal B:

Well, the key action was that we were in classes every day—every day. We provided feedback every week, if not every day, but for sure every week. The assistant principal and I did this. We would use the feedback and present it to the coaches. We said, "This is a hotspot, so let's go talk and see what the needs are. Let's intentionally tier our teachers so we can see movement.

Principal B also remarked on taking time to understand the parents of the students who attended her school. "You have to deal with the baggage of parents." She realized the parents wanted the

best educational opportunities for their students and that the school had to step up and offer support by being willing to assist the parents as needed.

Principal C was strategic by focusing on effective hiring practices. She stated the key factor to making systemic changes in schools was staffing the school with highly qualified individuals. She referenced the knowledge and skillset of her literacy coach. She also discussed the decision-making authority she had assigned to the literacy coach. The trusting relationship fostered collaboration and instructional support from teachers. Additionally, she discussed the importance of setting the tone at the beginning of year. She established clear expectations for students and provided parents with information regarding expectations. Practices included sending home explanation letters regarding school-wide expectations, transportation protocol, and implementation of positive behavior interventions and support offered to students.

Principal D asserted a heavy emphasis on structure and accountability. She required every staff person to be knowledgeable in his or her areas of expertise. She held them to high expectations and never veered from the plan. She also took time to recognize the importance of celebrating students. She made time in her schedule to broadcast their accomplishments on the school-wide morning show. She was intentional about sharing the success of the students. Principal E included her assistant principal as a key individual who helped her lead organizational change. She shared important responsibilities performed by the assistant principal, including implementing a positive behavior plan, managing ESOL responsibilities, building culture, and communicating effectively with parents.

Themes and Relationships Central to Phenomenon

After carefully analyzing the data and searching for patterns within the participant responses, six significant themes emerged relevant to leading successful organizational change

efforts that resulted in two academic rating increases within a three-year period. Creswell (2013) described themes in qualitative research as "broad units of information consisting of several codes" (p. 186) combined to form a central idea. Each theme encompasses direct or indirect actions taken by the participants and captures vivid examples of the lived experiences with supporting evidence. Table 5 displays the overall themes that emerged from the preponderance of supporting evidence.

Table 5

Theme Descriptions

Theme	Description
1	Deliberate and intentional leader actions and interactions
2	Reflective attentiveness to decisions and tasks
3	Fostering positive collaborative relationships
4	Affective awareness and action
5	Coordinating student support activities
6	Leadership dispositions and practice

Theme 1: Deliberate and Intentional Leader Actions and Interactions

All five participants provided evidence that their deliberate actions and interactions, along with an intentional focus on instruction, contributed to the organizational success experienced. This theme encompasses the various actions taken by the participants as they led organizational change efforts. Strategic actions included reviewing the state grading model to determine missed opportunities. Additional actions included offering accelerated programs within their schools so that students could earn dual certification. Students who earned dual certification credits earned credit towards industry certification or a college degree (Florida Department of Education, 2018). The participants modeled clear and consistent expectations for staff and students and prioritized time to meet staff regardless of other tasks. Participants

remarked on the importance of being consistent, restructuring the learning environment, developing a plan, and articulating the vision with all staff members. Principal A discussed requiring his teachers to take actionable steps to become dual-certified teachers. Dual-certified teachers have credentials that allow them to teach industry certification courses in addition to traditional subject-area courses (Florida Department of Education, 2017). He studied the components of his school grade, recognized a missed opportunity, and acted accordingly. His deliberate actions yielded high gains for his school and prevented punitive actions from the state level. Principal B reiterated the importance of reviewing the most current data related to her students' progress towards mastery of the standards. She was deliberate and expected the same behavior from her staff. Principal C described her ability to build benchmark assessments for her students. Her grasp of content knowledge allowed her to serve as an instructional leader on her campus. Principal D assigned members of her leadership team to serve as grade-level liaisons. This action allowed her to have a grasp of what each grade level needed in order to provide additional support. Principal E discussed the importance of knowing the needs of her students, staff, and school. She understood that language was a barrier for her students. To gain quick wins, she focused on mathematics and used that success to build a platform for other areas of success.

Theme 2: Reflective Attentiveness to Decisions and Tasks

The essence of this theme stemmed from the continual reflective activities mentioned throughout the interviews. Throughout the interview process, participants discussed their thought processes towards organizational change. Oftentimes, the participants discussed decisions they made and stressed the reasons for those decisions. The sharing of the actual thoughts was evident in how Principal A described his decisions and the reasons he made them.

His dialogue even expressed the reflective practices of his staff members. His teachers realized the direct correlations to standards-based instructional practices and student success. Principal B approached organizational change by dissecting the learning needs of her students. She used current data to drive her decision-making processes. She stated that it was integral for her and her leadership team to have this awareness in order to assist staff. She monitored her actions by being fair and consistent with all staff regarding expectations. She also challenged her staff to be reflective regarding their instructional delivery. Principal C reflected on her experiences of having strong assistant principals. She also stated the importance of reflecting throughout the process of implementing change. She stated that all members of her leadership team understood the importance of teamwork and the role it plays in accomplishing goals. Additionally, she emphasized a balanced approach to leading change by stressing the significance of incorporating beneficial non-academic tasks. Principal D reflected on her decisions to build the school culture and focus on core instructional practices. Principal E referenced her actions and knowledge of teaching when discussing her decisions. She drew from own teaching experiences to effectively lead her staff.

Theme 3: Fostering Positive Collaborative Relationships

All participants shared the importance of fostering positive collaborative relationships. These relationships included those with their leadership team, community members, other colleagues, staff members, parents and students. Principal A discussed his visibility in the community. This theme became evident by observing a glaringly a repetitive pattern of behavior shared by all participants. Principal B discussed the importance of building capacity in her staff through modeling the desired expectation. She also remarked on her intentional actions concerning fostering positive relationships among her students and parents. Principal C stressed

71

the importance of allowing others to lead within their realm of expertise. Principal D described her experiences of building relationships and gaining the trust of the community through honest and transparent dialogue. Principal E discussed the small things that meant a lot to her teachers. For example, she took time to make their copies, perform non-instructional duties, and clean up after school events.

Theme 4: Affective Awareness and Action

All participants shared detailed accounts of specific tasks and actions taken in order to change the image of the school. This theme emerged as detailed accounts emphasized the actionable steps taken to build climate and culture within the school. Principal A discussed the importance of school perception and its impact in the community. He gave detailed examples of activities he did in order to rebrand the image of his school. He stated,

> We changed our logo, we went on social media, and we worked with our city programs' director in telling our story. A big piece to me with staff was "we have to tell a story or they will tell a story on us." I constructed a narrative that we were going to be a school of possibility and a school that would help students achieve their dreams.

Principal B spoke of building a culture of love and affection among her students. She believed this was essential to establishing a positive school climate. Her rich discussions concerning building affection also wove into other themes. Principal C discussed the importance of incorporating fun monthly activities into her curriculum. She discussed the integration of monthly activities, which allowed students to make memorable keepsakes for their parents. She believed schools should not be run like penitentiaries but should represent the learning that takes place within the school. Principal D focused her attention on recognizing and praising the efforts of the students. She realized that many of the students had never been celebrated for the small

accomplishments they made. She firmly believed that an intentional focus on any concept or

action yielded more results in that area. Principal E made efforts to welcome her parents on the

school campus. Prior to her tenure as principal, parents were not welcomed or invited to

participate in school events. She stressed the importance of their involvement.

Theme 5: Coordinating Student Support Activities

This theme incorporates the actions taken by the participants, which required

coordination with other groups in an effort to raise student achievement. All principals spoke

about key individuals who were integral to the success of the students. They mentioned the use

of Title I allocations to fund necessary positions within their schools. Principal A remarked on

working with a migrant success coach in order to assist his students. He also spoke about

changing his instructional program to allow students more opportunities to earn industry

certifications. He cited specific examples of his work with local colleges and employers to build

relationships and partnerships that benefited his students. Principal B, Principal C, and Principal

E discussed providing supplemental meals for their students. This outreach extended beyond

school and often involved commitment from outside organizations. Principal D discussed the

need of hiring two behavior interventionists to serve her students. This intervention assisted to

reshape maladaptive behavior patterns among her students and led to recognitions and rewards

for her students. Principal A and Principal D shared about monetary awards and grants they

received from the community to improve the quality of their programs. When asked about

specific activities that have cultivated the students and community, Principal E stated the

following,

> We've incorporated many after school programs, which weren't here at the time when I
>
> first started. That's impacted homework and after-school care. That has really

affected the students. Supplying food, giving out Smile Packs every week, supplying

school supplies, clothing, backpacks, counseling, whatever the need— we've done our

very best to fill the need through community efforts, donations, churches,

other sources.

Theme 6: Leadership Dispositions and Practice

This theme developed from the participants' responses regarding the integration of

leadership experience and leadership training into their daily work habits. All participants

referenced receiving ongoing professional development through opportunities within the district.

They noted this as part of their success and leadership capacity. Principal A and Principal D

cited continuing education and noted its influence on their current practice. Principal B and

Principal C highlighted the strong mentoring they had received prior to becoming a principal and

its impact on their current practice. Principal C referred to her background in program

evaluation and statistical analysis and how that knowledge is used to help her lead with

confidence and authority related to student assessments and other areas. She also referenced

experience in other district-based roles between serving in school-based leadership roles.

Principal E had a very different disposition than the others and often referred to her years spent

in a classroom as a frame of reference. All principals shared their belief in the ability of their

students to do well. These beliefs shaped their practices and guided the strategic methods they

chose while leading successful change efforts within their schools.

<div align="center">Evidence of Quality</div>

The researcher endeavored to investigate this topic of study by adhering to Moustakas's

(1994) method for conducting a phenomenological study. First, the researcher described her

own experience with the phenomenon of inquiry and bracketed her experiences in order to

<div align="center">74</div>

conduct a valid study. After developing a list of significant statements, the researcher engaged in "horizonalization" (p. 118) to determine how the participants experienced the phenomenon. Then, the researcher grouped the significant statements into themes based on their meaning. Next, the researcher described what the participants experienced, by providing "textural descriptions of the experience" (p. 193), including verbatim statements of the participants, as well as how they experienced it, by providing "structural descriptions" (p. 193) of the experiences. The researcher described the essence of these experiences through detailed descriptions within the themes that emerged from the data. Table 6 displays an example of how the researcher engaged in this process. The researcher conferred with her dissertation committee and addressed errors and as recommended. Additionally, the researcher used member checking by asking the participants to validate the credibility of the data collected. Lincoln and Guba (1985 as cited in Creswell, 2013) asserted this method to be "the most critical technique" (p. 251) to establish trustworthiness.

Table 6

Significant Statements from Transcripts and Meanings

Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning
One change, as far as acceleration, was to vet our instructors to be able to teach dual enrollment courses. These teachers have been at this school for years, but none of them had ever taught Dual Enrollment.	The former way of conducting business was eliminated in order to achieve the desired results. (Theme 1 and Theme 2)
The community truly embraced the school last year; so much so that I went to different organizations within the community and talked about my struggles, talked about this school. We were just up front and personal.	Transparency invoked actions from others. (Theme 3 and Theme 5)
Knowing the people you hired are experts in their field and giving them the utmost respect by including them in those decision-making levels, even if it's a minor change, really gives them that empowerment that keeps everyone instep and together in order to make structural changes.	Empowering others though respect, autonomy, and trust aided organizational change. (Theme 3 and Theme 6)
My first rule was "know thy staff." I can have my way of thinking and I come into the school and I can try to force that upon a staff, but it usually doesn't work. They may conform, but you don't get that "buy-in." To me, the first step was to change the culture, get to know the staff, and know the needs of the staff, get their buy-in on what the school needed. We started there.	Taking time to know the staff and build relationships was the origin of change. (Theme 1, Theme 4, and Theme 3)

Summary

The results presented in this chapter provided evidence related to the experiences of traditional public school principals. The information obtained during interviewing process painted a vivid picture into the thought processes, strategic actions, and lived experiences of the participants. All participants shared their perceptions of leading organizational change through the lens of their lived experiences and took time to highlight key individuals who assisted them and described the specific actions of the individuals. Additionally, the participants described the phenomenon of investigation as a process requiring many steps and provided clear descriptions of events and outcomes, which assisted in the analysis of the data. Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the results of this phenomenological study as well as the limitations of the study.

The researcher will share implications for future practice and will provide recommendations for future research.

V. DISCUSSION

Introduction

The multi-faceted role of the principalship is one that many school leaders aspire to obtain. School principals are responsible for establishing safe learning environments, hiring qualified instructional and support staff, serving as the instructional leader for the school, building positive relationships with stakeholders, and increasing student achievement among pupils. In addition to the abovementioned tasks, the successful principal must be adept in communication skills, data analysis, and problem solving. Balancing the priorities and responsibilities of the principalship requires flexibility and resiliency.

Florida legislation requires the Florida Department of Education and local school districts to report annual data related to student achievement results. The perception of a school is often associated with student achievement results, reflected by the school's annual letter grade. Nikolaros (2015) cautioned that standardized test scores are not the only measure of student achievement, but indicated that "effective leaders improve outcomes on state-standardized testing" (p. 47). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the professional experiences, leadership trainings, and strategic initiatives of traditional public school principals whose organizational change efforts resulted in two academic rating increases within a three-year period. Five traditional school principals participated in this study. Three research questions guided this study and focused on the professional experiences, leadership trainings, and

implementation of strategic initiatives by the participants. Discussion in this section includes the interpretation of these results, implications for future practice, and recommendations for future research.

Methods of Data Collection

In a phenomenological investigation, researchers conduct interviews to collect data from the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The methodology followed in this study adhered to the phenomenological research methods described by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2013). Additionally, literature from Gay et al. (2011), Seidman (2013), Van Manen (2014), Vagle (2018), and Saldana (2016) provided technical assistance regarding best practices for conducting an ethical qualitative research study. For this study, the researcher used the same interview protocol guide (Appendix A) with each participant. The interview guide consisted of six open-ended questions. During each interview session, the researcher used an audio-recording device to preserve "the words of the participants" (Seidman, 2013, p. 117). Following the live interviews, the researcher transcribed the audio files onto Microsoft Word documents. Siedman (2013) posited that researchers who transcribe their own interview recordings come to know their interviews more personally and intuitively. The participants received electronic copies of the transcripts and validated the responses. All paper journals, transcripts, audio files, back-up files (USB flash drive), and anecdotal records were stored in a locked filing cabinet. The researcher will keep these documents for five years, and, at the end of the five-year period, the documents will be permanently destroyed. Chapter 3 provided an in-depth description of the procedures used for this study.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher examined the professional experiences, leadership trainings, and strategic initiatives implemented by five traditional public school principals whose organizational change efforts resulted in two academic rating increases within three years. Transformational leadership theory provided a theoretical framework for this study. As discussed in Chapter 2, the transformational leader sets directions for performance, develops people by providing support, redesigns the organization, and improves the overall instructional program (Leithwood & Jingping, 2012). All five participants led successful organizational change efforts that resulted in their school's letter grade increasing twice within a three-year timeframe. Evidence from the participants' responses links practices and methods to those described within the transformational leadership model. A summary of the results and their connection to the research questions, as described in Chapter 4, and a discussion of the results in relationship to the literature and the *Standards* (2015) is provided. The interpretations and conclusions drawn are representative of the data collected and not meant to generalize the practices of all principals.

Research Question 1: What are the professional experiences of traditional public school principals who have led successful organizational change?

The professional experiences of traditional public principals developed their current leadership capacity. In this study, diversity in past job roles and mentor relationships as well as principals' perceptions and beliefs had a major role in influencing their leadership and shaping their organizations. All participants in the study have been principals for a minimum of three years. In addition to graduate studies, principals attributed their organizational success to participation in group studies, special projects, and past professional experiences. Prior to

serving as a high school principal, Principal A served as a middle school principal, a middle school assistant principal, a guidance counselor, and a classroom teacher. Additionally, Principal B had experiences working as an elementary assistant principal, a middle school dean, and a classroom teacher. Principal C shared experiences of serving as an elementary assistant principal, district mathematics coordinator, district testing coordinator, and a classroom teacher. Principal D described her experiences as a reading coach, elementary assistant principal, and classroom teacher prior to becoming a principal. Principal E acknowledged her experiences as an elementary assistant principal and her enthusiasm as a classroom teacher. All principals reflected on their professional experiences and drew from those experiences as they served in their current roles.

Research Question 2: What leadership trainings influenced traditional public school principals who have led successful organizational change?

Participants provided references to leadership trainings that influenced their daily practices as principals. According to responses, the school district provided leadership training and opportunities for development for its leaders. In addition to these opportunities, participants highlighted their personal contributions to their professional development. Principal A and Principal B discussed principal preparation programs and described the effect those programs had on their leadership dispositions. Principal C noted the training she received as a new principal. She stated that she continues to model and implement the strategies that she learned. Principal D and Principal E remarked on training related to establishing positive cultures within their schools.

Research Question 3: What strategic initiatives did traditional public school principals implement while leading successful organizational change?

Participants shared vivid experiences related to the strategic initiatives they implemented. Initiatives involved hiring competent staff, assessing curricular needs, requiring greater effort from all stakeholders, and changing instructional delivery models. Additional initiatives included monitoring core instructional practices, analyzing student progress records, and offering constructive feedback to teachers concerning their practices. Setting clear expectations and modeling consistency was a common practice among participants. All principals associated their successful outcomes with the specific strategies they implemented. The researcher addressed the guiding questions by providing specific accounts as told by the participants.

The Findings Related to the Literature

For this research study, six themes emerged which gave credence to the experiences shared by the five traditional public school principals. The identified themes were (1) deliberate and intentional leader actions and interactions, (2) reflective attentiveness to decisions and tasks, (3) fostering positive collaborative relationships, (4) affective awareness and action, (5) coordinating student support activities, and (6) leadership dispositions and practice. These themes embodied the essence of what the participants encountered as they worked to lead school improvement efforts within their schools. Though each participant shared their individual experience, themes provided a more vivid depiction of their lived experiences as principals. In Chapter 4, the themes were supported with actual statements as shared by the participants. The following discussion associates the formulated meanings for each theme that emerged from the lived experiences as shared by the participants.

Theme 1: Deliberate and Intentional Leader Actions and Interactions

Deliberate and intentional leader actions and interactions were common behaviors regarding the participants' experiences leading change efforts. All principals shared vivid accounts of the strategic initiatives they implemented during the change process. Their relentless efforts became a catalyst for school improvement and increased student achievement. Principal A realized that he needed to restructure the courses offered to students. By offering rigorous courses, his students were provided with better learning opportunities. The success of the students became the school's success. The school earned enough points to raise the grade of D to a B within one year. Parallel to practices outlined in the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders*, formerly known as the *ISLLC Standards* and abbreviated in the current research as the *Standards*, the effective leader strives to "align and focus systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment within and across grade levels to promote student academic success" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 12).

Principal B committed to being in classrooms every day. She emphasized that her daily visibility in classrooms was a non-negotiable practice. Additionally, she and her assistant principal consistently provided feedback to the teachers based on classroom observations. Due to her awareness of instructional delivery practices and relevant data, she tiered her teachers according to the level of support they needed. Nikolaros (2015) asserted that principals who lead school improvement practices are committed to addressing specific goals. Likewise, Nikolaros posited that school leaders embrace inadequacies within their schools and view them as "opportunities for change" (p. 48). Articulated in the *Standards*, the effective school leader "delivers actionable feedback about instruction…through evaluation to support the development of teachers'… knowledge, skills, and practice" (National Policy Board for Educational

83

Administration, 2015, p. 14). Principal B's emphasis on feedback practices and instructional

alignments provided the direction the school needed. The school's grade increased from an F to

a C within one year.

Theme 2: Reflective Attentiveness to Decisions and Tasks

Reflective attentiveness to decisions and tasks were common attributes shared by the

participants. Principal C hired quality teachers and ensured the school was adequately staffed.

Nikolaros (2015) mentioned that hiring quality teachers is related to the success of schools and

fosters conducive learning environments for children. Additionally, Principal C understood the

importance of adhering to best practices regarding curriculum and instructional delivery. She

utilized her skills to build exemplar curriculum for her teachers to use. Many of the newer

teachers were not familiar with the strategies used in prior years. However, she was reflective

regarding those practices and did not waiver from what she inherently knew was effective

instructional practice. She modeled this practice for teachers and built capacity within the

teachers to do the same. Within one year, the school grade increased from a D to a B. Hitt and

Meyers (2018) posited that a positive correlation to student achievement is established when

principals "collaboratively create a vision" (p. 5) for their schools and develop the instructional

capacity of teachers.

Principal D established systems of structure and accountability within her school. When

she took over her underperforming school, she recognized that the teachers and students had not

been held accountable for their actions. Her approach to reform involved setting expectations

and communicating those expectations with staff and students. Actions included setting an

instructional vision and establishing clear expectations. Principal D also referred to the team

who served to assist her building change efforts. She noticed positive changes in behavior and

an increased focus on academic instruction. In his book *Leading Change*, Kotter (2012)

described a series of eight steps involved in leading change. Aligning to this model, Principal D

(1) established a sense of urgency, (2) formed a guiding coalition of support, (3) created a vision,

and (4) communicated the vision (pp. 34 -100). The effective principal "strategically develops,

implements, and evaluates actions to achieve the vision for the school" (National Policy Board

for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 9). Similar to Principal B's school, the grade increased

from an F to a C in one year.

Theme 3: Fostering Positive Collaborative Relationships

Fostering positive collaborative relationships provided a source of support for the

principals. Their intentional efforts to building positive relationships directly affected the

opportunities afford to their students. Principal A shared examples of how he developed

relationships with local colleges and businesses in order to assist his students. He inquired about

the type of skills and training required to obtain employment. He realized these were the future

employers of the students who attended his school. Therefore, he took actions to ensure his

students were prepared to enter the workforce after graduation from high school. Steiner and

Hassel (2011) indicated that "dramatic change requires active communication with local

stakeholders" (p. 10).

Comparably, Principal E invited mentors from local colleges to mentor her students for

the transition from elementary school to middle school. She also brought in community readers

to perform read aloud activities with her students. The attention provided by these volunteers

created an excitement for learning within her students. Her students realized that people outside

the school cared about them and their education. Learning from others who were not school

employees was a new experience for many of her students. Defined in the *Standards,* the

effective principal "creates and sustains positive, collaborative, and productive relationships with families and the community for the benefit of students" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 22). Additionally, the effective principal "promotes adult-student, student-peer, and school-community relationships that value and support academic learning and positive social and emotional development" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 13). By instilling confidence in her students and fostering rapport in the community, Principal E witnessed her school grade increase a letter grade for two consecutive years.

Theme 4: Affective Awareness and Action

A prevalent characteristic among all participants was their sensitivity to the affective attributes of their school. Their affective awareness, supported by deliberate actions, cultivated positive school cultures and climates for their students, staff, and families. Principal B described early actions of teaching her students how to love one another. Her attention was sparked when school discipline records revealed a pattern of maladaptive behaviors including racial bantering and physical altercations. To change these behaviors, she embarked on a journey that modeled respect and tolerance for all members in her school. The *Standards* explicitly state that effective principals ensure that all students are "treated fairly, respectfully, and with an understanding of each student's culture and context" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 11).

Principal C emphasized the importance of not creating an institutionalized setting while implementing change efforts. She adorned the hallways in her school with festive and creative projects. The visual display of student work echoed throughout the campus and demonstrated a balanced approach to education and fun activities. The infusion of activities embraced the

diversity of the students and staff and supported cultural awareness. Culture building

opportunities, combined with high-yield instructional practices, enhanced the work environment

for students and staff members. Nikolaros (2015) posited that the integration of various cultures

improves school diversity and supports the overall success of schools (p. 6).

Theme 5: Coordinating Students Support Activities

Commonly noted among the shared experiences of the participants was the principals'

advocacy to support their students. Action included participating in community outreach

activities, allocating student resources, and meeting students' academic needs. Coordinating

student support activities shaped the internal practices of the participants and garnered external

garnered stimulus from external stakeholders. Principal C highlighted her diverse approach to

hiring teachers. She stressed the importance of hiring teachers that mirrored her student

population. This action embodies the behavior characterized in the *Standards*, stating successful

principals "infuse the school's learning environment with the cultures and languages of the

school's community" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 13).

By voicing the struggles encountered by students in her school, Principal D received a

$15,000 grant to use for school improvement efforts. Her transparent approach invoked

community responsiveness and visible ongoing support. The students and parents of her school

have experienced and benefited from the wraparound services afforded to the school though

local support, additional grants, and human capital. Specified in the *Standards*, the effective

principal endeavors to "advocate publicly for the needs and priorities of students, families, and

the community" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 16).

Theme 6: Leadership Dispositions and Practice

Leadership dispositions and practices were relative to the principals' prior experiences. Contrasting yet substantial viewpoints formed the lens through which they viewed their success as school principals. Hitt et al. (2018) asserted that several factors contribute to the effectiveness of a principal, including prior experience, preparation program, and disposition (p. 59). Principal A and Principal B provided detailed evidence regarding leadership preparation and professional development activities. They articulated these experiences though citing specific actions they took to lead change initiatives within their schools. Principal B and Principal C seemed to have strong connections to highly effective mentors. When sharing their experiences, they shared the relevance of these mentor relationships. Principal A, Principal C, and Principal D referenced additional graduate studies and the implications of those studies in their current practices. Principal E acknowledged the leadership trainings she received but considered her success as a principal to be a result of her time and experience as a classroom teacher. Though diverse in their approaches, the leadership practices and dispositions shared centered on improving the quality of education for students.

Limitations

This study provided analyses and interpretations based on a small sample of administrators from a large Florida school district. Data collection and analysis were limited to the responses provided by the five traditional public school principals who participated in this study. This research study did not reflect the experiences of other traditional public school principals employed by the school district, principals in surrounding school districts, or the nation. Furthermore, the researcher did not interview any additional staff members who assisted the participants in leading the organizational change efforts that resulted in two academic rating increases within the three-year timeframe. The primary source of data for this study came from

the participants' responses during interview sessions and no other source, such as a focus group interview session or a field observation.

Germane to qualitative studies, researcher bias was a critical component that the researcher identified and addressed prior to conducting this study. To prevent influence from bias, the researcher bracketed her experiences as a principal and approached the topic with fresh perspective. In transcendental phenomenological research, the researchers approach the topic as if it were brand new to them (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2013) cautioned that the interpretation of data incorporates the assumptions of the researcher; however, by bracketing her experiences, the researcher suspended her understanding of the phenomenon in order to conduct a fair study. Additionally, the researcher used reflexive journaling, member checking, and structural and textural descriptions for trustworthiness and credibility (Creswell, 2013).

Implications for Future Practice

Hitt and Meyers (2018) stated that thousands of schools are engaged in turning schools around, but for several reasons, the research has not identified occurrences of sustainable long-term growth. The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of traditional public school principals who led organizational change resulting in two academic score increases within three years. As principals lead change efforts, an effort to consistently evaluate and develop leadership practices is necessary to see continued student achievement. When leaders align their beliefs, actions, and dispositions regarding accountability, they invoke similar behaviors in their followers. Hitt et al. (2018) posited that preparing principals to be successful is challenging work and referenced the shortage of experienced principals currently prepared to lead turnaround efforts in schools.

As districts develop leadership trainings and principal preparation programs, consideration regarding the tasks and completion products required of the participants may be helpful. Perhaps internships in turnaround schools may provide future principals with hands-on experience and firsthand observations of the work required to lead turnaround efforts. Steiner and Hassel (2011) asserted that district leaders need to develop a talent pipeline that to strengthen the supply of turnaround teachers and leaders. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) extends pressure and responsibility to school districts to develop and hire principals who exhibit leadership competency (Hitt et al., 2018). As in the case of the five participants in this study, leading turnaround efforts is attainable, but is not due to happenstance. Hitt and Myers (2018) described three scenarios following upward trajectories resulting from organizatioanl change. The three scenarios were (1) the school performances reaches a plateau, (2) the school perfomance declines, or (3) the school continues to improve. In order to sustain school improvement efforts and student outcomes, school leaders should give consideration to their resiliency exhibited during the initial phases of change and endeavor to continue those efforts in the follow-up phases. Some actions may include participating in ongoing professional development, staying abreast of legislative implementation and educational reform topics, and focusing on standards-aligned practices.

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Future Research**</div>

In this study, the researcher examined specific experiences of the five participating principals. Further examination of this topic may investigate others who are influential in leading school turnaround efforts. The accounts of other school leaders, such as assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers, may be worthy of investigation. Hitt and Meyers (2018) reported that the current literature focusing on school leadership is scarce and even fewer

studies are available which examine principals who have been successful in leading school

turnaround efforts (p. 6). Current literature revealed the need to continue research regarding

turnaround efforts; however, past research postulated this same need to focus research on

improving school leadership. Jacobson et al. (2007) outlined three significant reasons to study

school leadership including "increasing demands to hold schools accountable for measurable

student achievement, increasing environmental and organizational complexity, and a growing

perception that high-quality leadership is in short supply" (p. 292). These same reasons are

relevant today and provide a platform for additional research. Case study research is a useful

methodology to conduct future studies involving principals as they actively lead change efforts.

Skillful researchers may use a mixed-methods approach to examine the qualities of principals

and their effect by using a chosen appropriate metric. The opportunities are numerous regarding

this topic. Additionally, a longitudinal study of a successful turnaround school would add to the

existing research.

Summary

Establishing and conveying a vison, facilitating high quality learning experiences for

students, building professional capacity in others, creating a supportive learning organization,

and connecting with external partners are effective leader practices that influence student

achievement (Hitt & Meyers, 2018). The confluence of these actions and the strategic

implementation of others were noted in the successful organizational change experienced by the

participants in this study. Pairing principals with successful mentors, challenging them to reflect

on current leadership practices, and committing to provide meaningful and applicable growth

opportunities are a few practices that may keep the best leaders in schools. This study added to

existing body of research regarding turnaround leaders. Evidence presented in this study

suggests that professional experience and leadership training were influential for principals as they implemented strategic initiatives and led organizational change efforts.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Guide*

Interview Protocol: Responses of traditional public school principals' experiences related to leading organizational change resulting in two academic rating increases within a three-year period.

Interviewer: Nikeshia Leatherwood

Date:

Time:

Location:

Interview Questions:

1.	Describe the organization you lead. How many staff members do you supervise? Who is on your leadership team? What roles do they assume?
2.	What professional experiences contributed to your successful organizational leadership efforts?
3.	What leadership trainings have you received related to leading successful organizational change?
4.	Discuss strategic initiatives or methods you implemented in order to lead systemic organizational change.
5.	Describe strategic actions taken by key people who assisted you in leading organizational change.
6.	Tell me about strategic reforms you incorporated to cultivate students, staff, parents, and community while leading organizational change.

*The inquiries in this guide are descriptive of the information being sought by the researcher and may be modified based upon results.

Appendix B

Adult Consent to be Interviewed

PROJECT TITLE:

LEADING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF
EXPERIENCES OF TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

INVESTIGATORS
Principal Investigator: Dr. Charles Smith, Southeastern University

Student Investigator: Nikeshia Leatherwood

PURPOSE

The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to explore the professional experiences,
leadership trainings, and strategic initiatives of traditional public school principals who have led
organizational change resulting in two academic rating increases within a three-year period.

PROCEDURES
The researcher will contact you to schedule an interview by phone, virtual meeting, or in person.
The interview will be audio-recorded, transcribed, and returned to you for validation. The
interview will consist of approximately six questions, with possible follow-up questions, and will
not take more than 30 minutes of your time.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION
There are no known risks to participation in this study. You will not be personally identified in
any reports or publications of the results. In addition, any references to your school will be re-
coded so that individuals and schools cannot be identified.

BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATION
Your participation will add to an understanding of how traditional public school principals
experience leading organizational change. Data gathered will be informative for other principals
leading organizational change.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The audio-recordings, transcripts, and notes of this interview will be made available only to the
student researcher, primary investigator, and the dissertation committee's methodologist.
Written results will not include information that could identify you. Raw recordings and
transcriptions will be stored on a password-protected computer and backed up on a USB drive
stored in a locked filing cabinet. Only researchers and individuals responsible for research
oversight will have access to the records. Recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed five
years after the study has been completed.

CONTACTS
You may contact the researchers should you desire to discuss your participation in the study:
Nikeshia Leatherwood: ████████, nleatherwood@seu.edu, or Dr. Charles Smith:
cksmith@seu.edu.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty.

CONSENT DOCUMENTATION

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be given to me. I affirm that I am 18 years old or older. I hereby give permission for my participation in this study.

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Printed Name of Participant   Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

_____

Signature of Researcher   Date

Appendix C

Email Invitation to Participants

Dear Colleague,

I am conducting a research project describing the lived experiences of school-based principals who have led organizational change within their schools. The purpose of this email is to ask for your participation in this research project. This study has been approved by both Southeastern University and Polk County Public Schools. If you agree to participate, and are selected, we will arrange a convenient location to conduct the interview. The length of the interview is approximately 30 minutes and can be conducted in a place convenient for you.

I am interested in how your professional experiences, leadership trainings, and use of strategic initiatives lead to successful organizational change within your school. The interview will be digitally recorded, and the recordings will be transcribed. The recorded interview and the transcription of the interview will be kept in a locked file cabinet for a five-year period. At the end of the period, the material will be erased and shredded and permanently disposed. No identifying information will be used in any materials created from these interviews. The information obtained in this study will be published in my dissertation and may appear in journal articles.

You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting our relationship. Your participation in this research will contribute to the conversation held by organizational leaders at the district and school level who are charged with leading organizational change. Please indicate whether you are interested in participating in this research by contacting me at the contact information below. I look forward to hearing from you and the opportunity hear about your experience leading organizational change.

Respectfully,

Nikeshia Leatherwood – nleatherwood@seu.edu

Principal Investigator and Dissertation Chairperson: Dr. Charles Smith

Southeastern University

Appendix D

Southeastern University IRB Approval

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Southeastern University
IRB Reviewer's Review Sheet</td><td>Protocol #: 2019 ED 15</td></tr>
<tr><td>Exempt: Yes ✓ No ☐</td></tr>
</table>

Principal Investigator's Name: Dr. Charles Smith   **Today's Date:** 5-4-19

Co-Investigators: Dr. Janet Deck, Nikeshia Leatherwood

Project Title: Leading Organizational Change: A Qualitative Examination of Experiences of Traditional

1. Does the research place subjects at more than minimal risk?   Yes ☐   No ☐
Minimal risk is defined as the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort is no greater than that ordinarily encountered in daily life or during routine physical or psychological examination or tests)

Notes: _____

2. If more than minimal risk, does the merit of the project outweigh the risks and are the benefits maximized and risks minimized?   N/A ☐   Yes ☐   No ☐

Notes: _____

3. Are there any ethical issues regarding the study's design and conduct?   Yes ☐   No ☐

Ethical issues may include but are not limited to the Belmont Report principles: respect for persons (voluntary, fully informed consent); beneficence (obligation to protect subjects from harm and secure their well-being); and, justice (benefits and burdens of research are fairly distributed)

Notes: _____

4. Is subject selection equitable?   Yes ☐   No ☐

If special populations are included the IRB should ensure that subjects can understand the research, give full consent, and voluntarily agree to participate, and they should consider any other possible special problems. Are vulnerable or special populations included in the research?

- ☐ Pregnant women
- ☐ Fetus/fetal tissue
- ☐ Prisoners
- ☐ Minors Under Age 18
- ☐ Elderly subjects
- ☐ Minority groups and non-English speakers
- ☐ Patients
- ☐ Mentally/Emotionally/Developmentally Disabled persons
- ☐ Behavioral Abnormalities, psychological or disease condition
- ☐ None of the above, Normal Healthy Volunteers

Notes: _____

5. Is the recruitment and consent process (including telephone scripts, ads, brochures, letters, compensation) fully described, appropriate, and non-coercive?   Yes ☐   No ☐
Notes: _____

6. Are risks (physical, emotional, financial, legal) to subjects minimized? Yes ☐ No ☐

Notes: _____

_____

7. Confidentiality of Data:

Are there procedures for protecting privacy and confidentiality? Yes ☐ No ☐

Notes: _____

_____

8. Is Informed Consent Included in the Application? Yes ☐ No ☐

Stipulate Missing Elements:

Is affiliation with SEU clearly noted?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Is the Faculty PI identified?	N/A ☐	Yes ☐	No ☐
Is the study faculty sponsor identified (if appropriate)?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Does the consent state the study purpose accurately?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Is it clear what the subject(s) will be asked to do?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Are risks or discomforts clearly and fully stated?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Are benefits clearly and fully stated?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Are alternatives listed (if appropriate)?	N/A ☐	Yes ☐	No ☐
Are confidentiality or anonymity issues addressed?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Is the PI's contact information included?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Is the IRB's contact information included?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Is it stated that the subject can withdraw at anytime?		Yes ☐	No ☐
Is the consent understandable at an 8th grade reading level?		Yes ☐	No ☐

Assent Form Not Required ☐

Is one needed (can the child really refuse to participate)?	Yes ☐	No ☐
Is it one page or less?	Yes ☐	No ☐
Is the language simple and sentences short?	Yes ☐	No ☐

Notes: _____

_____

Additional Comments/Requirements by IRB:

.

RECOMMENDATION:

☑ Approved as submitted   ☐ Approval Deferred; add'l information required
                                    (additional IRB review required)

☐ Approved with stipulations as noted   ☐ Not Approved

Signature: IRB OFFICE _____   Date: 5-7-2019

Appendix E

School District Research Approval

Nikeshia Leatherwood   March 22, 2019

Davenport, FL 33837

Re: *Leading Change: A Qualitative Examination of Experiences of Traditional Public School Principals*

Dear Nikeshia Leatherwood,

The *Office of Assessment, Accountability, and Evaluation* has **approved** your request to conduct research. Your research activities are effective from March 22, 2019 through November 1, 2019. Should you desire to continue your research efforts beyond the aforementioned period, you must submit a request for an extension no later than September 30, 2019. Any significant changes or amendments to the procedures or design of this study must be approved by resubmitting a request for research that clearly identifies these methodological changes.

In the interest of continued research benefits and the coordination of research interests, we ask that you mail one copy of your finalized research product and a one-page executive summary for our research webpage at the conclusion of your study. This information, and any other relevant information you may have, will be filed in our research library and added to the annotated listing of research projects. We look forward to reading the results of your study and any suggestions they may offer toward improving academic services for students.

If you have any questions, or if I can be of any further assistance, please contact me or [REDACTED].

Best wishes on your research endeavors.

Sincerely,

Appendix F

Interview Protocol: Responses of traditional public school principals' experiences related to leading organizational change resulting in two academic rating increases within a three-year period.

Interview #1

Interviewee: "Principal A"

Interviewer: Nikeshia Leatherwood (NL)

Time of Interview: 8:15 a.m. to 8:45 a.m.

Date of Interview: May 15, 2019

Place: High School X

NL: Thank you for your time today. I am Nikeshia Leatherwood, and I will be interviewing you regarding your efforts leading successful organizational change in a traditional public school. Q1-Describe the organization you lead.

"Principal A": As you said, we are a traditional high school. We are a community school. We don't have any special programs or attracters for students. We pretty much serve the students in our zone who choose not to attend an academy program at another school or a specialty school. This is my fourth year and I will be ending my fourth year at High School X this year. When I came here, previously to that I was the principal at the feeder middle school and I was the principal there 7 years prior, so I was very familiar to the students, their families, and the community that this school serves. This school had traditionally been a "C" school for many, many years. They had been a "B" school, I want to say in 2010, possibly, but there was a year that they were a "B" school, but they had been a "C" school pretty consistently. I don't know where they fell into a "C", low "C" most of the time, middle to low, but I don't have any data to that, but I bet you could find that. And of course, throughout all those years, the grading scale and how it is graded, and the criteria for assessments have been all over the place, so it has changed continuously. This school was very traditional as far as instruction. I would say it was very *stand* and *deliver* and let me tell you what you need to know and then I'm going to test you on what you need to know, so there wasn't a lot of emphasis on instructional practices that would make a difference in student achievement. It was pretty much, "I'm teaching for my course and I'm teaching for a grade. I'm not necessarily teaching for a standard." The year I became principal was the previous year, which was the school year that I came in on, there was not any learning gains in the school grading model. It was the first year that the FSA was implemented for a grade, but it wouldn't be until the following year where gains would be put in place. I do think there were some kind of safety measures in that because about everybody had a C that year,

so it really didn't give us a lot of data to work from. We just had proficiency measures. As a high school, graduation rate is a component and the acceleration cell is a component, and we have a 1000-point scale in high schools. The grade I received- and everything is delayed a year- so it takes a couple years for your data to catch up to you for your graduation rate and acceleration rate to be reflected. We were a "D" in the 15-16 school year grade and then we were a "D" again in the 2017 school year. In the 2018 school year, in that data we became a "B." Our "D" was very close to a "C," it was a few points away. One of our issues was a structural issue with acceleration, which after we were placed on turn around status with the state for having 2 "Ds", I did go back and look at the acceleration cell dropping. Back in 2013-14, the state changed a rule that students did not get points for taking AP courses, but only for *passing* AP courses. Well when that rule changed, my assessment is the school did not take action making those points up in another way, which could have been through Dual Enrollment Success or Industry Certification Success. There was no structural or strategic intervention to change that. What happened is in the preceding years, that score would drop from 58 to 45 to 40 to 38 and they year that we were 2 "Ds" in a row, it had fallen to 20 points. Those 20 points got us to lowest in the state for traditional schools other than a zero. If you had a program and were offering things, that was a low score. That was identifiable by the state that we were an outlier in that cell extremely, and by the time I figured out what was going on with that, we were already a year behind. We knew that year we had to make up the points in *other* cells because there was no way to do it. Our comparable schools in our district, we earned academic points than many of them had earned, however they had 30 or 40 more points in acceleration, which kept them at "C" level and kept them from going into corrective action, even though academically we were much stronger than they were. That was the key piece that cast us to be perceived as really doing poorly in things, when truly, we really were not. We were doing about average or a little better, but that one cell being out-of-whack took us off the track. That was a structural change, that was adding Dual Enrollment, adding Industry Certification, cutting programs, cutting teachers, and I didn't do anything my first year coming in. My approach was I need to figure out what's going on before I made changes. I think my lesson learned and something I recommend to the district is that if we have these offices of data, "why aren't we tracking data to tell a principal when they are coming in that this is your 5-year trend?" and if I had seen a 5-year trend or 3-year trend, it would have been very apparent that the numbers were dropping (like a rock) and my situation could have been avoided with that. However, being in turnaround status and receiving a school improvement grant, that catapulted us and gave us a reason to revamp all our systems. As the leader I said, "This is an opportunity to create change." Our first year, we worked on standards with Rigor Walks through Learning Standards International and the outcome of that is that *we weren't teaching the standards*. We were teaching around the standards, we were addressing the standards, but we weren't teaching the standards. A lot of work was done on standards-based instructional alignment, year 2 more was done on structures and engaging in structures for students, and we have continued that. That is where we are now. We have seen increases in our Biology scores, increases in our U.S History scores, our Math scores. The year we went from a

"D" to a "B", we gained 40 points, which I already mentioned the acceleration cell and that is huge. We also increased our graduation rate 13 points, our Social Studies increased nine points, and our Science scores increased 32 points. Our math scores increased 20 points or more and some of those things were not directly instructional-oriented. Some were changes in our progression plan that allowed us to provide students with another year of math before testing them, so it changed the denominator group that was tested. We did increase in learning gains in ELA and in the lower 25%, but our proficiency in ELA decreased a few points. We've been pretty consistent in our ELA points, so we know that's root problem. We know that is our issue we have to work on. That has been a tougher piece, but we are continuing to work on that. When I say, "We", our teachers are shifting a lot of instructional support and planning to our department leaders, team leaders, coaches, and assistant principals. Everyone has an area they work in and they work with teachers in planning with executing instruction, planning, following up, and providing feedback for our teachers. We are just getting into that even more this year and going on into the future.

NL: Following up from an earlier comment, you mentioned you supervised about 130 people. Q2-Who on your leadership team?

"Principal A": Our leadership team consists of an assistant principal with a math coaching background, so she works in math and she wanted to work in literacy. She works in our reading area. Another assistant principal works in science and social studies; another assistant principal does the Arts and Performing Areas, and another does CTE Instruction. I work in ESE with those instructors. Everyone has evaluating instruction as a responsibility and they are also the key leader in working to create other leaders in that group. It's very much a discipline-oriented area.

NL: Okay so that answered what roles they take on.

"Principal A": We do have an instructional coach that works mainly in supporting Literacy through ELA, Social Studies, Science, and Reading.

NL: Q3- What professional experiences contributed to your successful organizational leadership efforts?

"Principal A": I would say experience in working in schools. I had gone through National Institute of School Leaders (NISL) which is a National Principal preparation-type program and that did give me some ideas on how to organize and cast a vision and how to create priorities and a sense of urgency to bring about change with the instructors and the stakeholders. We really had to change our perception of ourselves and reframe ourselves as a school. A lot of non-academic things did take place to improve our visibility in the community, our relationship with external stakeholders. Our involvement in the community and our openness to work with the community to have that exchange between a neighborhood school and the neighborhood. A lot of work was done in that regard *just* to change the perception. We really shifted our focus from *just* graduating students to having students create a purpose for graduating, as in "what's their next

steps?" *When I become and 11th and 12th grader, I should of met most of my graduation requirements for testing and those things. All that is left is to earn my credits, so I should be working towards I'm going to school and this is what I need, I'm going to this job and this is what I need.* What are the services that schools can provide their students while they are in school to help them develop a vision for their life? It's really everyone building their next bridge for their life. Some bridges are skyway and some bridges are a little rickety.

NL: Q4-What leadership trainings have you received relating to leading successful organizational change?

"Principal A": Other than the NISL Program, I'm currently involved in a turnaround leadership program through the University of South Florida, Ed Specialists degree, that is oriented towards turnaround schools and bringing dramatic change to low-performing organizations. I was in year 1 of the program last year and it was an opportunity being a turn-round that was available for training and support, so I took that and I think it served to confirm a lot the practices that I did already, and I knew that was the theory behind what I had already believed. It helped to confirm my practice and help me to be *more* focused and pointed in different things I did. It also gave me confidence to make drastic changes that needed to be done in changing people or demoting people or releasing people and making those actions that had to happen in order to bring about change in the school.

NL: You talked a little about this in the first one, but again- (Q4) discuss strategic initiatives or methods you implemented in order to lead the systemic organizational change.

"Principal A": One change, as far as acceleration, was to vet our instructors to be able to teach dual enrollment courses. These teachers have been at this school for years, but none of them had ever taught Dual Enrollment or even asked if they wanted to teach it. I worked with two schools, local colleges that provided opportunities to vet teachers and credential them to do Dual Enrollment through their organization, so it made dual enrollment more accessible to our kids. We made it a part of our progression in our school that all students will complete if they are eligible for at least one dual enrollment class that deals with career planning or college success. If they are not eligible for that, then we want our kids to earn an Industry Certification; so those were some of the programs that were changed. Not every program dealt with Industry Certification so that became a requirement, so those teachers had to teach those standards. They had to identify a test for Industry Certification in their program that students could take three times a year. They earned CAPE funds for the school and they earned it for them personally. They earn their certification from the school for work force and it gives a "point" to the school. We also looked at our AP program. We have increased the number of AP offerings that we have and we really brought rigor into our school. I had worked with a migrant success coach at my previous school that served this school too. Our conversation for years was that High School "X" does not offer any rigor; it is just get your 24 credits and leave. She would send all her students to a military academy or an International Baccalaureate program or an ACE program, or some

other specialty program. Kids were leaving our school in droves. You just had kids who had no vision or no thoughts of being aggressive students. This year, some of those students in our program, a girl has a scholarship for Stanford University; another student has full-scholarship to University of South Florida. These are migrant students who could have went to any other program in our school district, but wanted to stay at their traditional school, and they mainly took AP classes and traditional classes. That is how they were really able to increase their GPA's and increase their resume to Universities to say, "Hey I'm taking the toughest classes I can take and this is my background." These two students are just an example of the other students they have inspired to pursue a more rigorous program and to take our program and line it up to any other traditional school in the country and we offer is what they offer. We have rigor at High School "X" which is just one component that was missing and was not allowing our grade to represent ourselves well.

NL: Q5- Describe strategic actions taken by the key people who assisted you in leading Organizational change.

"Principal A": We had a plan. We had an instructional model that we introduced the year before and that became the expectation. We really planned it and talked about it the first year and then the second year we implemented it. People were encouraged to go to another place if they didn't want to work on that plan, but that sense of urgency was there because we were a "D". We were a double "D" and under the threat of House Bill 7069 that we could be closed, turned over, or repurposed to Charter. Our staff would be displaced and as a community high school that has been in place for over 100 years, that really enraged our community that this could even happen. We ended up having a lot of political support from our community and representatives wondering how could that be *(how is this just?)* and how did the school make this grade but now they are going to be closed down. We ended up making a "B" and that was definitely an exclamation point because the school was going to be closed down over the fact that this school did not have programs that they should have had.

NL: Q6- Tell me about the strategic reforms you incorporated to cultivate the students, the staff, the parents, and the community while you were leading the change.

"Principal A": All of those areas are important and all of those stakeholders had to be addressed if you are going to bring about change. You want to engage all of those folks at some level because you need that pressure to help people change what they do and people would rather die than change. *This is a saying that is out there*. However, we know that instruction and leadership are not a fixed state. You can grow, you can change, and you can develop a different mindset, so we had to work on the branding of our school. We changed our logo, we went on social media, and we worked with our city programs' director in telling our story. A big piece *to me* with staff was "we have to tell a story or they will tell a story on us." I crafted a narrative that we were going to be a school of possibility and a school that would help students achieve their dreams. In changing our CTE programs, we aligned everything with Polk State College and with Travis, a

technical college, so that kids could see that if they were going to college for robotics, this is how this connects with college or poly-tech. We really created pathways in our school that students and parents could see what the purpose of them was. We also developed relationships, especially in Health Care, Engineering, and Technology with our business partners through those academies like Central Florida Health Care, New Core, Polk State College, Corporate College-Clear Springs in Bartow. They want our students and they have companies who need our students, and to train them and pay them to get ready to go to work. We really had to work on broadcasting and creating that as being part of the narrative that we just don't have good old *(town)* kids, but where can these kids work? What kind of training would they need? How can they be marketable? We really worked hard in changing our offerings. We had a culinary program and we had an Auto program, so our school looked like all we had was a blue-collar opportunity. Some of those programs were changed or eliminated altogether and others were brought in. In the promotion of those, that really changed the way people perceived our school, our chamber of commerce, and even for a small community was pretty large since we had multi-national corporations involved. This past year we received the non-profit business of the year award for being involved in the community. That was decided by their board of directors and that (to me) was a big accomplishment because that was a huge goal of mine knowing that I had to work the community so that students would have access and more opportunities by those dollars and influence from them. I didn't do it by myself. One assistant principal worked in CTE and we looked at different models around the state. We worked with our district in creating the structure we wanted. It was to be something that would be open-ended allowing kids to change their mind and that the skills they learned could be transferable to another area. We wanted it to be general but we also wanted them to have an opportunity to earn specific credentials and the same thing with Polk State College dual enrollment and Southeastern University. Our kids would be able to earn their first year of college, if not, a year and a half here on our campus. That's just us doing it with no one else helping us. When our teachers saw that our scores were rising, they knew that it wasn't just our kids, but they really began to soul-search and said, "Oh, that it was also their practices. So how can we change our instructional practices to impact student achievement, which impacts students' futures and their lives?" That really became my driving mantra and "what's your dream?" It is not graduation (that is going to happen), but what is beyond that? We are continuing to work on that and in recruiting and keeping kids that would've left our school. Our feeder school has about 1200 students, but we only had 800. Many of those students had left. We are at 1200 no. Even though we have an additional grade, our number of students that leave has reduced greatly. We invigorated our sports program and all the elements that a secondary school has or a high school has that is different from elementary and those things do impact the students you attract and their performance at the school.

NL: Thank you very much. You have shared a lot of information with me.

Interview Protocol: Responses of traditional public school principals' experiences related to leading organizational change resulting in two academic rating increases within a three-year period.

Interview #2

Interviewee: "Principal B"

Interviewer: Nikeshia Leatherwood (NL)

Time of Interview: 10:29 a.m. to 10:49 a.m.

Date of Interview: May 15, 2019

Place: Elementary School A

NL: Describe to me the organization you lead.

"Principal B": I lead a public school and it is a community eligibility school, which means we have over 95% poverty rate. I also lead a diverse school where White is the majority, then the Black subgroup, and then Hispanic. We also have sub-groups with students who have disabilities and of course, students with economic barriers, but that is about 90% of our school. This school has been established and well-functioning with the four previous leaders before I came to this seat. There are about 38 teachers, 6 paraprofessionals, and I also have inclusion teachers. It's a K-5 building. Three of the original teachers who opened the building are still here and our school is very diverse. It is a community/bussed in public school and about 55 of the students that are zoned to go to the neighborhood school are bussed in. The school had a trend of A-B when we were FCAT, and then when we went to FSA, there were some dips causing the trend line to be D-D-F. Then we were on the trend line of C-C and this year we will see where it comes to. This is the type of organization I lead. We do have a Head Start program and a VPK-ESE.

NL: How many staff members do you supervise?

"Principal B": Roughly, I'd say, I directly supervise about 50 staff members.

NL: Who is on your leadership team?

"Principal B": This year on our team there was a Reading coach, Math coach, the assistant principal, the guidance counselor, the school psychologist, and myself.

NL: Other than the direct title, what roles do they assume?

"Principal B": The reading coach is the volunteer coordinator and does the E-Task box for Title 1 outside of her instructional role. She is also the sponsor for our National Junior Honor Society. The math coach, who is new this year (she doesn't have as many responsibilities), is training to do the Title 1 E-Task box. She also runs the tutoring program, but I embed that in her job. The guidance counselor does counseling, MTSS, and I tried to add safety patrol for her, but since she is new, I have had to have some grace there. The school psychologist has done things outside of her role like helping the assistant principal with PBIS, but that to me is embedded because you get to see "a ray" of children. Everyone does a role outside of his or her general one. I really use that "as principal assigned" option (smiles).

NL: What professional experiences contributed to your successful, organizational, leadership successes?

"Principal B": I would say serving under effective principals. I've had some great principals in my path that I worked under that I was able to study. They were very effective in different ways. I had a good instructional principal, a good managerial principal, and a principal who understood how to take action and build capacity. Those were all the things, and the trainings that I got to go to help turn-around schools. I was able to understand that there would be different needs and I also became a dean in a high-performance school, which is very different, so I think those things alone helped me shape the type of leader that I wanted to be. I was able to take nuggets from every experience.

NL: What leadership trainings have you received relating to successful organizational change?

"Principal B": There was the Aspiring Leaders program, the Gulf Coast program and I had a person come here as a mentor. He was very interested in helping and provided a lot of one-to-one coaching feedback. Sometimes I'm not very analytical, as it isn't one of my strengths, so sometimes I needed very literal things and the lines would get blurry because he thought, if I give her this then she'll be able to analyze it, but I'd needed him to just tell me what it is. I did end up taking things from that. I happened to be in a school turn-around project from New York that was in the district with my principal. When I became a new principal, they paired us with LSI and someone came in who did many hands-on things with me. She helped me to understand the "pillars of change." My regional director helped me understand the logistics of everything so I could just go in and do my job. I would also say… my colleagues. They were essential in many of the indirect things like talking about budgeting and running the school. I had many colleagues to lean on indirectly.

NL: Discuss strategic initiatives or methods you implemented in order to lead systematic organizational change.

"Principal B": Well the first year, you know that the initiative would be "core instruction" because we were an "F" school. So what do you do to go in and talk about core instruction? You have to go in and look and say, "These are what the expectations are and this is how we will

progress monitor." We progress monitored the core and let teachers see (as they progress monitored) what that looks like and how are the students were responding to the delivery that I am giving and asked, "what are the barriers?" We did a lot of that by looking into core instruction, the first year and progress monitoring the first year (*like nobody's business*). I did not say progress monitor (just to be on the sheet)— the teachers saw us use it *(weekly)*. We'd look at the assessment and see what it's showing us. In math, we really used formatives and formatives were used to change the direction of instruction. Then, we layered on the learning environment. I modeled that every morning by opening the school and doing morning announcements. We have a focus every day and a challenge every day and I structure a routine the way the school is opened. We did "Pioneer Bucks" the first two years when I got here, and with my new AP now, we are getting back to the main things. Some initiatives I took from that was having a system with those things and not leaning toward changing that. I looked at the learning environment, core instruction, and progress monitoring. I looked at those strategic initiatives. We implemented this by being consistent. We trained the coaches on how to collect data, how to use it, and how the teachers see you as being a part of the cycle of helping them be successful. They should be coming to you about their evaluations. You should have an open door (I didn't do well in this EPC...can you assist?) and let them be able to ask you what you can do to help them. I would share my walk through report with them without names present, just the trend-data. I understood as a school that we didn't understand high order thinking, so how could I expect that out of my teachers? We had to dissect our learning needs as an organization. Then, we had to understood how to present this to teachers and how it could impact students. I always set targets and when I looked at them, I knew I was being equitable and fair. "Here is the target, here is where we are, and here is where we want to go. Let's hit it and let's go!" These targets weren't just for 3-5 but for K-5.

NL: Describe strategic actions taken by the key people who then assisted you in leading the organizational change.

"Principal B": Well, the key action was that we were in classes every day—*every day*. We provided feedback every week, if not every day, but for sure every week. That was the assistant principal and me. We would use that feedback to go to the coaches and say "this is a hotspot so let's go talk and see what the needs, let's tier our teachers so we could see some movement. Let's tier teachers intentionally. We now do SAO's. It's not that I'm tiering teacher A because their core instruction is weak, but because the sub-groups aren't being moved. So, I go assist in there. You can't tier people on just one set of things, but maybe because the proficiency isn't there, maybe there are too many referrals in there, and a management needs to be placed in there. You have to tier teachers and be cognizant of what you are tiering so you can align those resources. We took action in leadership meetings and talked about our reading formative assessments. We asked how our math instruction was looking. How is whole group looking? How is team planning? What about small groups? What actions in leadership meetings and we talked about our assessments. We had to figure out what we were going to do about it, whether that be

modeling it for them or anything. Then we would come back and see if that teacher was moving out of the need for intense support. We were always doing the" plan-action-do." Plan-action-do, check for understanding. We followed that cycle. *That is* what we did. Everyone who I named, that is on the leadership team, has a role in that. If it was a learning environment issue, the guidance counselor went in. She would open up small groups in the morning. She even did yoga. Whatever the issue was, someone would take a part in fixing it. Each person knew their expertise or we would cross train. If there was an instructional math issue, it truly depended on who would be the best person to help with the issue. Maybe the reading teacher would step in and model how to use small groups and how to view the data. Even if was a math issue. They just cross-trained. We had to come up with a plan. If I saw that progress wasn't happening, we'd have to talk and figure out what the barriers were. Let's do a soft implementation deadline and then I'd follow up. If it weren't happening, I'd follow up again. We always strategically aligned our leadership team to launch out our expertise as a team.

NL: Tell me about strategic reforms that you incorporated, speaking to each one separately, to cultivate your students, the staff, the parents, and the community while you led the change.

"Principal B": Well some of them reforms with students was more about teaching them how to love each other. There were so many racial slurs that should not have been in the school where kids are learning how to grow and be community members. I had to cultivate teach them how to love each other. Getting here, I had almost 800 referrals, most of them consisting of racial fights. This was a problem, and they needed to learn how to understand each other. We bleed one color here and we are one person here. We are all pioneers, no matter what the color of your skin is. I had to cultivate how we were going to take care of the school and ourselves. I'd "shout them out" for modeling the desired behaviors. It was hard for me to come into this role and seeing the negativity and seeing the things the children were taught at home. I had to cultivate a love for each other and show we are not different. That was number one. Secondly, a love for learning. Parents here were so scarred by schools because they probably suffered from Dyslexia and they didn't have progress monitoring. They lived back in the day where if you did not get it, then you fell through the cracks because they would move on. You *have* to deal with the baggage of parents. There are a lot of parents who want the best education for their kids, even a better one then they had or were privy to, so you have to ask how you can support them. I had to cultivate the students by teaching them to have a love for learning. With the staff, you had to make them see that the kids deserved better. *They deserved better.* You don't look at their economic status, but the potential that they have knowing that the kids could learn. Give them the opportunity. Here, we are getting them ready for middle school and teaching them how to be readers, leaders, learners, and helping them to become responsible. That's all I can undertake. Then I can ask my teachers if they have gotten their students ready for middle school. Have you *truly* showed them what it's like to have homework in middle school? Have you *truly* showed them what it's like to be a leader in middle school? And have you showed them the essence of building a good relationship with their teachers? We are also looking ownership. I asked the hard questions.

"Why aren't the subgroups moving? Teachers would say, "Well, the inclusion teachers aren't coming in to serve the students. They get pulled for IEPs…" I would respond by saying, "It is a legal obligation and must be fulfilled." I was hoping they would say something like, "I need to look at how to service my students better in my class. Why are they not moving?" We taught before inclusion services were there. Staffing needs are not the same in every school. The staff had to understand that we were doing things differently here then what their previous schools had done. It was "what could I do instead of what isn't happening". With the parents, I let them know that their voice has value to me. I don't leave off this campus without returning a parent phone call. You have to deal with these parents on a case-by-case basis. You have to try to meet the parent halfway, but I have to know that I can trust them with assisting their kids in bettering their behavior so they will be allowed to go on trips or be a part of certain activities. Letting the parents know they can call me, limited them from running to the district or my regional first. Now I am not going to be able to please every parent, but if two parents saw each other and had a conversation, they couldn't say I wouldn't call them back. I show the parents that they have value in the school. I have even hired some of my parents. That's what I've done.

NL: Have you had to do any outreach within the community as well?

"Principal B": Yes, once we had the hurricane, we partnered with Bethel, raised $1200 worth of gift cards, and gave them to parents and staff members who were affected by the hurricane. We did everything to make sure that our parents were okay. We had eggs that were laid by chickens that we gave to the parents. We made sure we were visible by going out into the community and doing home visits. I see my parents at local grocery stores and speak to them. I let them know that I'm not untouchable. That's what we've done so far. The SAC president is the former principal of the school. I want our parents to see this connection. The school nurse runs the food pantry for our school. It is great to see the community come to our school and know there are resources here. These are just a few of the ways our community and school works together.

NL: Thank you so much, you have provided some great answers.

Appendix H

Interview Protocol: Responses of traditional public school principals' experiences related to leading organizational change resulting in two academic rating increases within a three-year period.

Interview #3

Interviewee: "Principal C"

Interviewer: Nikeshia Leatherwood (NL)

Time of Interview: 2:00 p.m. to 2:14 p.m.

Date of Interview: May 15, 2019

Place: Home of Principal C

NL: Describe the organization you lead.

"Principal C": Yes, it is a traditional Pre-K-5 school with 1400+ students who attend the school. On the instructional level, I supervise over 100 instructional teachers, closer to 200 when you include your custodians, lunch staff, and other support staff members.

NL: Who is on your leadership team?

"Principal C": The leadership team is comprised of two assistant principals, two reading coaches, a math coach, a math interventionist, a LLI interventionist, a behavior interventionist, a dean of students, my network manager, and my media center specialist and myself.

NL: What roles do they assume beyond their title?

"Principal C": All of them are also certified tech-coaches, so that is an additional role outside of their traditional job responsibilities. At least half of my leadership team are all aspiring leaders. In order to meet the program requirements for our district to be an aspiring leader, they also wear different hats throughout their day and evenings at the school.

NL: What professional experiences contributed to your successful organizational leadership efforts?

"Principal C": I have been blessed to have very strong mentors throughout my career. I believe these that these mentors (principals) are now what we call *nowadays* turn-around principals and they have lived that talk through their walk. Through their experiences, they were able to share with me; both as they were turning their schools around and after they turned their schools

around, what strategies have worked for them. I was very in tune to the research that they would follow and I had a very strong network of colleagues that were also in the same situation that I was in being a new principal at the time also wanting to be a pivot of change. We were just very blessed to have very strong mentors to help guide us in those formative years as a new principal.

NL: What leadership trainings have you received relating to leading successful organizational change?

"Principal C": I believe that as a new principal, back in the day, we were using a process called LFS (Learning Focused Strategies). LFS was basically a company that put together the best research practices, whether that was through Marzano, Kagan, Toth, or any of the different organizations. This company was able to take the best of the best and package it together as best strategies. As new principal at the time, that is what our district was following and *that* is what I was indoctrinated into. Even until this day, we are still very entrenched with Marzano though LSI. Though the names of the processes that we are doing may have changed, we are still doing Webb's Depth of Knowledge and still have other pedagogies that we are still following. The wording might be a slightly different, but the different classifications are generally the same types of tasks that they were under the other organization's title. I just feel that the training I had, as a new principal, under LFS, set me up to be a successful change-agent.

NL: Discuss strategic initiatives or methods you implemented in order to lead systematic organizational change.

"Principal C": The first strategic initiative was to ensure that the school was fully staffed. That sounds like a no-brainer, but you cannot make a systemic change if you are not fully staffed with qualified individuals. Secondly, having a strong understanding of your data analysis and knowing what your data is telling you, what areas need to be targeted, which areas need refinement and which areas are you doing well in. The third point in our strategic initiative was being able to walk the talk. I, alongside other professionals, would spend multiple weekends together putting together our own curricular products. Having with a Master's degree in Program Evaluation with an emphasis in Statistical Analysis, I feel very comfortable creating excellent benchmark tests, excellent curriculum based off a subset of standards, in this case which are the Florida Standards, and before that it was for the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. Being able to have a command of that and being able to curtail what instructional opportunities your school was going to be able to provide the students came from the top-down. I was able to model to my teachers how to use best practices to create materials if the basal doesn't fully meet the standard and how you, as an individual, are empowered to work to that level of depth. Another initiative that came after my first year of turning the school around is that the school cannot resemble a penitentiary. There still had to be balances that make school, in the memory of the parents and the grandparents, the things that they would keep in their keepsake box for their grand children's children. Many times, it is not that they performed well on this benchmark test; but that it was this "making memories type item" that nowadays may be considered "foo-foo",

those were the things they were able to keep in the keepsake box. We had devised our master schedule so tightly, we could repurpose 45 minutes a month to do what we called making memories. We would do a theme, and based on that theme, there would be a written connection. With each connection, there would be bright vivid colors of an illustration, and in that month, those "memories" would be adhered to the walls. As one would walk the campus, one was not mistaken and knew they were in a very creative elementary school. When the next month would cycle by, what was on the wall would be replaced with new "making memories". Therefore, the parents would be sent home the prior month's "making memory" work, which *in that time* became their keepsake. The importance is not to get lost and focused so much on turning the school around, but also remembering the entire culture of the school and some of those culture-building opportunities may not be necessarily academic-based, but they are just as important.

NL: Describe strategic actions taken by the key people who then assisted you in leading the organizational change.

"Principal C": First and *foremost* my one reading coach. She is a legend in this area and I was very fortunate to have her join my staff. She also accepted a leadership position at my school. Hands-down, there isn't a single language arts decision that is made without her being involved with it. Knowing that the people you hired are experts in their field and giving them the utmost respect by including them in those decision-making levels, even if it's a minor change, really gives them that empowerment that keeps everyone instep and together in order to make structural changes. I have been very fortunate to have very strong assistant principals, that I have worked with, who have understood that this is a collaborative effort in order to raise the entire organization. They understood that it is about the word team and knew there is no "I" in team. In order for everyone to shine, we have to shine together as a team and they understand that mindset.

NL: Tell me about strategic reforms that you incorporated, speaking to each one separately, to cultivate your students, the staff, the parents, and the community while you led the change.

"Principal C": As far as to cultivate change for the students, we really took grasp of the district's CHAMPS program. We also, based on our size, were also awarded a dean of students. I also used Title I money to fund a position for a behavior interventionist. For us, being as large as we are, it was very important for us that everyone had the same expectations. Expectations included movement through the hallways, going to the lunchroom, what are the expectations in the departmentalized classrooms. We have a very outlined, strategic format that we use at the beginning of the year. A letter is sent home explaining to every single parent and student what the expectations for the classroom is, what the mode of communication will be, what our PBIS system of points and tracking and student behavior rewards looks like, and how we do restorative practices. All of that is encompassed with our students through (what we call) character building assemblies, which we have four every year. We also incorporate it after every major holiday. We make sure everyone is on pace with the expectations. In regards to our staff, not only with the

CHAMPS, but also with the expectations through collaborative planning, we are always looking at refinement. If you are a 4th grade math teacher and you are a 4th grade math teacher, we all have the same pacing guide. So what is that lesson delivery going to look like in those classrooms? Being a large school, I may have a team of 12 in the fourth grade, so what is a team of 12 going to look like to make sure that there are no gaps leading into the next grade level? We have been very methodical on how we to do our collaborative planning with our staff. With our parents, we have been very vocal with ensuring our instructional staff mirrors our parent population. I am almost two-thirds Hispanic-bilingual in my student population and parent population. Now, I am finally to the point where I am about two-thirds Hispanic –bilingual in my instructional population as well. I really feel that meeting the cultural and linguistic needs of our population of students and parents is one of the reasons why we have been able to maintain our level of success.

NL: Have you to do anything to cultivate in your community to get behind you or have they always been there?

"Principal C": I will say that one of my assistant principals is very in tune with reaching out into the local community and through his efforts for the last couple of years, we have been able to garner some very strong community support as far as local businesses, local retirement communities, and things even from a non-business prospective. We have quite a bit of support from the community for our particular school. It can be anything from making sure we have school supplies at the beginning of the year, to running a competition for water conservation, to identifying if we have children who go hungry over the weekends and if they need packages of food to take home for the weekends. We are very fortunate to have business support for our school.

NL: Thank you very much I appreciate your time. Could you tell me how many years you've been in leadership roles total?

"Principal C": My first leadership role was running standardized testing process. That was in 2000, so it has been almost 20 years that I've been in leadership roles outside of the classroom.

NL: Thank you very much.

Appendix I

Interview Protocol: Responses of traditional public school principals' experiences related to leading organizational change resulting in two academic rating increases within a three-year period.

Interview #4

Interviewee: "Principal D"

Interviewer: Nikeshia Leatherwood (NL)

Time of Interview: 7:47 a.m. to 8:01 a.m.

Date of Interview: May 22, 2019

Place: Elementary School C

NL: Describe the organization you lead.

"Principal D": I currently lead an elementary school, which serves about 700 students from Pre-K-5th grade. The school has a long history of being a failing school, dating all the way back to the 2008-09 school year. The school would be a D or F for the last 10 years. It is a Title 1 school. 100% of the kids are on free or reduced lunch and when I arrived, the school also had a huge turn over in staff. About 80% of our teachers are brand new to teaching or new to the school.

NL: When did you take over at the school?

"Principal D": August of 2017.

NL: How many staff members do you supervise?

"Principal D": Currently almost 100.

NL: Who is on your leadership team?

"Principal D": Things have changed a little bit this year, but when I started last year, I had actually had a reading coach, math coach, reading interventionist, two behavior interventionists, an assistant principal, an ESE facilitator, a guidance counselor, and my network manager also made up my leadership team.

NL: What roles do they assume beyond their title?

"Principal D": They serve as grade-level liaisons, so they aren't necessarily the team leader because I have team leaders for the grades, but they are liaisons. What that has done for me, *and for them*, is that it's given the team an opportunity to have one direct person. I meet with them every Friday. I do not care what is going, on Friday mornings, we meet as a team and that particular person brings to the table pretty much any trends or anything that may be going on within that grade level. You're also serving as an extra hand of support. What I have found with my leadership team members is that they have truly taken on those teams personally. They send them notes of encouragement, they are front-end with them, they are in their classrooms and they know their kids. That *has really* been a plus.

NL: What professional experiences contributed to your successful organizational leadership efforts?

"Principal D": You know it is really hard to pinpoint one. I think that it is kind of a combination because- "Yes, we need to have the knowledge base, we need to know best practices, and we need to know those strategies and movement. You need to know those things, but I think, *for me*, what has helped, is all of the professional development that leads towards building relationships. You know we hear that *buzz* word all the time, but what I truly found is, is that "that piece"- "school climate" is critical. I have been studying and getting my second Master's degree in organizational leadership, and one of the big pushes was the whole school climate and changing *the feel* of your school. I would say *for me,* is professional development towards that end. Now, I need to hone in more on the academics, but this is where you have to pull your coaches and you get those people in and you recognize that you cannot do it all. You must trust the people you know to do some of it for you.

NL: What leadership trainings have you received relating to successful organizational change?

"Principal D": Outside of what the district provides, I have extended and gone out and received my Master's degree and doing things *personally* have helped me. Outside of what the district has offered us, I have studied the 7 Habits of Great Leadership. I have read that book a couple times and I am actually going to see Principal Kafele this summer at his conference in Orlando. I've done some of those type things and I read a lot (smiles).

NL: Discuss strategic initiatives or methods you implemented in order to lead systematic organizational change.

"Principal D": Structure and accountability; *structure and accountability; structure and accountability*. Every single person understood and needed to understand what they were responsible for. I had to set a plan, as it relates to expectations, and I held true for that particular plan the entire time. I think that that has been huge for this school and for this *type* of school. The idea was I walked in with the understanding that there wasn't any structure and that was all the way down to the children. Everyone needed to know what their role was, Nobody had sat down with children to say "what you can do and what you can't do" as it relates to anything. The same

thing was true with teachers and everyone else. I think that a lot of the initiatives I have done were centered on building those relationship and I did it really well this year. We actually retained 80% of my staff this year; actually maybe even 85% will come back. I partnered teachers that had positive attitudes and actually hung in there with me, with new teachers. Every month they had to send me something that showed that there was some type of interaction of what they actually did together. That was kind of one of the other things that I think was *really* instrumental in us holding on to people.

NL: Describe strategic actions that taken by the key people who then assisted you in leading the organizational change.

"Principal D": My assistant principal. We have the Mindful School Grant and my assistant principal puts forth a lot of effort with the positive behavior initiatives, going to those trainings, bringing in that leadership team. We have the unique opportunity of having *two*-behavior interventionist on our campus, which is huge. Having all of them come together, I think has been unbelievable, as it relates to the behavior piece. And *just* understanding children…my guidance counselor has had to step outside of her box as well in that movement of MTSS processes and not just putting kids in a corner and letting them fail. Being held accountable for knowing what you're doing and what you're doing for the teachers to help them move forward. She has done an unbelievable job this year in that whole process with teachers as well.

NL: Tell me about strategic reforms that you incorporated, speaking to each one separately, to cultivate your students, the staff, the parents, and the community while you led the change.

"Principal D" I think that the strategic reforms, *again* as it relates to the students was, *more than anything,* recognizing the ones that were doing a good job. For lack of a better word, good, and putting our focus on *those* children. I am a firm believer that anything you focus *on,* you are going to get more *of.* I tell my staff that all of the time. It went from every 9 weeks, and that was as often as those kids would be recognized for good behavior, to weekly. This gave them an opportunity to be recognized. On the weekly show in the mornings, no one was praising the students for academics. No one was recognizing the kids. I would actually go on the Friday morning show and make a big deal based on their accomplishments. The teachers would have "gold ticket drawings." I called out kids' names, we made a big deal, I had assemblies with children every 9 weeks, and we just talked. I said what our expectations were and I was very visible too! It is very funny, but one of the things when I noticed when I arrived here, was that the restrooms were locked because of kids hurting each other in the restrooms or just doing crazy things. I unlocked the restrooms and teachers thought that was crazy. I just *sat* and it took me probably two or three times to get whoever I needed to get out of restrooms. Now, I no longer have issues with the restrooms and I do not lock restrooms anymore. As it relates to staff, I think again staff need to know as a leader that you're going to be up front. They need to know what your expectations are, what your game plan is, and you don't change it. I *mean*, you have to be strategic in that. I had a lot of heart to heart conversations, and I still do, with staff members as it

relates to here's what our expectations are. If you don't think that this is the greatest school in the county, you need to find another school. I don't send other people to speak to staff, I do that myself. I think that with parents, it's been a little bit harder, but I've got them on board. Something as simple as answering their phone calls, believe it or not, has helped a lot and changed the culture. They truly believe that I care because there would be nights where I stayed until 9:00 o'clock at night just calling parents back. *They did not like this or they did not like that*. Just talking to them and doing what I told them I was going to do, and in doing that… I won them over, in terms of nothing else, even if they don't like my style and what I had to say, I've won them over and that *they do know* that I'm going to be *consistent* and I've got the best interests of their child at heart and so I've seen that change. I was recently recognized, just last week, with the "She Knows Where She's Going Award" for my community efforts and it relates to our school. The community truly embraced the school last year so much so that I went to different organizations within the community and talked about my struggles, talked about this school. We were just up front and personal. I received $15,000 anonymous donation and the only stipulation was at that the principal could use it at her discretion. With that said, the community bought into our school and a lot of them are *now* in our schools. A lot of them are on my SAC committee and they were the ones who pushing toward the charter reform in the city, but no more. They actually have a hands-on approach. They come in weekly from the Rotary Club and stand out at car riders with my SAC team and PTO team and that has been really amazing too, because they have seen the struggle from the inside and that has helped us a lot. I have made myself very open to the community and I think that that has been huge.

NL: Thank you so much for your time.

Appendix J

Interview Protocol: Responses of traditional public school principals' experiences related to leading organizational change resulting in two academic rating increases within a three-year period.

Interview #5

Interviewee: "Principal E"

Interviewer: Nikeshia Leatherwood (NL)

Time of Interview: 8:43 a.m. to 9:02 a.m.

Date of Interview: May 22, 2019

Place: Elementary School D

NL: Describe the organization you lead.

"Principal E": This is an elementary school, Pre-K-5th grade. We have approximately 50 to 55 paraprofessionals, teachers, itinerant and those who helped serve on this school campus. Our leadership team consists of our school coaches, our assistant principal, principal, guidance counselor, ESE representation, library/media services, and sometimes we pull in the nurse for the medical side. We have a lot of issues there.

NL: Describe your school.

"Principal E": It is a traditional/community school. It's Pre-K through 5th grade and of course it's Title 1 with 100% free or reduced lunch. About 60% Hispanic, within the 60%, about 40% of those students are in ESOL. We tend to be getting more ESE student who coming in or are being identified. We have gone from one self-contained unit to two self-contained units. This may not seem like a lot for a bigger school, but for a small school, it just seems like we are getting more and more students with ESE services or that are being placed in ESE services. That seems to be the trend right now, which is alarming and a challenge for me. With our makeup, we have some hurdles. 1.) Low income. 2.) A language barrier. 3.) Our ESE students are rising in numbers.

NL: What professional experiences contributed to your successful organizational leadership efforts?

"Principal E": I would say— spending a significant amount of my career as a teacher. I think part of the problem, and this is just me personally, sometimes I think when we want to lead an organization, (and it doesn't just have to be education— it can be anything, it could be a hospital, it could be a law firm), but if you don't spend the time actually down and doing the dirty work,

then how are you going to lead the teachers? If you've never been down there, if you've never taught kindergarten, first grade, or second grade? For example, I was in ESE for 3 years, then I was an assistant principle for 3 years, and now I'm a principal. You don't know the first thing about a regular education class and now you're the *leader*? I struggle with that personally. Now some people can lead it with no problem and be an effective school and can be an A or a B school, but for a school such as mine, if you don't have the background knowledge on how to help those students and help the teachers help the students, then I personally feel the whole system will struggle. We need to identify those areas in need so we can come up with a plan to attack those areas in need.

NL: What leadership trainings have you received relating to successful organizational change?

"Principal E": This is a struggle for me because this County has a lot of different trainings. As far as changing, maybe one that I took going through the principal training program (on culture). That's the one that stuck with me the most. I think that is where you have to start. You must start with changing your culture because if you have a toxic culture, then everything else will fail. Even with the brightest students, if you have a toxic school, then it's just going to bleed out to everyone. As far as change, I would have to say that one course. As far as the excellent courses the County provides, yes, there are many excellent courses out there as far as blanket courses. My school is different from the school down the street. My school is different from your school. My students' needs are different from your students' needs. For one particular course or even five courses to meet the needs of all of our schools at the same level, it's not. In my idea of change, it's not.

NL: Discuss strategic initiatives or methods you implemented in order to lead systematic organizational change.

"Principal E": We started with the culture and the buy-in. My first rule was "know thy staff." I can have my way of thinking and I come into the school and I can try to force that upon a staff, but it usually doesn't work. They may conform, but you don't get that "buy-in." To me, the first step was to change the culture, get to know the staff, and know the needs of the staff, get their buy-in on what the school needed. We started there. Then we moved to the students in trying to change their culture with PBS and what they needed, because again, what might excite my students might not the kids down the street. You've got different kinds of schools, so a higher level school, I'll just say one in town, that is more of an academy, and I have experience at that school, what we did there *worked*. If we try to take that exact same program and plan it here, it wouldn't *work*. My students here are driven with different means than students at other schools. 1.) Change your culture. 2.) Know thy staff. 3.) Know thy students. 4.) Is diving into the curriculum. The whole time we were teaching the curriculum, but then you get to the point in "how we can manipulate the curriculum to the needs of your students?" Again, every school is different. With all of our hurdles, we decided to start with math. Math is easier for language learners because it is just numbers so they seem to grasp that quicker. Then, we pulled back and

thought, "Where should we start and we decided on starting with place value and we noticed that area was low all the way through." We spent two years doing place value with a company, really hitting it hard and our scores jumped, and they *jumped* again. They continued to jump and we are expecting them to jump again, so that really helped build confidence in our teachers and then the letter grade started going up and scores started going up. Attacking the lower kids and getting those learning gains and realizing the potential, even though they are not proficient, we can still use those learning gains to help us get where we need to go. Then we attacked science next. Some people would say, "It's just one grade level, it's just one tiny piece." But if you raise your science, it will help balance out your lowest area, which for us is reading because of our language deficit in the struggle with our ESE students." Look at the big picture to determine where can you make the best gains. We're now at a point where we are looking at reading. How are we going to attack this? What do our students need? We are following the curriculum and I can honestly say we are not seeing the growth that we need; it is not fitting *this* school. We will teach the whole curriculum and we will always teach the whole curriculum, but perhaps we need to move the order around maybe we need to spend more time on foundational skills before we start hammering comprehension when they can't read it. It's a step by step process, like an onion, we just keep peeling back the layers to see what we can do next to help us grow.

NL: Describe strategic actions taken by the key people who then assisted you in leading the organizational change.

"Principal E": The science coach— instrumental. She's also the math coach. We used to have a science teacher, and they took that away from me and I think that's at most schools. Most schools have a reading coach; you have a math/science coach so she has had a double load that is very heavy, but so important to have those coaching positions. The AP has done a phenomenal job of the PBS, and helping with that culture— as far as discipline and ESOL. She has taken on the ESOL to really make sure that we're serving those students the way that we should and sometimes it's hard when you have students that don't speak any language and there is that communication gap. My bosses, throughout my time here, district personnel, to make sure when I have a need, that it's met. Especially technology, that it's been a huge thing here. When I first came here, it was old, ancient technology. It was on its last leg. We were putting memory in just hoping it would start. Getting Title I funds, receiving district funds to help with the technology, bringing in the training, again district people helping us —the PD Department. Having the community buy-in and step in and try to help us out. We had a lovely group that does grants each year and we received a check for over $5000 for individual teachers to make sure they have what they need in their classroom. We know that dollar doesn't go far anymore.

NL: Tell me about strategic reforms that you incorporated, speaking to each one separately, to cultivate your students, the staff, the parents, and the community while you led the change.

"Principal E": To cultivate the students, we brought in a mentor from Polk State College, Mr. A., and he has different associates that come. That has helped mentor children about preparing

for middle school. We've really tried to target 4th and 5th grade for that. We brought in community *readers*, so we have volunteer people that go in they go into every classroom K through 3 and they get the children excited about reading. It's not just drill and kill textbooks, it's my reader is going to bring this story to life and just making sure that *love* of reading is not lost. When we went to school back in my age, teachers used to read aloud and I don't see as much of that happening nowadays, so we incorporated the community with that, but that was really to help with the students. I think being *consistent* is key as well. With the students, they need to know what will happen and what to expect as soon as they arrive on our campus and that should never waver. What we expect today, will be the same thing as tomorrow is the same thing as it was yesterday. I think that is key as well and setting high standards for our students. We've also this year incorporated the Fellowship of Christian athletes for our 3rd graders. Next year it will roll up to where those 3rd graders who will be 4th graders and we will start again with 3rd and again each year will add another one and will try to target 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade. Again, bringing in the community to support our students. We've incorporated many after school programs, which weren't here at the time when I first started. That's really impacted homework and after-school care. That has really impacted the students. Supplying food, giving out Smile Packs every week, supplying school supplies, clothing, backpacks, counseling, whatever the need— we've done our very best to fill the need through community, through donations, through churches, whatever we could to fill the need there. Staff, supporting the staff at every endeavor and trying to take the load off. Doing their duty and letting them go. We'll run their copies. I have a box outside my door. I tell them to just drop the copies there, and I'll run them later. One less thing that they must do, and that means the world to them. Just supporting them by being down in the trenches with them and I always tell them I will never ask you to do anything I am not willing to do myself. After a program, I'm stacking chairs and sweeping the floor. They see me take out the garbage. We are all in it together, so they appreciate that. Parents, this was kind of hard when I first got here. A couple of principals before me really did not want parents involved. They would not allow them on campus, not eating breakfast, not coming in for lunch, they just didn't want them involved. That was hard to get past because a lot of parents still associated that culture at this school. Also, the language barrier— so it's really important that we always have somebody that's bilingual in many different areas of the campus so those parents feel comfortable to come in in express their concerns. Having programs, again offering support, even opening up the school saying, "We will help you and your child apply for middle school for those 5th grade students. They just think in their head, I'll have to pay tuition or I'll have to provide transportation." They just don't know of all the options that are out there, so we're trying to open those doors as well. The community has been a little more difficult. When you look at my school zone, it is not really right here. It's also another area in town that we're completely separated. A lot of schools that you see have the school in the center and here's your area. Mine is skewed, it's very odd. That presents a problem with the community when we're asking for community support but we're *here* and we're asking in a different area for that support. They do not always associate us with that particular community. Our parents tend to work very hard. They have 1, 2,

or 3 jobs, so getting parents involved on SAC or PTO has been a huge challenge. I reached out to the community and that's where they filled the void. I have an incoming parent of a child, that's going in the 5th grade, that will come on my SAC and PTO. They pretty much do double duty. That will probably be one of very few parents that I'll be able to pull in. The rest are community-based or school-based with SAC. They just don't have the time, they don't have the transportation, they really don't feel they are qualified, which isn't true, but they don't feel that they are qualified to have any decision making when it comes to the school, or they just don't want to. They say, "That's your job, you do what's best for the school." I'm blessed in the sense that I have enough to form a SAC committee and a PTO, but they're mostly community based.

NL: Thank you for your time.

Invitation to Validate Accuracy of Transcripts

Principal A

Leatherwood, Nikeshia
Transcribed Interview for Validation

Mr. ___ pdf
233 KB

Hello Mr. ___

Once again, thank you for allowing me to interview you as part of my dissertation research. As stated in the consent agreement, I am providing you a transcript of our interview for your validation. If you disagree with any of the contents, please let me know. If the you agree with the accuracy of the contents, you can reply letting me know as well. To protect your privacy, I refer to you as "Principal A" and your school as "High School X". Again, thank you for your time and the nuggets of wisdom shared. I'm grateful for your leadership, your mentorship, and humbled to call myself a colleague.

Respectfully,
Nikeshia Leatherwood

Principal B

Leatherwood, Nikeshia
Transcribed Interview for Validation

Mrs. ___ pdf
227 KB

Hello Mrs. ___,

Once again, thank you for allowing me to interview you as part of my dissertation research. As stated in the consent agreement, I am providing you a transcript of our interview for your validation. If you disagree with any of the contents, please let me know. If the you agree with the accuracy of the contents, you can reply letting me know as well. To protect your privacy, I refer to you as "Principal B" and your school as "Elementary School A". Again, thank you for your time and the nuggets of wisdom shared. I'm grateful for your leadership, your mentorship, and humbled to call myself a colleague.

Respectfully,
Nikeshia Leatherwood

Principal C

Leatherwood, Nikeshia
Transcript for Validation

Mrs. ___ pdf
133 KB

Hello Mrs. ___

Once again, thank you for allowing me to interview you as part of my dissertation research. As stated in the consent agreement, I am providing you a transcript of our interview for your validation. If you disagree with any of the contents, please let me know. If the you agree with the accuracy of the contents, you can reply letting me know as well. To protect your privacy, I refer to you as "Principal C" and your school as "Elementary School B". Again, thank you for your time and the nuggets of wisdom shared. I'm grateful for your leadership, your mentorship, and humbled to call myself a colleague.

Respectfully,
Nikeshia Leatherwood

Principal D

Leatherwood, Nikeshia   ▢ ███████████

Transcript for Validation

📎 1

📄 Ms. ████pdf
213 KB

Hello Ms. ████

Once again, thank you for allowing me to interview you as part of my dissertation research. As stated in the consent agreement, I am providing you a transcript of our interview for your validation. If you disagree with any of the contents, please let me know. If the you agree with the accuracy of the contents, you can reply letting me know as well. To protect your privacy, I refer to you as "Principal D" and your school as "Elementary School C". Again, thank you for your time and the nuggets of wisdom shared. I'm grateful for your leadership, your mentorship, and humbled to call myself a colleague.

Respectfully,
Nikeshia Leatherwood

Principal E

Leatherwood, Nikeshia   ▢ ███████████

Transcript for Validation

📎 1

📄 Mrs. ███████pdf
155 KB

Hello Mrs. ████

Once again, thank you for allowing me to interview you as part of my dissertation research. As stated in the consent agreement, I am providing you a transcript of our interview for your validation. If you disagree with any of the contents, please let me know. If the you agree with the accuracy of the contents, you can reply letting me know as well. To protect your privacy, I refer to you as "Principal E" and your school as "Elementary School D". Again, thank you for your time and the nuggets of wisdom shared. I'm grateful for your leadership, your mentorship, and humbled to call myself a colleague.

Respectfully,
Nikeshia Leatherwood