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PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR IMPACT ON SCHOOL REFORM IN  
SOUTH GEORGIA

by

LISA B. LINTON

(Under the Direction of Teri Denlea Melton)

ABSTRACT

The nationwide focus on student achievement and school accountability has resulted in an effort at the federal and state levels to identify and turn around the nation's lowest-performing schools. States and districts are desperately searching for solutions for failing schools. As a result, they are focusing on Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) models to generate changes in student achievement. Due to their ability to improve student achievement over time, these models are often chosen as a solution.

A review of the literature indicated that the involvement of the principals who are responsible for the implementation of the CSR model have not always been a focus. Therefore, this phenomenological study was designed to gain the perception of principals who lead a CSR because of this nationwide focus. Using individual interviews with South Georgia high school principals of low-performing schools who are implementing a CSR, this study explored what these principals perceive as their impact on CSR and how they are supporting their teachers in implementing school reform. In addition, leadership practices, strategies, and professional development opportunities were identified. This phenomenological inquiry revealed the thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of the high school principals involved with a CSR in South Georgia.

INDEX WORDS: School Reform, Comprehensive School Reform, Perceptions,  
Principals' leadership, Principals' training, Professional Development, Leadership  
practices

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SOUTH GEORGIA

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Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Electronic Version Approved:  
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## DEDICATION

*Giving all the glory, honor and praise to my God. For God will provide!*

It is with immeasurable love and gratitude that I dedicate this dissertation to my family, who have sacrificed the utmost for me to complete this academic journey. First and foremost, I would like to express my genuine appreciation and heartfelt gratitude to each of my family members for their unwavering support of me throughout this extremely long process. Each one of you have played a major role, both emotionally and physically for helping me complete this dissertation.

To my parents, Herman and Ruth Blyler, even though you are not here to physically participant in this accomplishment, I want to say thank you. Thank you for instilling in me a strong work ethic and ambitious nature that carried me through this process. Mama, thank you for loving on me and showing me what is a loving mother. Thank you for showing me how to love God, love my husband, love my children and love my family. Daddy, thanks for loving on me and showing me what is a loving father. Thanks for protecting me when I did not know I needed protection, thanks for giving to me when I did not have to ask, thanks for driving from Savannah to Atlanta in the middle of the night to be my mechanic when my car was broken down in the Kroger parking lot. Mama and daddy, without your loving support, I would not have been able to see this dream through.

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*The race is not given to the swift, nor to the strong, but to those who endure.*

*Ecclesiastes 9:11.*

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

During the Lyndon B. Johnson presidential administration, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 became a federal law. It was designed to provide funds to primary and secondary education schools for professional development, instructional materials, and resources to support supplementary educational programs in an effort to improve education for disadvantaged students. At the time, ESEA was meant to close the achievement gap in reading, writing, and mathematics between children from low-income households who attend urban or rural school systems and children from the middle-class who attend suburban school systems (Farkas & Hall, 2000). Initially ESEA was authorized through 1970; however, this act has been reauthorized by the United States government several times. The following will outline the historical development of Comprehensive School Reform (CSR).

In an effort to accomplish the same fundamental goal—to improve students' academic achievement, ESEA was reauthorized in 2002, under the leadership of President George W. Bush and the United States Department of Education. This act became known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB was designed to ensure that all students, despite socio-economic status, become proficient academically by the spring of 2014. Despite having the same fundamental goals of the ESEA reauthorization, NCLB placed more accountability on educators (Robelen, 2005). Since the launch of NCLB, schools and districts have experienced increased accountability for student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

As NCLB required that every student achieve a proficient level by 2014, an ever-increasing number of schools and districts were being designated as *needing school improvement* (LeFloch, Taylor, & Thomsen, 2005), which is a consequence of not making adequate yearly progress (AYP). There are a growing number of schools that are being classified as needs improvement. As many as 10,676 schools nationwide were categorized as needing improvement, and 2,302 were designated as needing restructuring (Herman et al., 2008). Many schools are frantic for assistance in increasing student achievement, closing the achievement gap, and keeping the school from being classified as needing improvement. As more schools obtain a *needs improvement* classification and the status of those schools that are already in improvement continues to increase, states and school districts are required to provide assistance to turn the failing schools around (NCLB, 2002).

Once schools or districts had been listed on the school improvement list for three or more years, the State Education Agency (SEA) and districts are obligated to provide corrective actions that are designed to help schools improve student achievement and remove themselves from the school improvement list (NCLB, 2002). These actions could begin with providing resources such as Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) models to individual schools. The CSR program was developed to help low-performing schools overcome some of the most common obstacles to effective school reform (SEDL, 2011). If the CSR model or other interventions did not produce results for these struggling schools, the state could replace the administration and remove faculty members as a last effort to correct the educational system and increase student achievement (Arsen, Bell, & Plank, 2003; Le Floch et al., 2005; No Child Left Behind,

2002). As more and more school districts struggled to meet adequate progress, governors along with members of Congress pushed for either radically revising or repealing NCLB (CEP, 2007).

At the beginning of 2016, NCLB, was reauthorized by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In the intervening years, President Barack Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced on July 24, 2009, the Race to the Top initiative (RT3). Race to the Top seeks to fund innovations and reform movements in K-12 education at the state and local district levels. A major provision in this initiative allows states the opportunity to seek a waiver from NCLB compliance provided that the state can demonstrate an attainable plan that will address the achievement gap through accountability and high standards (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). In this plan, states submit an application that would waive them from the requirement that 100% of all students be proficient in language arts and mathematics by 2014. However, one major provision of this waiver is that states must identify 15% of schools that are struggling the most to help students achieve and show learning growth (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). There were several states that seized this opportunity to waive compliance of NCLB. One of these states to seek a waiver from the federal government was the state of Georgia.

Schools and school systems that do not measure up to standards will face serious consequences from external agencies such as state departments of education. During the past decade in the United States, countless elementary, middle, and high schools have implemented a reform initiative issued by district and/or state educational leaders in over twenty states, most notably in California, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, New York, and Texas. Exact numbers vary depending upon the definition used to describe the

reform. Nationwide, 32 states have sanctions in place for low-performing schools while 19 states possess the authority to implement more comprehensive reforms such as reconstitution (Ziebarth, 2001).

The idea of school reform lends itself to various interpretation by different schools, school districts, and government entities. Reforms have been implemented under the alias of restructuring, takeovers, reconstitution, and redesign, among others (U. S. Department of Education, 1998). Consistent with the varying definition of reforms, there are also a variety of methods by which schools have been reformed and by whom. In Chicago, local school councils comprised of parents, educators, and community leaders were created for each school and given the authority to hire and fire principals (Sebring & Bryk, 2000; Smiley, Crowson, Chou, & Levin, 1994). Chicago also adopted the use of specially designed school improvement teams as “last-ditch” attempts to turn around failing schools prior to absolute takeover (Stunard, 1997).

In the Fall of 2009, as part of The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act 2009, the Obama administration promoted a competition among states to bid for over \$4 billion of federal grants. The educational grants were awarded under the “Race to the Top” (RT3) initiative. This initiative was intended to support new approaches to school improvement. The funds were made available in the form of competitive grants to encourage and reward states that were creating conditions for educational innovation and reform, specifically implementing comprehensive plans in four key education reform areas:

1. Recruiting, preparing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially in districts and schools where they are needed most.



2. Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy.
3. Building data systems that measure student growth and success and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction.
4. Turning around the lowest-achieving schools.

Georgia was one of 10 states initially granted a waiver from the federal No Child Left Behind Act in February 2012. Under this grant, Georgia was awarded \$400 million to implement its Race to the Top plan. Georgia's application was prepared through a partnership involving the Governor's Office, the Georgia Department of Education, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, and education stakeholders. The State Board of Education has direct accountability for the grant. Georgia partnered with 26 school systems around the state. Half of the awarded funds remained at the state level and half were directed to partnering with local education authorities (LEA) school districts. LEA's distributed these funds via their Title I formula. All funds were used to implement Georgia's Race to the Top (RT3) plan. In addition, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by each district superintendent and board chair. These districts, which make up 40% of public school students, 46% of Georgia's students in poverty, 53% of Georgia's African American students, 48% of Hispanics, and 68% of the state's lowest achieving school districts, are Atlanta, Ben Hill, Bibb, Burke, Carrollton, Cherokee, Clayton, Dade, DeKalb, Dougherty, Gainesville, Gwinnett, Hall, Henry, Meriwether, Muscogee, Peach, Pulaski, Rabun, Richmond, Rockdale, Savannah-Chatham, Spalding, Treutlen, Valdosta, and White.

While Georgia is committed to supporting all teachers, leaders, and districts in implementing these reforms, it has a particular concern with persistently low-performing

schools. Historically, across the nation, efforts focused on turning around the lowest performing schools have not been successful. An evaluation of the school improvement plans implemented in the late 1990s and wrapped into No Child Left Behind (NCLB) found that states and districts receiving federal dollars to turn around their lowest performing schools were successful in directing those dollars to the appropriate schools. However, according to the U.S. Department of Education, schools receiving the funding made little progress in implementing the mandated components. In fact, the identified turnaround schools were less likely to implement the various required elements than were comparison schools not receiving federal assistance (Orlando, Hoffman, & Vaughn, 2010).

In its reform efforts and its RT3 application, Georgia laid out a systematic plan of implementation and support for the lowest performing schools. First, Georgia proposed to implement a statewide longitudinal data system that would support educator use of data to improve instruction, among other facets. Second, the state proposed a series of targeted programmatic activities that had a proven track record of improving low-achieving schools. Collectively, these efforts sought to not only turn around Georgia's persistently low-performing schools but also support all schools and their districts in ensuring effective teachers and leaders were contributing to positive outcomes for students (Rickman, 2014).

As previously stated, former work to turn around low-performing schools was generally unsuccessful. Therefore, in an effort to address some of these shortcomings, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act transformed the federal supported School Improvement Grant (SIG) in 2009. As part of the SIG effort, each participating school

received up to \$2 million per year for three years to participate in rigorous, comprehensive interventions. One requirement of the SIG program was the mandate that SIG-funded schools choose one of four prescribed comprehensive intervention models: turnaround, transformation, restart, or closure (Trujillo, & Renee, 2012).

In 2010, under Georgia's RT3 plan, Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) identified persistently low-achieving schools. Each school adopted one of four reform models—turnaround, restart, school closure, or transformation—and developed aggressive reform plans that aimed for drastic improvement in student performance within three years. Thirty-six schools chose the transformation model. Twenty-six of these schools received federal School Improvement Grants (SIG), while the other 10 schools used district Race to the Top funding to implement the reform model (Rickman, 2014). Half of the schools began implementing the grant during the 2010-11 school year, and the remaining schools implemented the grant the following school year 2011-2012.

Georgia's RT3 application charges the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) with the task of evaluating the implementation and the effectiveness of turnaround efforts in these schools (Rickman, 2014). The Turning Around Lowest-Achieving Schools reform effort is based on a change theory developed by GOSA. This theory states that if a school makes aggressive changes through one of four intervention models, receives concentrated support from the GaDOE and the Local Education Agency (LEA), and implements that model with fidelity, then students in that school will demonstrate improved outcomes. Each reform model calls for schools to make significant changes in a short period of time (Shearer, & Rauschenberg, 2012). However, the school turnaround field is relatively new, so little research-based evidence

exists to explain the criteria of how schools should choose among models, how the models should be implemented, and whether the models are effective.

### **Statement of the Problem**

States and districts are desperately searching for solutions for failing schools. As a result, they are focusing on Comprehensive School Reform models to generate change in student achievement. These models are often chosen as a solution because of their ability to improve student achievement over time. A review of the literature indicated that the involvement of the principal and teachers who are responsible for the implementation of the CSR models has not always been a focus of the literature. This study will provide a voice to the principals concerning their perceptions of implementing the CSR model.

Researchers have emphasized that principals and site leadership are only second to teacher quality amid school-related factors that impact student learning. Similarly, education reform needs leadership, especially at the site level, and the impact of this leadership tends to be greatest in schools where the learning needs of students are most critical. Site leadership is so instrumental in enacting reform that it is vital to study how principals lead this change, and in turn, how principals guide their teachers in the implementation of the school reform. In other words, principals are an essential piece of the reform puzzle therefore, they need to be heard.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to explore the principals' perceptions of their impact on Comprehensive School Reform at low-performing high schools in South Georgia. The nationwide focus on student achievement and school accountability has resulted in an effort at the federal and state levels to identify and turn around the nation's

lowest-performing schools. In Georgia, public schools in year three or more of school improvement are required to implement a state mandated intervention to assist in their school reform efforts. As schools in year three or more have experienced countless interventions with less than desirable outcomes, their faculty and staff may feel skeptical regarding the ability of the intervention to perform as indicated or reach specified outcomes. The guidepost of this study is three-fold; (1) to explore what the principals at low-performing high schools in South Georgia perceive regarding their impact on Comprehensive School Reform (2) to establish what leadership practices, strategies and professional development opportunities they employ; and (3) to analyze how principals are preparing and supporting teachers in implementing school reform.

### **Significance of the Study**

As state and federal mandates requires that every student achieve at a proficient level, more and more schools and districts are being designated as needing improvement, which is a consequence and a public indication that they did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP). Once schools or districts have been in school improvement for three-plus years, the State Education Agency (SEA) and districts are obligated to provide interventions that are targeted toward helping schools improve student achievement and remove them from the school improvement list. If the CSR intervention prescribed for the low-performing school does not produce desirable results, the states' intervention can evolve into a model that requires the removal of the principal and faculty members as a last attempt to correct the educational system and increase student achievement.

As the instructional leader, the principal is ultimately responsible for all aspects of a school's performance. Principals are held accountable for student academic success,

selection and management of competent personnel and faculty, appropriate resource management, and the creation of a safe and productive school climate. It is widely believed that each principal sets the vision and tone of the school building and its occupants. Researchers have emphasized the importance of decision-making in addition to vision, as a key to principal success. Vision is inadequate unless the principal understands how to make decisions that lead to the fulfillment of the vision. The principal is responsible for ensuring that the school environment is conducive to learning and that the highest of academic standards is expected from students, faculty, and staff.

The knowledge discovered through this study of principals' perceptions of their impact on school reform at low-performing high schools in South Georgia will make a contribution to the academic literature on school reform. More importantly, the findings from this study will assist principals, school systems, educational leaders, policy makers, and others interested in understanding the challenges and issues of a mandated CSR at the high school level. It might also serve to help prevent failure in other schools.

### **Research Questions**

The primary concentration of this study is to explore the principals' perceptions of their impact on a Comprehensive School Reform. Therefore, the overarching research question that will guide this study is as follows: What are the principals' perceptions of their impact on comprehensive school reform at low-performing high schools in South Georgia? In addition, the following sub questions will be addressed:

1. What leadership practices, strategies and professional development opportunities do the principals utilize to implement a CSR?
2. How are principals preparing and supporting teachers in implementing a CSR?

## **Procedures**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain principals' perceptions of their impact on CSR at low-performing high schools in South Georgia. This phenomenological study utilized a sample of seven high school principals in failing schools in South Georgia. Data collection was conducted using face to face interviews. After transcription, a narrative using the Consent Comparative Method is presented. The narrative can be found in chapter four.

## **Definition of Terms**

*Adequate yearly progress (AYP)* – AYP is the yearly measure of academic performance for public schools and districts as indicated by state assessments and accepted by the federal government (No Child Left Behind, 2002).

*Comprehensive school reform (CSR)* - CSR is a research-based educational program designed to improve student achievement by focusing on all aspects of a school's operation, instead of piecemeal programs (SEDL, 2011).

*Needs Improvement School* – is a title given to schools that have failed to make adequate yearly progress (No Child Left Behind, 2002).

## **Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions**

The focus of perceptions of high school principals is a limitation because perceptions are not always accurate. The possible relationship between the participants and the researcher is also a limitation. The participants may know the researcher prior to participating in the study, the response may be influenced by the relationship, therefore the provided responses may lack impartiality. The study will rely on the response from the interviews to produce accurate findings. The interviewing method yields data that, by

nature, can be interpreted in many ways. Therefore, the use of triangulation will resolve this limitation.

Though there are other high schools in the country implementing school reform initiatives, this study will only focus on high schools in the South Georgia. The researcher placed this delimitation of only selecting principals who are located in high schools in South Georgia. The schools selected for his research have to be currently implementing a CSR or have completed the reform within the last year. This allows the opportunity to collect current perceptions from the principals.

The primary assumption made by the researcher prior to and throughout the study will be that the principals are forthright and truthful in their descriptions and in their responses about their experiences. The perceptions of the principals might be useful to others encountering similar situations with recovering low-performing schools.

### **Chapter Summary**

According to a variety of state criteria, the most common of which involves student scores on state achievement tests, many U.S. schools have been determined to be low-performing or failing. The public and elected officials are demanding that school officials either turn around these schools considered to be in crisis or be held accountable for unacceptable results. With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, school districts are mandated to develop and implement initiatives meant to not only increase student achievement, but also decrease the continual achievement gap that exists for dis-advantaged students. Effective leadership research suggests that ensuring student learning and shrinking the achievement gap is dependent on the effectiveness of the principal's leadership practices. The decreasing of this gap is the key to achieving high



performing schools. In order to ensure that CSR is implemented with fidelity, it is important to understand the school leader's role.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this study is to explore what principals at low-performing high schools in South Georgia perceive regarding their impact on Comprehensive School Reform and to establish what leadership practices, strategies and professional development opportunities they employ. This study also attempts to analyze how school administrators are preparing and supporting teachers in implementing school reform. Therefore, this chapter includes a review of the literature relevant to the historical perspective of education reform, school accountability; practices and behaviors of principal leadership; and the role of principals in leading professional development.

#### **Historical Perspective**

Title 1 schools are the target schools for restructuring under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The history of Title I can be traced to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Yell & Drasgow, 2005). As part of President Johnson's War on Poverty, the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA) was authorized into law. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 authorized grants for elementary and secondary school programs for children of low income families; school library resources, textbooks, and other instructional materials for school children; supplementary educational centers and services; strengthening of state education agencies; and educational research and research training (ESEA, 1965). Title I, the largest section of the law, directly relates to school children living in poverty. According to Yell and Drasgow (2005), the federal government devised a number of formulas to determine which schools would be considered Title I schools. These

formulas considered the number of students who were eligible to receive free or reduced lunch or the percentage of students who received public assistance.

The educational system experienced a surplus of reform initiative between the 1960s and the 1980s. These initiatives ranged from the mathematics and science focus during the Sputnik era, to the Title I reform program and effective schools' movement and also to the reform model design (Berends, 2004). *A Nation at Risk* (1983) changed the framework of American education (*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* is the title of the 1983 report from President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education). This report, commissioned by the Secretary of Education during the Regan administration, asserted that America's students did not achieve as well as their peers from other countries. The report states that the country is complacent in education; as a result, the education system is responsible for producing mediocre citizens, threatening the country's future as a powerful player on the global level (*A Nation at Risk*, 1983). As a result, *A Nation of Risk* inspired school reforms to focus on excellence and improvements in teaching and teacher education as a means to increase student achievement. This report also sparked the standards-based reform movement which included: a) establishing a vision that promotes challenging academic standards and high expectations, b) aligning policy and practice, c) advocating a strong governance system, d) producing evaluation and accountability measures that provide incentives and sanctions as they relate to student achievement (Berends, 2004). As a result of the 1980s reform movement, high school students took more than the required number of courses and participated in more rigorous courses. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), in 2004, 33% more high school students took

advanced science, 24% more high school students took advanced mathematics, and 20% more high school students took advanced English compared to 1982.

In 1994, the ESEA was reauthorized as the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA). IASA not only allowed the federal government to allocate funding to schools serving economically disadvantaged students, but it also ignited standards-based reform at the state and local levels. The use of performance standards for all students, not just those served by Title I, was included in the reauthorization of Title I legislation as part of the IASA (Schwartz, Yen, & Schaffer, 2001).

President George H. W. Bush and governors across the country agreed upon six national goals for education in 1989, known as the National Education Goals. They concentrated on student and adult literacy by the year 2000. America 2000, legislation calling for six specific education goals, was signed into law. America 2000 was comprised of reform strategies intended to help local schools meet the National Education Goals. The reforms included the use of New American Schools (National Education Goals, 1989). In 1991, in combination with former President Bush's America 2000, the New American School (NAS) was established. It was established by CEOs of large corporations to create a "break the mold" reform model in order to further increase student achievement (Berends, 2004). It used private contributions and business principles to create an idea of what schools should be (Berends, 2004; Martinez & Harvey, 2004). There are several reform models associated with NAS: America's Choice, Accelerated Schools, ATLAS Communities, Co-NECT, ELOB, Leonard Bernstein Center, Modern Red Schoolhouse, Success for All/Roots & Wings, Turning Points, and Urban Learning Centers.

America 2000 gained further completion in President William Clinton's Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which created the National Education Standards and Improvement Council. President Clinton's Goal 2000 was signed into law in 1994. Goals 2000 was the first federal initiative to provide support to implement state and local programs that improved achievement for all students (Goal 2000, 1994). However, the National Education Standards and Improvement Council was weighed down with opposition in Congress because of its authority to approve or reject the academic standards presented by individual states and was eventually abandoned (Yell & Drasgow, 2005).

In 2002, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2002), marking an increase in the role the federal government played in education. When President George W. Bush took office, he announced that NCLB was the number one concern of his administration's domestic agenda. No Child Left Behind reauthorized the ESEA. The most significant change was to mandate that all public school students meet state standards in reading and math by a designated time, consequently closing the achievement gap was based on race, ethnicity, and language (Yell & Drasgow, 2005).

Along with escalated funding (9% of every education dollar), NCLB increased the educational requirement of states, school districts and public schools (Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003). Among these mandates were the requirements for highly qualified teachers in every classroom, the use of research based instruction, the development of assessment tools that would lead to data-driven decision, and the holding of schools accountable for student achievement (Yell & Drasgow, 2005). As a result, all students in

grades three through eleven are tested to determine if Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is made in the areas of reading and math (Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003).

To establish AYP targets, each state outlined a baseline for measuring the percentage of students who met or exceeded state proficiency goals in reading and math; then, they determined how to measure adequate academic achievement (Porter, Linn, & Trimble, 2006). States chose a specific route to move from that baseline toward the 100% proficiency goal, the minimum number of students required for reporting a subgroup, and also decided whether or not confidence intervals would be used when analyzing and reporting test data (Porter, Linn, & Trimble, 2006). Failure for one subgroup to meet the target would result in not making AYP (Olson & Robelen, 2002; Porter, Linn, & Trimble, 2006; Weiner & Hall, 2004). Each state determined what constitutes each year's proficiency target as well as the least number of students required to populate a subgroup in order for it to count toward AYP (Olsen & Robelen, 2002).

Title I schools failing to make the AYP proficiency goal for two consecutive years are acknowledged as needs improvement and must create a school improvement plan. Within this school improvement plan, 10% of Title I funds must be spent on professional development for teachers (Porter, Linn, & Trimble, 2006; Weiner & Hall, 2004). These schools must also inform parents of the schools' status, and as a result, parents may elect to send their children to an alternative, high performing school within the district (GADOE, 2005; Olson & Robelen, 2002).

Schools failing to make proficiency goals for three years, in addition to the year-two consequences, must provide supplemental academic services for students from low income families. Schools failing to make proficiency goals for four years, in addition to

year three consequences, move into corrective action and select specific strategies to improve student achievement. Title I schools that fail to make AYP for five years develop a restructuring plan. In such a case, districts must choose one of the following corrective actions: a) replace teachers, b) implement new curriculum, c) reduce management authority at school site, d) appoint an outside expert, e) extend the school year, or f) restructure the internal organization of the school (GADOE, 2005; Olson & Robelen, 2002).

At year six of failing to meet proficiency goals, schools are required to restructure as part of the restructuring plan. In this arrangement, districts must choose one of the following alternative governance arrangements; a) reopen the schools as a charter school, b) replace all or most of the staff, c) contract with a private management company, d) turn the operation of the school over to the state, or e) any major restructuring arrangement that makes fundamental reform to improve student achievement (GADOE, 2005; Olson & Robelen, 2002). Consequently, restructuring becomes an unwanted consequence.

### **School Reform and Accountability**

This term accountability is frequently used in discussions about education, and it is a term that appears to have various interpretations. An original dictionary definition suggests that being accountable involves being responsible and/or providing explanations (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1996). When applied to educational leadership, it means that leaders must be responsible for all-student learning and use data to inform the successes and/or failures of the instructional process. Accountability simply means that school leaders can no longer be willing to defer to or blame others for school inadequacy

and that they must be willing to do whatever it takes to make sure that all students are academically successful. Schmoker (2001) says it is time to acknowledge an ever-increasing body of evidence that points to the fact that accountability promotes higher achievement. He continues to emphasize that accountability and school improvement are linked because as school leaders take greater responsibility for successes as well as failures, their schools begin to improve.

**Principals Leadership:** With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, K-12 school districts are mandated to develop and implement initiatives meant not only to increase student achievement, but also decrease the persistent achievement gap that exists for students. Research on effective leadership suggests that ensuring student learning and shrinking the achievement gap is predicated on the effectiveness of the principal's leadership practices (Leithwood et al., 2004; Furkas et al., 2003; National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2008).

**Principal Training:** Peterson (2002) and Darling-Hammond (2010) point out that there are not only many pre-service programs that inadequately prepare principals, but also there are frequently in-service training programs provided by districts that inadequately develops principals once they have obtained a site leadership position. Although district induction programs are becoming more wide-spread, few districts offer mentoring for beginning principals to "help them learn how to make sense of this complex job, prioritizing and juggling its many demands and developing skills in managing other adults" (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Many districts continue to spend significant resources on one or two-day workshops instead of emphasizing ongoing support that aligns school activities with best practices (Reeves, 2004).



Professional Development: With the passing of NCLB, the federal government has mandated that states, districts, and schools implement change initiatives to address achievement gaps in student learning (Borman et al., 2003; Hess & Petrilli, 2004; Marzano et al., 2005). After over a decade since NCLB's passage, the level of student academic achievement across the nation has not shown significant improvement (DuFour et al. 2009; Fullan, 2007). Reeves (2010) pointed out that good intentions are insufficient to bring about meaningful change in student achievement and teacher efficacy. Rather, it is important that the principals, in conjunction with their teachers, provide meaningful and focused professional development opportunities that increase teacher effectiveness in lesson design and instructional practice (Smith & Andrews, 1989; Marzano et al. 2005).

The term accountability seems to generate various meanings. A dictionary definition implies that being accountable involves being responsible and/or providing explanations for action (Webster's New World Dictionary, 1996). Newmann, King, and Rigdon (1997) indicate that accountability is clustered across four components: performance results, standards for judging that performance, significant consequences for success or failure in meeting specified standards, and external agents that judge the ability to meet those standards. Gullant and Rutter (2000) define accountability as the decisions that are made and the actions that are taken as a result of the performance shown by the assessment.

Accountability simply means that school leaders can no longer be willing to defer to or blame others for school inadequacy and that they must be willing to do whatever it takes to make sure that all students are academically successful (Schmoker, 2001). Schmoker (2001) declares that it is time to acknowledge an ever-increasing body of

evidence that points to the fact that accountability promotes higher achievement. He adds that accountability and school improvement are linked because as school leaders take greater responsibility for successes as well as failures, their schools begin to improve. Greenlee and Bruner (2001) declare that while many view standardized testing as a monitoring piece for accountability, it can raise organizational and instructional expectations when the assessments require the students to perform at a higher cognitive level. They reveal that when aligned with curriculum goals, "standards and assessments do not have to result in just 'teaching to the test'" (p. 2), rather they can influence the process of teaching and learning. Consequently, the dilemma for school leaders becomes one of balance between accountability and school improvement.

In this era of accountability, Underwood (2001) holds that "the only stable aspect of school as an institution is a persistent, constant, repetitive drumbeat of reform (p. 72). With the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), schools began an ever-evolving process of change and reform. The school reform measures have denoted changes in assessment and accountability strategies, which have led to a clearer articulation of what students need to know and be able to perform. This major emphasis on student learning and student success means that school leaders are obligated to implement better practices and materials, not just apply consequences for failure (Slavin, 2000/2001).

School leaders must use appropriate and available student data to ensure that reform leads to fundamental changes in the instructional materials and practices in classrooms. Fullan (1999a, 1993) suggests that, on the basis of his research and

observations, an elementary school can make progress in school improvement in three years, a high school in six years, and an entire school district in eight years.

While designed to bring universal change, and require state and local officials to make decisions to reinvent the education system, NCLB applied pressure to change what was perceived as a failing education system (Hess & Petrilli, 2004). Over the last twenty years, the creation of standards and heightened accountability has changed the role of the principal considerably (Tirozzi, 2001; Cooley & Shen, 2003; Hallinger, 2005). In the past, principals were regarded as managers of schools whose chief task was to be accountable for personnel as well as budgetary issues (Tirozzi, 2001; Copland, 2001). Currently, principals are responsible for the creation, implementation, and supervision of instructional programs. This instructional leadership includes all activities that affect student learning and achievement (O'Donnell & White, 2005). Hallinger (2005) stated, "Principals again find themselves at the nexus of accountability and school improvement with an increasingly explicit expectation that they will function as 'instructional leaders'" (p. 1).

As accountability increases for educators, principals find themselves challenged with a variety of school reform programs. Cooley and Shen (2003) define this rigorous role when they reveal, "Principals find themselves in the 'eye of the storm' as society conditioned by instant gratification and change expects immediate results from the latest reform efforts" (p. 13). Newspapers and other news outlets publish standardized test scores and rank schools on their effectiveness in increasing student achievement. State Departments of Education publish school and district scores while at the same time issue comparative rankings. Rankings that tend to heighten the pressures on principals and

other school leaders (Copland, 2001; Hallinger, 2005; Tirozzi, 2001). Ediger (2002) theorized that principals' reputations are forever linked with the public report cards of their school's performance.

### **Practices and Behaviors of Principal Leadership**

Traditionally, principals have been held accountable for the effectiveness of schools. Measures of principal effectiveness have included student achievement, commitment to academic goals, creation of high expectations for student achievement, the allocation of resources, and the development of stable learning environments (Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990). The work of principals has expanded during the past decade to include a larger focus on teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decisions making, and accountability.

The work of the principal has evolved from a focus on the managerial issues to a focus on instructional issues, namely increased student achievement. With the demands of accountability, principals must be able to harmonize these two aspects of their work. Although the principal is involved in all managerial duties required in facilitating a school, more time has to be devoted to the instructional program of the school to ensure a well-managed learning environment that is conducive and encourages academic success for all students. Principals must be able to increase student achievement while they change the roles of the teachers in their buildings.

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, K-12 school districts are charged to develop and implement initiatives meant to not only increase student achievement but also decrease the persistent achievement gap. Research on effective leadership advocates that ensuring student learning and reducing the

achievement gap is grounded on the effectiveness of the principal's leadership practices (Leithwood et al., 2004; Furkas et al., 2003; National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2008). Nelson and Sassi (2005) went so far as to say that effective principal leadership is the key to achieving teaching and learning excellence.

There are specific qualities and practices of great principals that distinguishes them from all other principals (Whitaker, 2012; Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). O'Donnell and White (2005) warn that effective principal leadership is the key to achieving teaching and learning excellence. According to Whitaker (2012), the difference between more effective principals and their less effective colleagues is not what they know but what they do. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) imply that principals can have a profound effect on the achievement of students in their schools. Decades of research have consistently found positive relationships between principal behavior and student academic achievement (Cotton, 2003). Three meta-analyses that have contributed to the research on successful principals are: (1) Todd Whitaker's *What Great Principals Do Differently: Eighteen Things That Matter Most* (2012); (2) Kathleen Cotton's *Principals and Student Achievement: What the Research Says* (2003); and (3) Robert Marzano, Timothy Waters, and Brian McNulty's *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results* (2005).

Whitaker's, *What Great Principals Do Differently: Eighteen Things That Matter Most* (2012) clarifies what the best principals do, provides insight into how the most successful principals function as leaders, and divulge the skills principals have that produce significant effects on principal leadership. Whitaker serves as a consultant for over fifty schools each year. He has combined his observations in these schools and

pooled them with his visits with principals, faculty members, students and staff, his experience training and coaching hundreds of principals, and identified eighteen specific qualities and practices that effective principals demonstrate over their non-effective counterparts (See Appendix 1). The purpose was to establish a framework that sustains the work of all great principals. Whitaker concludes, “Every principal has an impact. Great principals make a difference” (p. 141).

Cotton examined more than 81 studies over 15 years that dealt with the effects of leadership and student achievement. Cotton identified 25 areas in which principals of high-achieving schools were effective and provided examples of behaviors that were associated with each area (See Appendix 2).

These 25 leadership areas were divided into five categories. The first category is *establishing a clear focus on student learning*, which includes having clear learning goals, a vision, and high expectations for learning for all students. The second is *interactions and relationships* which embraces behaviors such as emotional/interpersonal support, visibility and accessibility, communication and interaction, and parent/community outreach and involvement. The third is *school culture*, which incorporate collaboration, continuous improvement, shared leadership/decision making, and support of risk taking. The fourth is *instruction*, which comprises of behaviors as observing classrooms, discussing instructional issues, and giving feedback. The fifth and final category is *accountability*, which involves monitoring student progress and examining student data that drives program improvement.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty professed that the research over the last 35 years has provided strong guidance on specific leadership behaviors for school administrators

and that those behaviors have well-documented effects on student achievement. In an effort to look for specific behaviors related to principal leadership, a meta-analysis of over 69 studies involving a little more than 2800 schools was conducted. Consequently, they identified 21 leadership responsibilities that are effective in bringing about school reform (See Appendix 3).

While Marzano et al. emphasized that all 21 responsibilities are important in bringing about change; they determined that certain responsibilities are more effective in bringing about what they define as first- and second-order change. First-order change is incremental and can be thought of as the next obvious step to take in a school or district. Incremental change fine tunes the system through a series of small steps that do not depart drastically from the past. Examples of responsibilities that bring about first order change include monitoring/evaluating relationships, order, and discipline. According to Marzano et al. (2005), first order change can be associated with the day-to-day operations of the school.

Marzano et al., (2005) defined s second-order change as “deep change that alters the system in fundamental ways, offering a dramatic shift in direction and requiring new ways of thinking and acting” (p. 66). True school reform involves an extreme break from the expected, both in defining the problem and discovering a solution. Second-order change can manifest itself in context of a specific issue that is being addressed or a problem that is being solved; it can negatively impact the school’s culture, communication, and order (Marzano et al., 2003). Because it is so uncomfortable, second-order change is rarely attempted. Marzano et al., (2003) asserted that this lack of attempt is the reason prevalent problems like the achievement gap have been unsolved.

They also found that seven of the 21 responsibilities are instrumental in bringing about second-order change: (1) Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (2) Optimizer; (3) Intellectual Stimulation; (4) Change Agent; (5) Monitoring/Evaluation; (6) Flexibility; and (7) Ideals/Beliefs (p. 70).

### **Professional Development**

With the passing of NCLB, the federal government has authorized that states, districts, and schools implement change initiatives to address achievement gaps in student learning (Borman et al., 2003; Hess & Petrilli, 2004; Marzano et al., 2005). Since NCLB's passage, the level of student academic achievement across the nation has not shown significant improvement (DuFour et al. 2009; Fullan, 2007). Reeves (2010) emphasized that good intentions are insufficient to bring about meaningful change in student achievement and teacher efficacy. Rather, it is important that the principal, in conjunction with his or her teachers, participate in meaningful and focused professional development opportunities which will increase teacher effectiveness in lesson design and instructional practice (Marzano et al. 2005; Smith & Andrews, 1989). Schmoker (2012) stated that professional development must be devoted solely to proven or research-based methods to ensure student success. When done purposefully and with focus, professional development of teachers has a profound and continuing impact on student achievement (DuFour et al., 2009).

Butler (1992) and Desimone (2011) identified three desired potential outcomes of staff development. The first possible outcome is information transfer, in which participants receive information about new approaches, requirements, and techniques. Second is skill acquisition, in which participants are taught a particular way of doing



something. The final outcome is a behavior change, in which new information and/or skills are taught with the expectation that participants will apply the new learning and change their behaviors. Whereas behavior change has the most lasting impact on students' learning, the potential for upsetting school culture and teacher practice makes it the most challenging (Marzano et al., 2005). Lindstrom and Speck (2004) and the Educational Resources Information Center (Educational Resources Information Center [ERIC], 1998) divulged that there are several key components of high quality professional development (PD):

1. PD centers on learning and sustaining student learning;
2. PD cultivates collaboration and collegiality among teachers, other staff, and the principal;
3. PD expands teachers' teaching practices and content knowledge;
4. PD emerges from student data and the desire to improve student results;
5. PD concentrates on the learner through learning styles, options, and job-embedded work;
6. PD employs shared leadership, support systems both inside and outside the school, and other resources;
7. PD focuses on research with a foundation in student learning and accountability;
8. PD emphasizes the usage of student data to drive lesson design and instructional practice; and
9. PD involves ongoing practice, reflection, and observation.

Desimone (2011), DuFour and Marzano (2011), Garet et al. (2001), and Schmoker (2012) supported that the four most important characteristics include:

1. Focusing on core content and modeling of teaching strategies and data-driven decision making;

2. Providing opportunities for embedded active learning of new teaching strategies;
3. Providing opportunities for collaboration among teachers; and
4. Including embedded follow-up and continuous feedback.

They also insist that the most effective way for these characteristics to be implemented is through the implementation of the professional learning community (PLC). DuFour and Marzano (2011) believed that creating PLCs within the school is a significant component of school improvement efforts on student learning. Schmoker (2012) stressed the following:

Professional learning communities help teachers understand their proper role and focus: to work in teams to continuously clarify, reinforce, monitor, and improve the implementation of curriculum focused on essential standards, strong lesson design, and effective instructional practice by using assessment data to ensure that increasing percentages of students learn essential knowledge and intellectual skills. (p. 69)

DuFour (2004) stressed that PLCs provide an opportunity for schools to capitalize on internal expertise rather than external staff development. In addition, school leaders who create professional learning communities in their schools allow staff members to focus on shared commitments and values that emphasize student learning rather than focusing solely on teaching (DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2000; Schmoker, 2012).

Blase and Kirby (2000) and Stronge et al. (2008) have highlighted that one of the most important duties of instructional leaders is to organize the professional learning opportunities within their schools. In addition, it is imperative that principals be aware of the connection between learning and professional development (Stronge et al., 2008).

Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) further contended that, “Sustained improvements in schools will not occur without changes in the quality of learning experiences on the part of those who run the schools” (p. 344).

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), emphasized specific roles and responsibilities that a principal must take in order to effectively implement successful professional development. Undoubtedly the principal is the center of any change movement (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Marzano et al., 2005). Thus, Marzano et al. (2005) suggested that the most important role of the principal in leading professional development is to understand the role as a change agent. Since the purpose of staff development is to elicit change or improvement, principals must be willing to challenge the status quo, consider new and better ways of doing things, and lead change initiatives with uncertain outcomes (Butler, 1992; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1998; Marzano et al., 2005). Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) have suggested that principals must have a clear purpose of the change, share knowledge, possess strong relationships, comprehend the change process, and unite new ideas with existing ones.

As with any change initiative or professional development opportunity, Blase and Kirby (2000) indicated that shared decisions are usually better than individual ones. Butler (1992) referred to several studies showing professional development participants valued being involved in the planning, development, and presentation of the training program. In addition, teachers highlighted that professional development was planned in response to the assessed needs of the participants and content matches the current development of the participants (Butler, 1992; Garet et al., 2001; Reeves, 2004; Desimone, 2011). Marzano et al., (2005) stated that this can be accomplished when

principals seek input from staff by providing opportunities for staff to be involved in developing school policies and seek their input on important decisions, such as staff development.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) suggested that it is important that principals have knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. In many high-achieving schools, principals are knowledgeable of effective and research-based practices in lesson design, instructional practice, and assessment (Cotton, 2003). Garret et al. (2001) and Desimone (2011) found that effective principals facilitated frequent discussions with teachers about issues related to instruction and used student assessment data to determine teaching strategies that would improve student performance.

Finally, principals who are knowledgeable of the curriculum, practitioners of shared decision making, and change agents, will not have successful professional development opportunities if they do not provide the resources necessary for success (Desimone, 2011; Marzano et al., 2005). DuFour (2004) and Reeves (2010) emphasized that teachers must have time built into the weekly schedule to collaborate with their colleagues to examine data on student achievement, their students' work, and lesson planning. In an effort for teachers to practice what they have learned in their classrooms, observe other teachers, or conduct demonstration lessons, principals must provide time and substitute coverage (Desimone, 2011; Garret et al., 2001). Garret et al. (2001) explained that this collaboration allows teachers to engage in effective teaching and provides opportunities for embedded active learning of new strategies. Schmoker (2012) has noted that professional development, especially peer-to-peer collaboration, is a priceless resource, and improves teacher satisfaction.

## Chapter Summary

The level of student academic achievement across the nation has not shown significant improvement (DuFour et al. 2009; Fullan, 2007). The importance of academic success and fiscal stability of schools and school districts is not debatable (Paulen, Kallio, & Stockard, 2001). With the impact of No Child Left Behind, 2001, A Nation at Risk (1983), and the accountability movement, a renewed interest and focus has been placed on ensuring that every student has access to free and appropriate learning opportunities (Haertel, 1999; Lashway, 2001; McNeil, 2000; Smith, Heinecke, & Noble, 1999; Wellstone, 2000). Accountability in education has been high on the agenda of governments and educational authorities for decades (Foster, 1999). Schools are accountable for the effective teaching of students, and governments and school systems have been eager to hold schools accountable for the learning outcomes of their students (Foster, 1999).

Site leadership has been the focus of scrutiny as to the practices that best characterize the quality of effective leadership and its relationship to student success (Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008). In response to the importance of effective principal leadership, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) affirmed that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school.

Whitaker (2003), Cotton (2003), and Marzano et al. (2005) advised that specific leadership behaviors have a significant effect on student achievement. Effective school leadership is an essential part of an effective school. An effective school is one that allocates the time and resources necessary for students to succeed and meet the

achievement targets established under the legislation. One of the primary roles of the school principal is to ensure that teachers have the necessary staff development opportunities to enhance their teaching (Marzano et al., 2005). It is important that principals allow their teachers to be involved in the process of determining appropriate staff development. Garet et al. (2001) concluded that leaders ensure that all professional development opportunities are sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and teachers' performance in the classroom. Therefore, it is imperative to effectively implement CSR we need an understanding of the principals' role in school reform and accountability, the practices and behaviors of principal leadership, the models of principal training, and the role of the principal in professional development.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this section is to describe the methods used throughout this study. A discussion of the current study includes the rationale for the study, the paradigmatic underpinning, a description of the research design, the researcher as instrument, role of the researcher, the sample procedure, data collection, data management, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

#### **Research Design**

While there has been debate as to an exact definition for qualitative research, Marshall and Rossman (2006) defined qualitative research as the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the vastness of the human experience. Qualitative research abandons the quantitative means to secure findings and focuses on methods that allow researchers to capture information from the world around them (Creswell, 1998).

Merriam (2009) used a term that guided the method in this research: basic qualitative research. The foundation of basic qualitative research is grounded in constructivism with reality being constructed by individuals as they intermingle within a certain environment. The intention of basic qualitative research is to understand the meaning individuals have attached to a certain phenomenon they have experienced. Merriam (2009) stated that researchers conducting basic qualitative research would be mainly interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences. While other types of qualitative research share this same focus, these types of qualitative research include additional components not found in basic qualitative research. Since the central focus of

this study is to examine principals' perceptions of their experience, basic qualitative research will be able to provide an accurate picture of unique individual experiences of the principals in the school settings.

Merriam also noted that "there is almost no consistency across writers in how [the philosophical] aspect of qualitative research is discussed" (2009, p. 8). She added that, in true qualitative fashion, each researcher makes sense of the field in a personal, socially constructed way. A qualitative approach is selected for this study because the research is concerned with understanding individuals' perceptions of the world and seeking insights rather than statistical analysis (Silverman, 2005).

This study will attempt to explore principals' perceptions of their impact on school reform efforts that occurred within the school's natural setting—a setting that is viewed as low-performing by the Georgia State Department of Education. A qualitative approach attempts to provide an accurate picture of individual experiences as they unfold within natural contexts. The intent of this qualitative research is not to generalize the information, but to illuminate the specifics (Creswell, 1998).

### **Paradigmatic Underpinning**

Paradigms play a vital role in our lives in the sense that they define our worldviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2005). In other words, paradigms allow us to understand the nature of the world as it is our place in it and our relationships with its other components (Denzin & Lincoln). Karger (1983) contended that at one level, we have to choose or create our own paradigmatic beliefs. However, he mentioned that the choices we make are constrained by our context, by the types of paradigms that are operating in this context, and how dominant they are.



Research has demonstrated that there is a close interconnection between paradigms and methods (Howe, 1988). Therefore, given that the choice of a specific paradigm determines the type of design one may be inclined to select and since qualitative research by definition is both inductive (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Borg, Gall & Gall, 2006; Lichtman, 2006) and interpretive (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), this study will be guided by an interpretivist paradigm. An interpretivist paradigm is essentially interested in understanding the nature of the world as it exists. The goal of interpretivism is to understand the lived experiences of those who live it on a daily basis (Schwandt, 2003).

### **Phenomenological Design**

According to Merriam (2009), a researcher conducting a qualitative research study is focused on how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their words, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences. In order to conduct this research, the researcher will use the phenomenological design as a lens to analyze the primary research question: What are the principals' perceptions of their impact on comprehensive school reform at low-performing high schools?

According to Lester, "The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation" (Lester, 1999, para. 1). He continued, "Phenomenological methods are particularly effective at bringing to the forefront the experiences and perceptions of individuals" (Lester, 1999, para. 3). The perceptions people hold are internalized and become their reality, which influences their behaviors. This is why a study on principals'

perceptions on their impact on school reform is important. The use of the phenomenological approach “does not dictate to phenomena but rather it wants to understand how phenomena present themselves to consciousness and the elucidation of this process is a descriptive task” (Giorgi, 1985, p. 6). Describing the principals’ perceptions can provide a rational indicator of beliefs (motivations and aspirations) in regard to the duties of the principal.

Merleau-Ponty (2005) stated, “The world is what we perceive” (p. xviii). It is these perceptions that describe how principals perceive their impact on school reform, “To seek the essence of perception is to declare that perception is, not presumed true, but defined as access to truth” (Merleau-Ponty, p. xviii). The perceptions an individual hold are continuously developed and transformed through his/her experiences in life, As Merleau-Ponty said, “The world is not what I think, but what I live through” (Merleau-Ponty, p. xviii).

Based on principals’ experiences and exchanges with others, perceptions are developed. It is the aim of this study to provide rich data to describe principals’ perceptions of their impact on school reform, “Because the world of human experience is ambiguous, frames of reference shape how situations are defined and determine what actions take place...learning from experience often plays a more powerful role than formal education” (Gaziel, 2003, p. 477).

The researcher seeks to examine the perceptions of principals whose schools are in the process of implementing a school reform model, but acknowledges that the perceptions of all participants during school reform are important. Each stakeholder presents a different perspective. Parents view reform through their roles as their

children's advocates. Teachers view the reform from a classroom standpoint. The views of children offer a look at reform from the learner's outlook. Though all views are important, the researcher purposefully chose to study the principal's point of view in-depth. This is due partially to the researcher's own experiences in the field of educational leadership.

### **Participants**

This study focused on high schools in a southern state in the United States of America that had been designated as the lowest-achieving schools for the state. To be classified as a low-achieving school, schools must receive Title I funding from the federal government and be in the lowest 10% of all Title I schools in the state. Each identified lowest-achieving school selected one of the four intervention models listed below:

1. Turnaround (replace principal and remove 50% of staff)
2. Conversion to charter management organization or education management organization
3. School closure
4. Transformation (replace principal and utilize a combination of strategies in the other reform models)

The appropriate model for each school has been selected by the state in collaboration with the Local Education Agency (LEA). Participating LEAs with schools that have been identified as lowest achieving schools are:

1. Utilizing resources made available to the LEA by the state through Race to the Top,
2. Participating in an ongoing state-level intensive monitoring performed by a state team of turnaround experts,

3. Maintaining a high-performing principal who has autonomy over staffing and budget,
4. Implementing the state's common evaluation system for teachers and leaders (TKES and LKES),
5. Pursuing meaningful partnerships to advance applied learning opportunities,
6. Establishing a common planning time for teachers,
7. Increasing learning time for all students; also increasing the amount of intervention time for student that need additional remediation,
8. Utilizing as least one full-time graduation coach and one full-time math coach per school.

### **Researcher as Instrument**

Qualitative research requires an instrument that can assimilate various sources of data, integrate the information, and render a sensible interpretation of the social action (Berg, 1998, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Morrow & Smith, 2000; Patton, 1990, 2001, 2002b). In qualitative research, it is expected that the researcher shares the role of participant and observer or instrument (Berger, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Only human beings are capable of such diverse requirements (e. g., Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Hunter & Schmidt, 2004; Lichtman, 2006). In other words, it is through the researcher's "eyes and ears" that the data is collected, the information is gathered, settings is viewed, realities are constructed, and data are analyzed and interpreted (Lichtman, 2006).

Patton (1990) acknowledged limitations for neutrality in qualitative research since "the researcher is the instrument of both data collection and data interpretation, and because a qualitative study includes having personal contact with and getting close to the

people and the situation under study” (p. 54). Neutrality, Patton indicated, is “simply means that the investigator does not set out to prove a particular perspective or manipulate the data to arrive at predisposed truths” (p. 55). In an attempt to counter this possible confound, Patton (1990) suggested the reporting of “any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis and interpretation--either positively or negatively-- in the minds of the users of the findings” (p. 472).

Furthermore, Babbie (1998), Berg (1998), Chadwick, Bahr, and Albrecht (1985), Merriam (1998), and Patton (2001) contend that when individuals are used as instruments in research, there is always room for errors and imperfections. As stated by Merriam (2009), “The investigator as human instrument is limited by being human – that is mistakes are made, opportunities are missed, personal biases interfere. Human instruments are as fallible as any other instrument” (p. 20).

Considering this fallibility, it is necessary for the reader to understand both the researcher’s personal and professional background. The researcher’s personal experiences have facilitated its understanding of school reform. As a classroom teacher for over eighteen years at the same low-performing high school, the researcher experienced countless interventions with less-than-desirable outcomes. The researcher shared in its colleagues’ skepticism regarding the ability of reform interventions to perform as indicated. In 2010, as a classroom teacher, the researcher was a part of the restructuring stage, which was intended to force schools with a history of chronic low performance to enact major changes that would boost student achievement levels. The

intervention associated with this restructuring was the implementation of a Comprehensive School Reform utilizing the Turnaround intervention model.

In this model, the principal and at least half the staff were replaced, and the instructional program was revised. In addition, the school had to implement new types of professional development, use data to inform instruction, expand learning time, provide wraparound services, and develop new governance structures. The turnaround model brought in new staff, new programs, new training, and new support.

Six years later, the researcher currently serves as the assistant principal of this same school, where we are still implementing many of the turnaround initiatives. However, the researcher now has an administrative insight about this phenomenon. Without question, the researcher's first year as an assistant principal was the most eye opening experience the researcher had in its 22 years as an educator. As an assistant principal, the researcher saw the daily experiences and responsibilities of school leadership first hand, from insect bites to frightening cases of child neglect and abuse. The researcher had to combat late bus pick-up and drop-off, handle most of the school's discipline, and learn to smile politely while parents scream at the researcher for one reason or another. The researcher dialed disconnected phone numbers when needing to contact parents during emergencies, handled complaints from cantankerous teachers, and the researcher never quite reached the bottom of the mountain of urgent paperwork that covers the researcher's desk while trying to respond to email in a timely manner.

The researcher witnessed first-hand the awesome levels of responsibilities and duties placed on principals. The researcher understood that regardless of the new programs that was implemented, the researcher had no control over all the problems

many of the students face daily: dysfunctional home situations, shortage of emotional and physical support, disparities in ability levels, neglect, and disabilities. We can put programs in place to assist our students, but there are still so many troubles facing children that cannot be prevented or planned for in advance. We make so much progress with students in areas that will never appear on achievement tests. Still, principals are held responsible when children fail to perform. When test score levels dip, principals are often left contemplating their own futures.

### **Role of the Researcher**

It is imperative for researchers to clarify their role as researcher, especially for those utilizing qualitative methodology to make their research credible. The researcher that carries out qualitative studies fulfills a variety of roles when he or she is in the research setting. These roles can range from complete membership of the group being studied (an insider) to a complete stranger (an outsider) (Adler & Adler, 1994). While there are a variety of definitions for insider-researchers, commonly insider-researchers are those who choose to study a group to which they belong, while outsider-researchers do not belong to the group under study (Breen, 2007). For this study, the researcher had the role of an insider.

The researcher acknowledged the researcher's belief that sound leadership is the key to school reform. However, the researcher controlled for the researcher's bias by engaging in reflectivity by journaling and note taking.

**Sampling Procedure.** Limited participants were involved in this study; Creswell (2003) indicated that researchers purposefully or intentionally select individuals for the population. The goal was to structure a study that provided rich data to describe the

principals' perceptions of their impact on school reform. The use of a purposeful sampling "is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77).

Purposeful sampling was used to select the interview participant. This allowed the researcher to choose participants based on the information they provided that would yield rich, in-depth information, and enough information for data saturation.

Participants for this study were chosen for several reasons. First, all schools were identified as a high school in Georgia that had been designated as the lowest-achieving schools for the state. Second, all identified lowest achieving schools had to be classified as being eligible for intervention by a state school improvement team and selected one of the four intervention models. Third, the location of these schools had to be accessible to the researcher.

After the researcher ascertained which schools in South Georgia was eligible for intervention and implantation of one of the four intervention models, a list of qualifying school systems was compiled by the researcher. In an effort to obtain rich, in-depth and enough information for data saturation, participants must have been implementing the intervention model for at least one school year prior to the interview and/or concluded implementing the CSR model within the past school year. Thus, the length of time that each principal worked at the intervention school was obtained. Only principals who met the criteria were eligible to participate.



The location of these schools was accessible to the researcher. An established travel parameter from the researcher's resident city was also a factor. Schools had to be within a maximum of a four-hour drive for the researcher.

The researcher obtained the name of the reform schools from the state department's website. After which, names of the principals, the work telephone number and work email was obtained from the schools' public website. The researcher gained permission to conduct the study from the qualifying schools' district superintendent office via a certified letter. Once permission was obtained from the district office, the researcher recruited by contacting the site principals via certified letter, including a follow-up phone call, to introduce the study and determine their willingness to participate in the study. Interviews were scheduled for February and early March 2016 and confirmed via email. In an effort to build trust and allow the principals the time to prepare, the researcher forwarded the interview questions to each participant prior to the interview date.

**Data Collection.** Creswell (2009) suggested, "In qualitative research, the intent is to explore the complex set of factors surrounding the central phenomenon and present the varied experiences or meanings that participants hold" (p. 129). Research methods serve as "specific tools for conducting that exploration" in data collection (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 62). The researcher used individual interviews, observations, field notes and document analysis to collect data. Data collected through these means provided contextually embedded descriptions of each principal's perception of his or her impact on school reform.

Interview:

Interviews are the most familiar strategies for collecting qualitative data (Diciccio-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) because they provide “the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and explore alternative explanations of what you do see” (Glesne, 2006, p. 81). Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008) reported that there are three fundamental types of research interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. A semi-structured interview approach was utilized in this study to allow participants the freedom to express their views in their own terms and to provide reliable, comparable qualitative data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The interviews were semi-structured so that “the interviewer [could] introduce the topic, then guide the discussion by asking specific questions” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 5) in order to address the overarching question of this study: What are the principals’ perceptions of their impact on comprehensive school reform at low-performing high schools?

Prior to each interview, the principal was provided with an informed consent form. They were asked to take a moment to read the consent form and if they agreed to participate, they were asked to sign the consent form. The information in the consent form was reiterated explaining to each principal that the name of the district, the school, and the participant will remain confidential. Pseudonyms was developed for this purpose. Again, they were informed that their participation is voluntary. Each principal was made aware that the interview would be audio recorded as a method to document the interview conversation. It was also explained that the researcher would not transcribe the interview, but a professional transcriptionist would transcribe the interview session. The researcher informed each principal that the transcriber has more than twenty years of experience and has signed an agreement of confidentiality. Again, each principal was

informed that their participation is voluntary. Each principal was asked to state their name and their professional title prior to the recorder being activated. Once this information was provided, the recorder was activated and the researcher read from the Interview Protocol which was established and approved by the researcher, committee members, and Institutional Review Board (IRB). After the introductory comment, the researcher read each question from the list of interview questions and allowed the principal an opportunity to respond. This process continued until all the interview questions were answered and the extended dialogue had ended. Each principal was thanked for their participation and the recorder was deactivated.

This approach provided an in-depth exploration of the topic; it allowed the researcher flexibility, for example, to change the order of questions, simplify the questions, and/or probe the interviewees (Cohen, et al., 2007). The use of semi-structured interview questions allowed a greater exploration of participant responses. As Merriam (2009) stated, “interviewing in qualitative investigations is more open-ended and less structured. Less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (p. 90). Since each of the participating principals perceived life differently, the questions used to gather their perceptions needed to be open-ended.

The design of the interview questions was linked to perception and motivation, “To seek the essence of perception is to declare that perception is, not presumed true, but defined as access to truth” (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, p. xviii). Describing the principals’ perceptions provided a rational indicator of beliefs (motivations and aspirations) in regard to the duties of the principal. The research questions for this study focused on the principals’ perceptions of their impact on school reform.

**Field Notes.** Field notes of statements, events, and interactions observed were taken. According to Patton (1980), field notes provide a description of what has been observed by recording “such basic information as where the observation took place, who was present, what the physical setting was like, what social interactions occurred, what activities took place...” (p. 161). Field notes allow the researcher to record “direct quotations; evaluator-observer’s own feeling, reactions to the experience, and reflections about the personal meaning and significance of what has occurred for the observer; and the observer’s insights, interpretations, beginning analyses, and working hypotheses about what is happening in the setting” (Patton, 1980 p.163).

The researcher’s field notes included reactions to interviews, impressions, and reflections. Field notes were recorded immediately following an interview. These field notes were reviewed following each interview, during analysis, and throughout the writing stage of this research.

The rationale for utilizing this method of data collection is based on the fact that qualitative research methods are designed to ascertain in-depth information. The goal of this research study is to explore and describe principals’ perceptions of their impact on school reform.

**Data management.** The researcher assured all participants that the name of the district, the school, and the participants would remain confidential. Pseudonyms were developed for this purpose. The researcher gathered interview recordings of all participants. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by a third-party transcriber; the transcriber was required to sign a third-party confidentiality agreement. Interview questions, notes, and any documents or data that was collected was stored on the

researcher's portable hard drive and in a file cabinet. Access to data was limited to the researcher. Data was stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office and will be for three years after the completion of the research. After that time, the data was destroyed.

### **Data Analysis Strategies**

The qualitative process of data analysis is an inductive one in which the data is examined from a "bottom-up" approach (Creswell, 2005). The specific data was examined to identify more general themes that was used to understand the meaning of the data. In this regard, the researcher implemented the following protocol. The researcher had the interviews transcribed. Interviews were recorded to give the researcher accurate recordings of the interview data. Transcribing is time consuming, but it served two purposes in the data analysis process. First, it allowed the interview data to be formatted into a usable form. Second, the transcription allowed the researcher to hear the data repeatedly. This repetition allowed the researcher to become familiar with the data, and common themes began to emerge at this stage.

During data analysis, the researcher studied the data to become familiar with the interview information. This entailed the researcher reading the transcripts multiple times. Sections of the transcripts that reflect a theme was identified. Notations was made to record ideas that the researcher identified while reading the data. A coding scheme was created to define the themes that was identified. This provided a way to break up the data for further analysis.

Once the coding was complete, quotes that best illustrate the meaning of the theme were selected; this process provided a voice to the people interviewed when

describing the data. This process of qualitative analysis was repeated with the researcher's field notes.

### **Trustworthiness**

To safeguard the trustworthiness in qualitative research, scholars offer many suggestions. Erickson (1986), for example, tends to be more pre-emptive than many others in his approach with regards to the notion of validity. He endorses that validity be considered at the onset of the research process because such a precaution may allow the researcher to rule out all the possible cases of inadequacy pertaining to the amount, type, and variety of data.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the researcher be immersed or have an extended experience in the cultural context of his or her participants. Gaining familiarity with the target population is expected to allow the researcher to build an ambiance of trust with his or her participants and increase his or her chance to obtain more credible data. Building trust is extremely important at this point as it prevents the researcher from being trapped in committing major errors, which can be detrimental to the success of his or her entire research (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Morrow & Smith, 2000).

Trustworthiness of this study was safeguarded through (a) triangulation and construct validity, and (b) audit trial.

### **Triangulation and Construct Validity**

This qualitative study was supported since various forms of evidence was collected. Research suggested that the use of multiple sources of evidence in studies is vital because it provides investigators the opportunity to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and observational issues (Yin, 1984). Multiple sources also

provided the triangulation of information (Adler & Adler, 1994; Huberman & Miles, 1998; Yin, 1984, 1994).

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), “triangulation is supposed to support a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or, at least, do not contradict it” (p. 266). While triangulation does not eliminate the possibility of misinterpretations or misrepresentations, it is useful because it “reduces the likelihood of misinterpretation, [because] we employ various procedures, including redundancy of data gathering and procedural challenges to explanations” (Stake, 1994, p. 241).

Furthermore, construct validity was enriched by the use of multiple sources of evidence because “essentially [they] provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon” (Yin, 1984, p. 91). There are four basic types of triangulation: data, investigator, theory, and methodological (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980). Since a variety of data sources was utilized, and the evidence from each of the sources was compiled and analyzed, this study employed data triangulation and methodological triangulation.

### **Audit Trail**

An audit trail or “chain of evidence” has been maintained during this study (Yin, 1984). The audit trail included citations of specific conversations, observations, and documents and the time and place of these events. The “chain of evidence” enhances construct validity (Yin, 1984). In addition, a good data management system gives more credibility to a specific study in the sense that it systematically addresses the issue of participants’ privacy and confidentiality. In this regard, all transcribed interviews and field notes were stored and retrieved by following two of Levin’s (1987) principles of

data management consisting of (a) formatting, and (b) indexing. To format the data, the researcher labeled, organized, or classified the participants comments to the interview questions and stored them in computer files. The themes were identified and coded. The researcher concentrated on identifying a theme that can be illustrated with a great number of incidents and quotes. To ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the participants, all the data were kept in locked drawers in the researcher's home office. To further protect participants, their names were replaced by pseudonyms names. Computerized data files were password protected to prevent unauthorized access to research data. Since data management and data analysis are directly related, consideration must be given to data analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Patton (2001) emphasizes that the most sensitive stage of the data collection process during which ethical problems are likely to arise is in the stage of the interview:

Because qualitative methods are highly personal and interpersonal, because naturalistic inquiry takes the researcher into the real world where people live and work, and because in-depth interviewing opens up what is inside people – qualitative research must be more intrusive and involve greater reactivity than surveys, tests and other quantitative approaches. (p. 407)

To address the ethical concerns for this study, the researcher secured the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgia Southern University, secured the approval to conduct the study from each school district superintendent, and then the researcher sent an informed consent form to the potential participants to obtain their approval to participate in the study, promising to respect ethical confidentiality.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### REPORT OF DATA AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore principals' perceptions of their impact on Comprehensive School Reform at low-performing high schools in South Georgia. Specifically, the researcher sought to identify what the principals at low-performing high schools in South Georgia perceive regarding their impact on Comprehensive School Reform (CSR), to establish what leadership practices, strategies, and professional development opportunities they employ, and to analyze how they are preparing and supporting teachers in implementing school reform. Specifically, this study served as a qualitative assessment of the attitudes and perceptions of principals whose schools have been designated as one of the lowest-achieving schools in the state. In conducting the data analysis, the researcher's aspiration was to formulate meaning out of the data. This "involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning" (Merriam, 2009, pp. 175-176).

Through the process of reviewing and coding the interview transcripts, the goal was to highlight significant information that provided insight into the participants' perceptions. The organization of the data was into categories and themes. This process captured the general idea and consistencies the participants expressed throughout the interviews. To identify themes, codes for various pieces of the data were assigned. This process was applicable to each transcript. After working through each transcript in this manner, the researcher reviewed marginal notes and comments several times. Thus, those comments and notes were grouped together in tandem. As Merriam (2009) stated, an

“important characteristic of qualitative research is that the process is inductive; that is, researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively testing hypotheses as in positivist research” (p. 15).

Chapter Four contains an overview of the participants involved in the study. It also includes a detailed analysis using the information collected from the 16 interview questions used in the study. The chapter contains discussions on the emerging themes as well as a summary of information presented. The type of questioning techniques used for this study consisted of an in-depth interview script that guided the researcher through the process of collecting the needed data during the interviews. There was a total of sixteen questions asked of each participant and all participants had a response to each interview question. This chapter delivers the demographic profiles of the principals in the low-performing high schools in South Georgia. Additionally, it captures the common themes and patterns that emerged from the interviews.

### **Research Questions**

The interview questions protocol was designed to provide insight of the principals’ perception of their impact on comprehensive school reform at low-performing high schools in South Georgia. Hence, the overarching research question that guided this study was as follows: What are the principals’ perceptions of their impact on comprehensive school reform at low-performing high schools in South Georgia? The following sub-questions assisted in answering the research problem,

1. What leadership practices, strategies and professional development opportunities do the principals utilize in implementing a CSR?
2. How are principals preparing and supporting teachers in implementing school reform?

### **Description of Participants**

The qualitative phenomenological study to examine principals' perceptions of their impact on CSR at low-performing high schools used purposeful sampling to select the interview participants. Participants for this study were chosen for specific reasons. First, schools had to be identified as a high school in Georgia that had been designated as the lowest-achieving schools for the state. Second, these identified lowest achieving schools had to be classified as being eligible for intervention by a state school improvement team and they had to have selected one of the four intervention models. Third, the location of these schools had to be accessible to the researcher.

To obtain rich, in-depth information for sufficient data saturation, participants must have been implementing the intervention model for at least one school year prior to the interview and/or concluded implementing the CSR model within the past school year. Thus, the length of time that each principal worked at the intervention school was obtained. Only principals who met the criteria were eligible to participate. A total of 11 school principals qualified for the study and, therefore, they were sent an invitation to participate letter. A total of seven invitation letters were returned from school principals willing to participate in the study. The researcher reached out to the four potential participants to only discover they had a desire to participate, but were unable to gain permission from their school district superintendent.

The participants in this study included seven males holding the position of principal of low-performing high schools in South Georgia who are currently implementing a CSR model within their school. As part of the CSR models, school level leadership or principal had to be replaced with a newly appointed principal. As a result,

each participant in this study was interviewed and appointed to lead their CSR. Given that the names of the participants and their institutions are confidential within this study, the researcher gave the participants pseudonym names representative of their position and the order in which they were interviewed. The first principal who was interviewed was given the pseudonym name of P1, the second principal interviewed was given the pseudonym name of P2. This process was performed for all seven of the principals that were interviewed. Any information that the researcher believed could potentially identify the participants was omitted. Table 1 describes the participants as it relates to years of principal experience. This data reveals that there was a range of three to more than 10 years of experience with an average of six years of principal experience.

Table 1 Participants Demographics

Participant Names	# of year in a Principals position
P1	11 years
P2	6 years
P3	3 years
P4	6 years
P5	5 years
P6	4 years
P7	9 years

Table 2 displays how many years of CSR implementation at the participants' current school. There was only an average of 3.8 years of experience in implementing the CSR. However, one of the principals reported that he has only 18 months as the

principal leading a CSR, but he has two years of experience as an assistant principal implementing a CSR.

Table 2. Participant's Demographics

Participant Names	# of years CSR implementation
P1	6 years
P2	5 years
P3	18 months
P4	3 years
P5	2 years
P6	3 years
P7	5 years

In defining their leadership style, seven or 100% of the principals specified they employ a shared leadership style for they believe their role as principal is a supporting role. However, three or 43% of the principals indicated an important responsibility of the principal is to work with and support all members of the school as it is equally important to be the instructional leader. The principals provided responses that spoke about working with teachers to help them improve their instruction. One of the principals stated, "When I work with teachers and we talk about things they have tried or they did differently based on our discussions, I really feel like I'm making an impact, and I find that to be rewarding" (P3). Another principal stated, "My position lets me make, you know, make key decisions that affect instruction and the teaching and learning that goes on in the building" (P4). Another principal responded, "I serve as a resource for my teachers as it relates to instruction and that is quite rewarding" (P5).

Three or 43% of the principals also described their leadership style as visionary. Principal one (P1) declared that a principal must, “make everything come together because it is a big puzzle and you have to make sure the pieces fit”. In order to do this, P7 said that a principal must first have a “vision” and “be able to communicate that vision.” Another principal responded, “A major goal for me is to have a vision and to see how all the parts between the students, the staff, the community, all stakeholders, how they relate, how they come together and work as one” (P6).

The participants also described their school demographics. Student demographics included an average of 94% of the students identified as economically disadvantaged. Five or 71% of the principals reported that their students transition to high school academically behind their peers and they are accompanied with home and community disadvantages. Although these principals revealed that their students enter behind their peers, 100% of these seven principals acknowledges that growth is evident within the completion of a school year. Additionally, retention data reveals many of the students have been retained one or more years in their educational careers. Seven or 100% of the principals described Black/African American ethnicity as the largest racial demographic of their student population. Based on the percentages reported, there was an average of 93% of the students identified as Black/African American. Another major statistic that was reported was the percentage of students who qualify for free and/or reduced priced meals, which was an average of 91% of qualifying students.

### **Findings**

This section provides an overview of the perceptions and professional experiences shared by the participants. The researcher provides an interpretation of the data collected

through face- to-face interviews, documents, and the researcher's notes. These findings will be presented according to the research question/sub-questions and the themes that emerged from the data. While the themes are reported as being discrete, there is considerable overlap among them. Further, participants' responses to interview questions often addressed more than one theme. In those cases, the interview data are described where they appear to fit most logically. While all themes may seem to be common practice they are not; hence, the reason for the research.

### **Practices, Strategies, and Professional Development Opportunities**

The first research question for this study asked the following: What leadership practices, strategies, and professional development opportunities do the principals utilize in implementing a CSR? Several statements offered alluded to practices, strategies and professional development opportunities. One major emphasis in the educational arena has been the continuing demand for greater accountability to increase student performance. In order to meet the challenges associated with national and state expectations, principals must focus on teaching and learning. School principals need to manage the structures and processes of their schools around instruction. When discussing the practices and strategies associated with implementing a CSR changing the culture was the emerging theme.

**Theme: Changing the culture.** The term *culture* for this study relates to the schools' operation processes, rituals, and routines as well as the ceremonies to honor traditions, instilling school pride, and improving a sense of affiliation with the school. Seven or 100% of the principals had responses to indicate that changing the culture played a major role in implementing the CSR. These principals stated culture change

was and still is an extremely difficult task. One principal said, “getting the veteran teachers to do things differently is like pulling teeth” (P3). Principal P5 expressed similar concerns when he stated “changing the perception of the seasoned teachers was not easy, for they were determined to do things the way they have always done them”. One principal stated that “changing the culture was my initial barrier, however, despite the fact that the culture has changed, there are times when I have to readdress this change” (P1).

Everyone associated with the school has the responsibility to contribute to the creation of a school’s culture, from the custodian to the community members. Everyone has the responsibility to contribute to the fundamental foundation of what the school is, how it functions, how it sustains itself and how it grows. Creating a school culture is always active, always ongoing and always a conscious consideration of leadership in everything it does. It’s a choice.

In discussing what specific approaches they executed in changing the culture, five or 71% of the principals responded that keeping the vision in the forefront was a strategy they utilized. One principal asserted, “Every opportunity that presents itself, I remind everyone that student success is the goal and if it does not relate or support this goal then we don’t do it, talk about it or endorse it” (P1). He goes on to say that he posted the school-wide goals throughout the school so his entire school community can feel a shared sense of purpose. In addition, P1 recites his schools mission and vision statements over the intercom each day during the morning and afternoon announcements.

Principal three (P3) responded that he has created a media team and they are responsible for communicating to stakeholders their success stories and activities that



promote and support the school's vision. Principal four (P4) pointed out that he keeps the vision by re-drafting his leadership team. This was sparked by Jim Collins philosophy in "Good to Great." He believes that getting the right people on the bus ensures that the vision is supported. Two or 29% of the principals responded that flexible decision making was a strategy they implemented. One principal stated, "One of the most important job requirements is to be an open decision maker for the entire building" (P3). He explained that as principal he has the responsibility of dealing with the "heavy stuff," and to deal with this responsibility, he "has to be really flexible in order to problem solve." Similarly, another principal stated, "I try to not be overly rigid and close minded" (P5).

In addition, two or 29% of the principals responded that they are changing the culture by creating a positive and supportive atmosphere. One principal (P1) stated that he has not completely changed the culture, but he has put plans in place to be more supportive. He discussed having his leadership team members provide support to teachers who struggle in certain areas such as classroom management or differentiated instruction. Principal seven (P7) indicated that he reminds everyone that Rome was not built in a day and he encourages celebrations of the small accomplishments as he believes they will help to lead to major accomplishments. Three or 43% of the principals indicated they changed the culture of their school by monitoring data. Establishing a habit to monitor the effectiveness of our efforts is the "core" of our success (P3). Principal six (P6) stated that using the results and feedback from monitoring our progress gives us data that keeps us on track. While principal five (P5) describes monitoring as the "glue" that

keeps the vision the focus. Reviewing the strategies that have been implemented helps us to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's implementations (P5).

While the principals relished in their accomplishments in changing the culture, this task did not come without opposition. Four or 57% of the principals discussed time as a personal barrier they had to hurdle in efforts to change the culture in their school. Time is referred as the number of hours they worked per week, the lack of time during the day to accomplish all of the duties and responsibilities of the principal, and the difficulty of balancing work and life. One principal said, "Late nights and working on the weekends" was one of the most challenging barriers (P3). Other responses expressed the lack of time to accomplish the job duties and responsibilities of the principal. Due to the lack of time in the day, it was described that it was difficult to juggle all the responsibility (P1, P7). "I would have to say time, there is never enough time in the day to do the things that need to be done. So, I would say time management sometimes would be the most difficult thing" (P6).

If a school's cultural resists improvement, many people cannot see ways to overcome. Principals responded that personnel decisions were some of the most challenging barriers. One principal stated working with teachers who are not up to the level or up to the expectations that we want or need them to be can be difficult to handle particularly when they have tenure. Working with a teacher who (1) could be difficult or (2) does not have the ability to do the work that we are asking them to do is a barrier (P4). Principal four (P4) continued with, "I would say personnel decisions are sometimes tough decisions to make when trying to change the culture. You know if a person is not good for your school. You know they are not good teachers and you know they need to

be fired or let go, but you struggle with the human nature side. You know they need a job and they are trying but it is just not working out. Making those decisions can be difficult and tough to make.” Aligned with the comments of principal four (P4), principal one (P1) expressed that reprimanding personnel can be very difficult at times: “I would also imagine that the human resource piece in reprimanding and dealing with teachers in the building and handling it in a professional way is very challenging.” Two or 29% of the principals responded that dealing with difficult parents also proved to be a challenging. They stated that dealing with difficult or unreasonable parents, and families made the turnaround efforts difficult for them as the principal of the school (P2, P5). Parents can have the same mentality as some veteran teachers, “We have always done it this way why the change?” (P5).

### **Preparing and Supporting Teachers**

The second research question for this study was constructed to gain insight on how principals are preparing and supporting teachers in implementing a school reform. Keeping staff informed about current research and practice and possessing a belief system that schools are learning communities are crucial to school success. Principals who use staff development to emphasize awareness on research-based strategies increase instructional effectiveness. Two major themes emerged: Collaboration Opportunities; and, Professional Development on Data Collection.

**Theme: Creating opportunities for collaboration.** Seven or 100% responses generated this theme. All seven principals indicated that they implemented various opportunities for faculty and staff to collaborate with hopes for support and buy-in of the reform efforts. Teachers do the best they know how, as one of the principals eloquently

stated (P7), “If the expectation is for teachers to do better, we must help them to learn and improve” according to principal seven (P7). One of the principals indicated that job-embedded professional development helped provide teachers and staff members opportunities to receive training that would not have been available for them without having to leave the building (P6). Principals talked about establishing Professional Development (PD) as a weekly event for their teachers (P1, P2, and P4). Each supports the idea of having the flexibility to design his Professional Development sessions around the needs of his teachers and staff members. Principal four (P4) said “using professional development sessions to analyze our data, allowed us to plan our PD sessions and identify which PD needed to be whole school or differentiated based on the teachers’ needs”.

Two or 29% of the principals indicated one of their first reform tasks was to establish a common planning time for each discipline area. This gave way to creating an opportunity for teachers who were teaching the same subject-matter a chance to plan and “share best practices” with each other (P1, P7). Five or 71% of the principals indicated that they encourage collaboration across the school as well as have teachers give suggestions and feedback concerning collaborative efforts (P2, P4, P5, P6, and P7). Teachers are allowed to meet on a regular basis to discuss or create assessment data, unpack standards, plan and revise instruction, discuss professional development needs, and/or share alternative solutions or strategies (P1, P3, P5, and P6). Principal four (P4) said “After Data PD, we went a step further and worked on collaborating using this data. We learned what collaboration looks like, its benefits and how to use the data we collected to help in our collaborative planning meetings.” Based on a survey that

principal seven (P7) gave to his teachers, principal seven (P7) indicated that collaboration was advantageous for him and his teachers. “The responses I received from the survey affirmed that my teachers benefit from collaborative planning opportunities. They relished in working with their colleagues in efforts to review the data, then plan for instruction” (P7). Principal six (P6) discussed that Professional Learning took place once a week and they ranged from technology to data interpretation. He continued to say that of all sessions “data and collaboration, especially collaboration” were beneficial. Seeing the rollout and the teachers’ buy-in proved that this PD was greatly beneficial.

**Theme: Professional development on data collection.** Seven or 100% responses generated this theme. The principals indicated that the professional development that was most effective was related to data collection, analysis, and use. One principal said, “PD on reviewing data and making instructional decisions based on the data was most effective for the teachers, the leadership team and myself” (P1). Principal two (P2) said “Interpreting data was most vital to both the teachers and myself. We all gain new knowledge.” One principal discussed that data analysis was great for everyone. He went on to say that there were some of his teachers and staff members that had been gathering data and did nothing with it while some of teachers and staff had no idea how to collect data. He further went on to say that professional development helped him and his staff learn what data to collect, how to gather the data and what to do with that data (P5). Principal four (P4) admitted that for him professional development relating to data was great. He knew the importance of data, but he struggled with what to collect and how to present that data once collected. On the same accord, Principal three (P3) said “Data PD

for me personally was most effective. It taught me how to collect and review data. This helped me to show my teachers, students, and parents where we stand as a school.”

### **Principals’ Perception of Their Impact on Comprehensive School Reform**

The overarching research question sought to explore principals’ perception of their impact on CSR. This set of questions was instrumental in gaining an understanding of the beliefs, values, and feelings associated with the principals’ perceptions. The questions helped to paint a picture but more importantly, it gave a voice to those who experienced the phenomena. Two major themes that emerged from this question were: Restructuring; and, Working Collaboratively.

**Theme: Restructuring the school.** Restructuring was one of the emergent themes from the principals. All seven of the principals stated that as the CSR school leader their main responsibility is to restructure or reform the school. As such, they viewed themselves as being tasked to revamp, or as one principal stated, “redesign the school from the inside out” (P1). Principal three (P3) expressed the idea that he was to “actively lead as he restructured the school.” Four or 57% of the principals indicated that during their interview process for the principal position, restructuring was a major concern (P2, P4, P6, and P7). In the same line of thought, principal five (P5) revealed that it was understood in the community that the major task for the principal was to restructure the school. However, restructuring a school or any organization cannot be successful unless it is the result of a concerted effort from all the stakeholders. As Principal one (P1) pinpointed, “redesigning the organization from the inside out requires that he identify and capitalize on the talent of others while both modeling and requiring collaboration.” This idea seemed to be reinforced by P3 who made the case that “actively

leading a reform necessitates that principals have ‘knowledge of best practices’ as they include all stakeholders by effectively communicating expectations and results.”

Principals spoke about understanding the restructuring process. However, based on their responses, it appears that the concept of school restructuring may carry different meanings depending on the person interviewed. For example, in Principal one (P1) opinion, “restructuring means changes made in the structure of the school which includes making changes in who makes the decisions and how they make these decisions” (P1). Following the same logic, Principal seven (P7) argued that “when a school is failing, dramatic improvements are needed.” “The starting point in making a change is always a major change in who will have authority and control and how will that control be used” he added. One principal alleged, “if done correctly, changing the leadership of a school can enable capable teachers to achieve better results in student learning” (P5). Restructuring changes that were reported by the principals include professional development, new mathematics curricula, instructional methods, reductions in class size and team teaching. While discussing restructuring, Principal four (P4) thoughts are that “some schools will improve dramatically, some schools will improve a great deal, and some schools will continue to fail.” When prompted to explain his thoughts about schools continuing to fail, his response included “major restructuring will be a regular event, not a onetime event for some school districts. This is especially true for large school districts that serve many disadvantaged children. District leaders must set clear performance goals and commit to promptly addressing failure.”

**Theme: Working collaboratively.** Closely related to shared leadership are collaborative practices. Principals have established an environment in which they along

with their staff learn, plan, and work together to improve their schools. The overwhelming majority of principals indicated that having the ability to work with others is the key. One principal asserted, “I can work collaboratively with others to lead the school through the process” (P6). Four or 57% of principals indicated that being a principal requires having the ability to work with others (P2, P3, P4, and P5). Two or 29% of the principals maintained that their career in education has had longevity due to their ability to work collaboratively with various stakeholders (P1, P7). These principals view collaboration as a process during which the leader is engaged in listening to his followers, taking input from them and using the information he gathered to make decisions. They also suggested that their schools get the best outcomes when more people are involved in developing a plan for success.

Furthermore, principals were given a chance to share their experiences on how leading a CSR has impacted them as well as provide aspiring principals with recommendations regarding making an impact on CSR. Principal one (P1) stated, “I have grown into a better principal.” He confessed that he does not get as stressed as he did in the past. “I now take that energy and think of ways to remove barriers so teachers can do their job more effectively. I know they have the hardest job in the building.” Principal two (P2) referred to himself knowing that he must positively influence others: therefore, he is more conscientious about his actions and his spoken words. Principal three (P3) alluded to a personal approach for supporting his teachers. One of his new and innovative actions is to provide “nicely done kudos” to his staff. At least twice a month, P3 writes a short note to a teacher and leaves it on the teacher’s desk. “The note highlights something positive that the teacher has done. This small, but appreciative



action tells the teachers that they are supported and their work does not go unnoticed” articulated principal three (P3).

In Principal four (P4) opinion, the type and quality of people surrounding a leader play an important role in determining how an organization will achieve its desired goals. Thus, he emphasized the extent to which he is now meticulous when it comes to selecting his staff. “I surround myself with likeminded assistant principals. I have learned that a great team is the backbone to success,” he said. He also contended that discovering the talents of staff members is a process that takes time. As such, he makes the effort to do some prior research on organizational culture and learn more about the things that contribute to de-motivating people. The rationale behind such an initiative is “getting the right people on the bus but more importantly, is making sure they are in the right seat on the bus.” According to Principal five (P5), keeping a focus on established goals has become easier over time. “I am no longer worried about what others think of me and my actions. My only concern is: Do my actions support the established goals for the students? If they support the goals, who cares what others think,” he argued.

Everyone wants to be good at what they do, unfortunately, not everyone can tell when they fall short. The lack of self -awareness is a common phenomenon. Principal six (P6) acknowledged that principals are less likely to have onlookers offer direct comments about their lack of awareness, therefore he employs daily self-reflection. He dwells in careful thought about his behavior and his beliefs. Principals six affirmed that he spends 10 to 15 minutes each night reflecting upon his day. “I reflect upon what I can do different and get a better outcome or how can I help my teachers, staff or students do something different so they can get a better outcome.” Finally, Principal seven (P7)

discussed a new era in teaching. P7 declared that he is a risk-taker and he is more apt to try something new. His efforts are concentrated on “doing things differently.” His focus is concentrated on the “totality of the evidence” that his students are learning. In this era of teaching, the traditional teacher lecture is not going to produce results (P7). Principal seven (P7) is cognizant that teaching and learning are not divorced from each other. His stance is “to improve student learning to ensure more ‘good’ teaching is taking place in more classroom most of the time.”

When participants were asked to provide aspiring high school principals with recommendations regarding making an impact on CSR, the overwhelming majority underscored the importance of collecting and utilizing data. Data may be used for different purposes. Many of the principals believe that data should be used to create and implement a plan or vision for a school. Principal two (P2) expressed that “you could use your data to create a plan and a vision with attainable goals and communicate this as clearly as possible.” For some principals, data can be instrumental in the decision-making process as principals five (P5) commented, “Use your data to support all decision.” Principal six (P6) seems to agree with P5 when he suggested that data could be used to “identify deficiencies and to drive instructional decisions” On the other hand, view the use of data as a way to connect research and practice. Consequently, Principal three (P3) recommended that data can be used to lead your research. No Child Left Behind admonished educators to use scientific, research-based strategies to ensure that all students learn. Likewise, Race to the Top requires educators to use research-based school improvement models. “As the principal of a CSR school, we are being mandated to

improve student learning by implementing mandated reforms. It would be advantageous to be cognizant of proven strategies that help in raising student achievement” (P3).

In addition to collecting and using data, there were some other recommendations, such as: be fair and consistent; create teams to help set the directions of the school; use teams of people to implement initiatives; and, assess the initiatives implemented. Just like an effective teacher, principals must be fair and consistent. They need to have the same rules and procedures for all staff and students. They cannot show favoritism. They cannot allow their personal feelings or loyalties to cloud their judgment (P3, P4, P5). A good principal, just like a good CEO should want to give their employees a sense of team and empowerment according to principals six (P6). He notes business companies empower their employees to offer solutions to problems as a form of empowerment. “While teachers are typically in charge of their own classrooms, many may feel powerless to affect the atmosphere of the school. Principals need to be open and responsive to teacher suggestions for school improvement. This helps create a team mentally among the teachers.” Principal one (P1) acknowledged, “If teachers feel as if they are needed and appreciated, they will work hard for you. If not, they can quickly realize they can get the same amount of money working somewhere else with less stress.” Working collaboratively in developing and aligning the curriculum is major to student success. Leadership for change can come directly from your department heads, per P7. He goes on to say, “Don’t try to do it alone, give your building leaders the support and direction they need to move your vision forward. Expectations must be high and consistent for all students” (P6). A variety of support services needs to be in place to help students and teachers reach those expectations. Everyone in your building has talent, creativity, and

access to some resources. It is vital to the success that everyone is guided in constructive ways to use what skills they possess in ways to uplift the academic and social needs of the students (P4).

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore principals' perceptions of their impact on CSR in low-performing schools in South Georgia. Participants revealed that to meet the demand for greater accountability to increase student performance, they encounter several challenges and barriers. One major challenge was changing the culture. The participants also disclosed that the most effective professional development opportunity provided was related to data collection. This professional development pertained to reviewing data and making decisions based upon this data. It was agreed that data collection was most beneficial to principals, teachers, staff members and all other stakeholders. In sharing their perception of their experiences and making recommendations to future principals, the participants provide a glimpse into what they do to impact the implementation of a CSR. Participants also recommend that future principals use data to make decisions that assist with keeping a focus on the vision and the directions established. Lastly, participants discussed the necessity of restructuring the school and finding opportunities for working collaboratively and engaging in shared leadership.

Six emergent themes regarding principals' perceptions of their impact on CSR in low-performing schools were revealed through the course of the data analysis. The emerging themes were revealed as common phrases and statements consistently revealed by the participants. The emerging themes were as follows:

1. Changing the culture
2. Creating opportunities for collaboration
3. Providing professional development on data collection
4. Restructuring the school
5. Working collaboratively
6. Sharing leadership

Chapter Five presents an overview of the study and provides a discussion of the findings.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the principals' perceptions of their impact on Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) at low-performing high schools in South Georgia. The nationwide focus on student achievement and school accountability has resulted in an effort at the federal and state levels to identify and turn around the nation's lowest-performing schools. In Georgia, public schools in year three or more of school improvement are required to implement a state-mandated intervention to assist in their school reform efforts. Using individual interviews with South Georgia high school principals of low-performing schools who are implementing a CSR, the phenomenon was investigated. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with seven principals. The goal of the interview was to elicit responses from the participants explaining their perception of their impact from their viewpoint. This phenomenological inquiry revealed the thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of the high school principals involved with a CSR in South Georgia.

Throughout data analysis, key terms used by these school leaders included team members, giving others opportunities, development of others along with opinions, and viewpoints. Being responsible for the learning of others is at the heart of leadership. Taking leadership to another level and accepting that it includes the understanding that all stakeholders have the right, responsibility and the ability to lead is the key to success.

The participants revealed that to meet the demand for greater accountability to increase student performance, they encountered several challenges and barriers. One

major challenge was changing the culture. Altering the schools' operation processes, rituals, and routines as well as the ceremonies to honor traditions, instilling school pride, and improving a sense of affiliation with the school is extremely difficult to conquer. Public perception of the school extends beyond the walls of the physical structure. The seven or 100 % of the participants divulged that restructuring and working collaboratively was perceived to be their role as the leader of a CSR. They were tasked by their superiors to revamp and set a clear sense of direction. They were mandated to change the culture of their organizations. To meet this expectation, 100% of the participants supported the idea that this is accomplished by having the ability to work collaboratively with all the stakeholders.

The participants also disclosed that the most effective professional development opportunity provided was related to data collection. This professional development pertained to reviewing data and making decisions based upon this data. It was agreed that data collection was most beneficial to principals, teachers, staff members and all other stakeholders. In sharing their perception of their experiences and making recommendations to future principals, the participants provided a glimpse into what they had to do to impact the implementation of a CSR. There were several unique contributions, including being conscious about the staff selection and making sure the staff is using their talents effectively. Making a personal approach in supporting teachers, encouraging others to be risk takers, and taking the time to self-reflect are habits executed to assist in the implementation of CSR. These seven principals also recommended that future principals collect and use data to make positive and meaningful impacts on student learning. Using collected data to implement decisions assist with keeping a focus on the

vision and the directions established. Through multiple levels of data analysis, six emergent themes were revealed: changing the culture; creating opportunities for collaboration; providing professional development on data collection; restructuring the school; working collaboratively; and, sharing leadership.

### **Analysis of Research Findings**

Based upon the criteria for selection for participation in this study, a total of 11 school principals qualified for the study and a total of seven were willing and able to participate. All seven participants were male. Each of them had an average of six years of experience as a principal and had an average of 3.8 years of experience in implementing Comprehensive School Reform (CSR).

As presented in Chapter Four, the data analysis led to the discovery of six emergent themes: (1) changing the culture, (2) creating opportunities for collaboration, (3) providing professional development on data collection, (4) restructuring the school, (5) working collaboratively, and (6) sharing leadership. One major challenge faced by all participants was changing the culture. Each school has its own culture. As time passes, the culture becomes stronger and more defined. Whether situated in a positive or negative setting, school culture is very much ingrained. Each principal understood his role in leading a CSR. Their leading role was to restructure the school. Restructuring means making changes that affect how their school was led and how instruction was delivered. According to the principals, restructuring was essential in achieving improvements in student learning. They reiterated that school reform required them to make changes that altered the customary way their schools operated, offering a dramatic shift in direction and requiring new ways of thinking and acting. What is most revealing of this consensus



is that all principals acknowledged that restructuring is only attainable by working collaboratively with others, which is indicative of their perceptions of their leadership style of shared leadership. It was disclosed that out of the many professional development opportunities made available to the principals, teachers and staff members, data collection was most impactful and beneficial; however, principals must create opportunities for working collaboratively. This professional development pertained to reviewing data and making decisions based upon this data. In sharing their perceptions of their experiences and making recommendations to future principals, there were several unique contributions including being conscious about the staff selection and making sure the staff is using their talents effectively. Making a personal approach in supporting teachers, encouraging others to be risk takers, and taking the time to self-reflect are habits executed to assist in the implementation of CSR. These seven participants also recommended that future principals collect and use data to make an impact. Using collected data to implement decisions assist with keeping a focus on the vision and the directions established.

### **Discussion of Research Findings**

The design of this study of principals' perceptions of their impact on Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) at low-performing high schools in South Georgia was three-fold: (1) to explore what the principals at low-performing high schools in South Georgia perceived regarding their impact on Comprehensive School Reform (CSR); (2) to establish what leadership practices, strategies and professional development opportunities these school leaders have employed; and, (3) to analyze how principals are preparing and supporting teachers in implementing school reform. Therefore, the

overarching research question that guided the study was, what are the principals' perceptions of their impact on comprehensive school reform at low-performing high schools in South Georgia? In addition, the following sub-questions were addressed:

1. What leadership practices, strategies, and professional development opportunities do the principals utilize?
2. How are principals preparing and supporting teachers in implementing school reform?

These questions were the basis of the study and what the findings aimed to answer. The data and the findings from the research study did provide detailed and thorough answers to the research questions.

Research sub-question one and research sub-question two are essential to the efforts of establishing what leadership practices, strategies and professional development opportunities principals employ in operating a CSR intervention model. Before it can be determined if the CSR is helping to shrink the achievement gap, it is imperative to identify the principals' leadership practices and the strategies that have been implemented. Low-performing schools have been mandated to implement CSR initiatives to increase student achievement. Effective leadership research suggested that ensuring student learning and shrinking the achievement gap is dependent on the effectiveness of the principal's leadership practices.

### **Leadership Practice, Strategies, and Professional Development Opportunity**

Research sub-question one asked: What leadership practices, strategies, and professional development opportunities do the principals utilize? The answer to this research question resulted in one major theme: Changing the culture. The term *culture* for

this study relates to the schools' operation processes, rituals, and routines as well as the ceremonies to honor traditions, instilling school pride, and improving a sense of affiliation with the school (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Whitaker (2003) declared that school culture takes a great deal of time to create; it does not happen overnight. It happens over years. He continues, many regard the school culture as the driving force behind anything related to school success. If a school's culture opposes improvement, many struggle with ways to change and move forward (Whitaker, 2003). The importance of school culture seemed to be supported by the findings of this study when all the participants emphasized that their focus on changing the culture was instrumental in implementing a CSR. One important component of creating a culture of excellence in a school, for instance, is setting up high expectations for students. In this regard, the majority of the principals interviewed expressed their satisfaction to see that teachers, parents, and community members were working in synergy to set high expectations for all students and do whatever it takes to meet those expectations.

Moreover, it seemed to be evident that the principals in this study recognized the dynamics of change. For these principals, changing the culture of their school has not been an incremental change, but a deep change and at times, far reaching. Marzano et al. (2005) depicted this as second-order change and described it as "dramatic departures from the expected, both in defining the given problem and in finding a solution" (p. 66). One of the key characteristics to bring about change is an emphasis on culture. This fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation (Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005).

Many strategies, protocols, and practices can be found in the works of Whitaker (2003), Cotton (2003), and Marzano et al. (2005) regarding successful leadership practices in site principals. Principals in this study implemented a strategy of sharing and focusing on the vision in support of changing the culture. Principal two (P2) discussed how he created a media team. This team consist of teachers, parents, and students. “My media team has one focus and that focus is to communicate to all the stakeholders our success stories and our activities that promote our school, our vision and our mission in a positive light.” The media team used a vast array of outlets such as print, in-house media feeds and social media apps. Principal two (P2) goes on to say “the students love the idea that they have a hand in shaping the perception of their school. They do not want the public to only see them in a negative light.”

Principals who established a clear vision and set goals had a greater measure of success despite some of the challenges they may face (Cotton, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004). Principal one (P1) talked about having a vision that was broad and generic. He said, “The vision was so generic that no one could follow.” The next year “I revamped the vision to make it clear. There was a schoolwide goal followed by grade level goals, that if met, they would ultimately exceed the school wide goal.” Principals in this study understood the significance of keeping the school’s vision a key factor. By doing so, they created an environment that resulted in sharing the vision.

### **Preparing and Supporting Teachers**

Research sub-question two asked: How are principals preparing and supporting teachers in implementing school reform? This resulted in two themes: creating

opportunities for collaboration; and, providing professional development on data collection.

It appears that the principals in this study were sensitive to teachers' needs by giving the support and reinforcement. One of the primary functions of the school principal is to ensure that teachers have the necessary staff development opportunities to directly enhance their teaching (Marzano et al., 2005). It is important that principals involve their teachers in the process of determining appropriate staff development. Principals have reported that they have incorporated collaboration time into the course of the work week, which allowed their teachers to collaborate on best instructional practices as well as analyze data from formative assessments. "Teachers are required to meet for at least once a week for one hour to collaboratively plan. During this time, teacher create pacing guides, common assessments and benchmark assessments" (P6). Principal five (P5) comments that "academic coaches also meet with teachers during their weekly collaborative planning time." "During this time teachers developed planned lessons, observed colleagues, and provided feedback in a non-evaluative structure" replied principal four (P4).

These findings support Blase and Kirby (2000) conclusion that one of the most important duties of instructional leaders is to organize the professional learning opportunities within their schools. In addition, it is imperative that principals be aware of the connection between learning and professional development (Stronge et al., 2008). Principal one (P1) believes that it important that he involves his teachers in the process of determining appropriate collaboration opportunities. This is supported by him requiring his teachers to meet at least two hours a week, they decide what day, and what time best

fits their schedule. However, principal one (P1) takes this idea a step further by offering collaborative sessions that pertain to a specific topic. Principal one (P1) elaborated on how he offered collaborative learning sessions for teachers. “There are some professional collaborative sessions that were designed for certain teachers. Based on data collected during focus walks, end of the year surveys, teacher assessment data or even personal request, professional collaboration sessions were generated. Certain teachers are mandated to attend these sessions. These sessions are managed by other teachers.” He goes on to say that “during the creation of the PD calendar, differentiated days are included.” Garet et al. (2001) ascertain that leaders ensure that all professional development opportunities are sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and teacher’s performance in the classroom.

Research indicates site-specific, ongoing, systematic professional development is essential for student learning and teacher growth (DuFour et al., 2009; Marzano et al., 2005; McEwan, 2003; Reeves, 2004; Reeves, 2010; Stronge et al., 2008). Principals reported using in- house professional development opportunities to lead discussions and to mentor in essential standards, data collection, formative assessments, and research-based instructional strategies. According to Principal five (P5), “my academic coaches are tasked to provide the teachers with professional development sessions weekly. These session cover topics such as standard-based instruction, analyzing data, differentiated instruction and school-wide data usage.” The principals in the study knew that teachers and other staff included in identifying goals are much more likely to be motivated to achieve those goals (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Principals also reiterated the importance of using data to drive instruction. “We make it a practice to analyze common assessments. We focus on what standards was mastered or proficient as well as determine which standards were not met. This data assist us in formulating our next step in instruction” (P7). The focus on standards and accountability has encouraged school leaders to gather, analyze, and monitor school data with teachers and staff (Cotton, 2003). Also, they found it imperative to provide staff training in how to collect and interpret data, and then provide substitute teachers so that classroom teachers could be released to analyze the data and determine appropriate responses. Principal six (P6) testified that “after the teacher session on collecting and interpreting data the atmosphere changed.” He resumes “I can walk into classrooms and see the students interacting with the data on the walls. Students are actively engaged in collecting and interpreting their individual data. This is great” Marzano et al. (2005) showed that the use of assessment data is essential in the examination of student progress toward instructional standards and is considered a mark of successful schools. When principals collaborate with classroom teachers in the implementation of common formative assessments and then use the data to drive instruction, teachers are likely to develop interventions that have a direct focus on meeting the needs of individual students (DuFour, 2004).

Based on the data collected in this study, it appears that one of the chief practices among the principals was the collection and usage of data. Cotton (2003), Marzano et al. (2005), and DuFour et al. (2009) stressed the importance of using data to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of a program or practice. Using the data to not only determine

what students have learned and not learned, but how it drives instruction is one of the chief ideologies of the professional learning community (DuFour et al., 2009).

### **Principals' Perception of Their Impact**

The overarching research question asked: What are the principals' perceptions of their impact on comprehensive school reform at low-performing high schools in South Georgia? Two major themes emerged: restructuring the school; and, working collaboratively.

The consensus among the principals was that as a CSR leader, they were tasked with restructuring the school. While the definition of restructuring has a different meaning to each principal, they all agreed that the primary role of the principal is that of an instructional leader and that the responsibilities of these leaders have changed over years. In the post-NCLB era, these principals realize they must expand their role beyond that of the traditional administrator. They reported that they need to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, and expert overseers of legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. "As a leader of a CSR, I have come to understand and comprehend that I have bigger shoes to wear. I have to be more than a traditional principal" (P7). They are expected to negotiate the conflicting interests of parents, teachers, students, district office personnel, state and federal agencies, and they need to be sensitive to the broadening range of student needs. Principal three (P3) suggested that the role of the principal is more diverse and demanding. Principals face greater measures of accountability for student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Principal seven (P7) went on



to say that in response to this increased accountability, principals must reevaluate the allocation of time and attention paid to both the managerial and instructional leadership duties of the principal.

Restructuring in schools included changes in who makes decision and how they make these decisions. The principals acknowledged that even with restructuring efforts, some schools will improve and some schools will continue to fail despite restructuring efforts (P1, P4, P5 & P7). Seven or 100% of principals believed that working collaboratively with others is a major factor in implementing a CSR. “I could never successful operate in this position without the assistance of others” (P5). The principals were knowledgeable of the curriculum, shared decision making, and their role as a change agent, as well as the need to provide professional development opportunities for their teachers. They were also cognizant of the need to provide the resources necessary to make the professional development opportunities a success. “Giving teachers a professional work day allows them to shadow their colleagues. Depending on the need, they will shadow a teacher at another school within the district” (P3). Principals discussed creating common planning times for teachers and they discussed allowing teachers’ opportunities to observe their colleagues. They also discussed providing these opportunities during the work week and in-house. DuFour (2004) and Reeves (2010) emphasized that teachers must have time built into the weekly schedule to collaborate with their colleagues to examine data on student achievement, their students’ work, and lesson planning. In an effort for teachers to practice what they have learned in their classrooms, observe other teachers, or conduct demonstration lessons, principals must provide time and substitute coverage (DeSimone, 2011; Garet et al., 2001). Garet et al.

(2001) explained that this collaboration allows teachers to engage in effective teaching and provides opportunities for embedded active learning of new strategies. Schmoker (2012) has noted that professional development, especially peer-to-peer collaboration, is a priceless resource, and improves teacher satisfaction.

### **Implications**

Several implications for research can be generated from the findings of this dissertation. First, findings identified here should be added to the growing literature on comprehensive school reform (CSR) as well as effective principal leadership. Researchers who work with school leaders from low-achieving schools may then attempt to replicate (or refute) the findings of this study. Moreover, additional studies of similar CSR populations that focus either on the nature of principals' perception or turning around low-achieving schools will increase the validity of this study's findings. Several findings identified in this research are congruent with other research on school reform (Furkas et al., 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005) and with qualities of effective principals (Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; Whitaker, 2012). One example is that a true school reform requires a change so intense that it transform the core. It should cause a dramatic shift in direction and requires new ways of thinking and performing. One of the key attributes to bring about this reform, is to change the culture (Marzano et al., 2005).

Second, this research points in the direction of future studies. For example, a closer scrutiny of the CSR models that are being implemented in low-achieving schools will facilitate an analysis of political questions in education regarding common design elements between high-achieving schools and low-achieving schools such as their

demographics. We also need discussion about choosing a change strategy; which intervention model for restructuring is most beneficial to which population of schools. We need to know about what role the school districts play in taking charge of the change. Little is known about how district capacity effect change; if the district is not capable of leading change, who will take over the restructuring process? Further, researchers should seek out educational leaders who are willing to engage in action research projects that investigates how to avoid the need to restructure other failing schools within the same district.

Third, evaluation findings should assist in making education policy. This study sought to explore perceptions, practices, and strategies in implementing a CSR. However, researchers who engaged in educational policy research, may wish to study the evaluation findings or results from implementation of CSR. Once you have implemented restructuring with one or more schools, the district should monitor improvement and act accordingly. Knowing what the district expects to achieve in school change is critical for clarity for those who will be leading change. Another essential action for clarity is who is accountable for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data about restructuring school performance and for facilitating next-step decision. This will ensure that data is collected in a useful format for decision making. Questions that should be asked: (1) Who will collect the performance data for each school? How?; (2) What kind of format will be used to summarize findings?; (3) Who will get the findings? When?; (4) Who will make next-step decisions about whether restructuring is having a positive effect in each school? If so, is it enough? District leadership is essential for collecting data and making decision based on the findings.

In sum, implication for research include:

1. Expand the body of CSR and effective principal leadership to include findings of this study so that others can replicate (or refute) them,
2. Conduct research on CSR models that are being implemented in other low-achieving schools,
3. Conduct research on which intervention model for restructuring is most beneficial to which population of schools,
4. Conduct research on what role the school districts play in taking charge of the change,
5. Develop an educational policy on evaluating, improving and acting on reform results.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study supplements the limited body of research on the importance of effective principal leadership and the implementation of a Comprehensive School Reform (CSR). The focus is to gather what principals perceived to be their impact on school reform. This study included seven high school principals who are currently implementing a CSR model. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made regarding future research in this area:

1. The schools in this study are high schools located in South Georgia, it would be advantageous to study if these similar practices are being utilized at high schools in North Georgia. If so, what struggles are they experiencing that are unique. If not, what are the implications of implementing them at different geographical regions.

2. Georgia schools that receive School Improvement Grant funds for restructuring purposes must elect one of the four restructuring models- Turnaround; Transformational; Restart; or Closure. I recommend that future research focus on the practices between these intervention models.
3. This study focused solely on reform Title One high schools. I recommend that future researchers analysis practices of reform Title One middle schools and reform Title One elementary schools. It would be valuable to know if these reforms Title One schools feed into reform Title One high schools.
4. Finally, I recommend research in analyzing the practices of the feeder middle and elementary schools of reform high schools. In an effort to continue the work of a CSR, it would a strategic move to safeguard that the feeder schools are working collaboratively to implement initiatives and strategies that promote and enhance student achievement.

### **Dissemination**

The findings of this study suggested that principals who lead CSR perceive their role as a leader who makes significant changes while supporting others to increase student achievement. The findings of this study would be best presented at educational leadership conferences. Additionally, the experiences and recommendations of these principals would be helpful for aspiring principals, school systems, and educational leaders to read and gain an awareness of what role the principal plays in leading a school reform and what approaches work best in providing support in this process.

Understanding the challenges and issues of implementing a CSR and the impact that the principals have can help to assist in implementing a CSR with fidelity.

## Conclusion

There are many things that can be attributed to the nationwide focus on student achievement. However, this phenomenological study was designed to gain the perceptions of principals who lead a CSR because of this nationwide focus. Mendels (2012) and Leithwood et al. (2004) point out that principal leadership is second only to teacher quality among school-related factors in its impact on student learning. In addition, educational reform needs leadership, especially at the site level and the impact of leadership tends to be greatest in schools where the learning needs of students are most acute (Knapp et al., 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2010; DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

During interviews, the seven principals of the CSR schools shared a variety of strategies that were employed at their schools. Many of these strategies, protocols, and practices can be found in the works of Whitaker (2003), Cotton (2003), and Marzano et al. (2005) regarding successful leadership practices in site principals. For many of these schools, changes were major, rapid, purposeful, and at times, they appeared to be unattainable. These principals experienced what Marzano et al. (2005) described as second-order change and defined it as “dramatic departures from the expected, both in defining the given problem and in finding a solution” (p. 66). Among the key behaviors related to second-order change, they include (1) knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (2) monitoring the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning; (3) ensuring faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices; (4) communicating and operating from a strong ideals and beliefs about schooling; and (5) inspiring and leading new and challenging innovations. As evidenced

by their practices and protocols they implemented, all seven of the principals in this study demonstrated these behaviors in the course of improving their schools.

Marzano et al. (2005) reiterated that true school reform requires “deep change that alters the system in fundamental ways, offering a dramatic shift in direction and requiring new ways of thinking and acting” (p. 66). One of the key attributes to bring about this change is an emphasis on culture. This fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation (Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). All seven principals emphasized that changing the culture was instrumental for success. In connections to changing the culture the idea of professional development began. There was discussion concerning professional development opportunities and how they were woven into the course of the workweek. This allowed teachers to collaborate on best instructional practices as well as analyze data from formative assessments. School leaders who create professional learning communities in their schools allowed staff members to focus on shared commitments and values that emphasize student learning rather than focusing solely on teaching (Fullan, 2000; DuFour, 2004; Schmoker, 2012).

Finally, all seven principals reiterated the importance of using data to drive instruction. The focus on standards and accountability has encouraged school leaders to gather, analyze, and monitor school data with teachers and staff (Cotton, 2003). Likewise, they found it imperative to provide staff training in how to collect and interpret data, and then provide substitute teachers so that classroom teachers could be released to analyze the data and determine appropriate responses. Cotton (2003), Marzano et al. (2005), and DuFour et al. (2009) stress the importance of using data to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of a program or practice. Using the data to not only determine

what students have learned and not learned, but how it drives instruction is one of the chief tenets of the professional learning community (DuFour et al., 2009).



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**APPENDICES****Appendix A**

<b>COLLEGE OF EDUCATION</b>
<b>DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT</b>

**INVITATION TO SUPERINTENDENTS**

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Lisa Linton, and I am the Assistant Principal at A. E. Beach High School in the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System. Currently, I am completing my doctorate at Georgia Southern University (GSU) in Statesboro, Georgia.

The reason for this letter is to request your approval to conduct research using high schools in your district. I will be conducting a qualitative study on principal's perception of their impact on school reform. I believe this study will make a valuable contribution to the academic literature on Comprehensive School Reform as well as assist principals, school systems, educational leaders, policy makers, and others interested in understanding the challenges and issues of a mandated CSR model at the high school level. It might also serve to help prevent failure in other schools.

I am only studying high schools in South Georgia who are currently implementing a CSR model or has completed the reform within the last school year. I would greatly appreciate your approval to conduct my study within your school district. If approval is granted, the identity of every participating school and principal will be kept completely confidential and pseudo-names will be used to adhere to the strict confidential rules stipulated by GSU. Only I will know the actual names of the schools and principals that participate. At the beginning of the interview each principal will be asked to state their name and their professional title prior to the recorder being activated. Once this information is provided, the recorder will be activated and the researcher will read from the Interview Protocol which has been established and approved by the dissertation committee and the GSU Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Information will be gathered through a qualitative interview, and observations. I would like to schedule a 45 minute to a 1 hour interview with the principals as well as visit their school and observe the daily operations. Your approval to conduct my research is extremely important, appreciated, and valuable to this body of research and will be confidential!

The interviews will be transcribed by a professional third-party transcriber. A professional transcriber will transcribe the audio files verbatim; the transcriber will be required to sign a third-party confidentiality agreement. Interview questions, notes, and any documents or data that will be collected will be stored in a locked cabinet in the

researcher's home office for three years after the completion of the research. After that time, the data will be destroyed. Access to data will be limited to the researcher.

If you agree to me conducting this research within your school district, please sign below and return the form to me. I would also appreciate it if you could submit a signed letter of permission on your official school district letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission allowing me to conduct this research within your school district.

I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration. If you have any questions, please call or email me as indicated below. Thanks again and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely

Lisa Linton, Doctoral Candidate  
Assistant Principal, A.E. Beach High School  
3001 Hopkins Street, Savannah, GA 31405  
Phone-912-395-5330  
Email-lisa.linton@sccpss.com

Approved by:

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Superintendent

Date

**Appendix B**

<b>COLLEGE OF EDUCATION</b>
<b>DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT</b>

**PRINCIPAL INVITATION LETTER**

Dear Principal,

My name is Lisa Linton, and I am the Assistant Principal at A. E. Beach High School in the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System. Currently, I am completing my doctorate at Georgia Southern University (GSU) in Statesboro, Georgia.

The reason for this letter is to invite you to participate in my dissertation study. I will be conducting a qualitative study on principals' perception of their impact on school reform. I believe this study will make a valuable contribution to the academic literature on Comprehensive School Reform as well as assist principals, school systems, educational leaders, policy makers, and others interested in understanding the challenges and issues of a mandated CSR model at the high school level.

I have been granted permission from your school district superintendent to conduct my research within your school district. I am only studying high school principals in South Georgia who are currently implementing a CSR model or has completed the reform within the last school year. I would greatly appreciate your participation in my study. Every participating school will be kept completely confidential and pseudo-names will be used to adhere to the strict confidential rules stipulated by GSU. Only I will know the actual names of the schools and principals that participate. For confidentiality purposes, participating principals, the name of the district, and the school, will be given pseudonym names. At the beginning of the interview each principal will be asked to state their name and their professional title prior to the recorder being activated. Once this information is provided, the recorder will be activated and the researcher will read from the Interview Protocol which has been established and approved by the dissertation committee and the GSU Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Information will be gathered through qualitative interviews, and observations. I would like to schedule a 45 minute to a 1 hour interview with you as well as visit your school and observe your daily operations. Your participation is extremely important, appreciated, and valuable to this body of research and will be confidential!

The interviews will be transcribed by a professional third-party transcriber. A professional transcriber will transcribe the audio files verbatim; the transcriber will be required to sign a third-party confidentiality agreement. Interview questions, notes, and any documents or data that will be collected will be stored in a locked cabinet in the



researcher's home office for three years after the completion of the research. After that time, the data will be destroyed. Access to data will be limited to the researcher.

If you agree to me conducting this research within your school, please sign below and return the form to me. Please sign, scan and email me your response to my information provided below. I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration. If you have any questions, please call or email me. Thanks again and I look forward to hearing from you!!!

Sincerely

Lisa Linton, Doctoral Candidate  
Assistant Principal, A.E. Beach High School  
3001 Hopkins Street, Savannah, GA 31405  
Phone-912-395-5330  
Email-lisa.linton@sccpss.com

Approved by:

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Principal

Date

## Appendix C

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Informant: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Introductory Comments:

I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. The purpose of this interview is to gain insight of your perception of your impact on school reform. This interview will last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour and will be tape recorded to insure the accuracy of your story. Your participation is voluntary and you may stop the interview or refuse to respond to any question at any time. All of your responses will remain confidential as will your identity and school district. Please elaborate on specific details during the course of the interview. Please be honest, candid, and accurate as you respond to the questions. Are there any questions regarding the conditions of this interview?

#### Profile

1. How many years have you been a principal?
2. How many years (months) have you implemented the CSR at your school?
3. Briefly describe your schools demographics.
4. Describe your leadership style.

#### Role Perception

1. What do you perceive to be the role(s) of a high school principal leading a CSR?
2. Noting that principal leadership is key in the successful implementation of the CSR at the school level, what leadership characteristics that you possess helped you to implement an effective CSR at your school? How did you measure your success—list assessments?

#### Demands and Challenges

1. What was your most challenging barrier(s) to implementing the CSR?
2. What strategies did you implement to overcome the barrier(s)?

### Professional Development

1. What type of professional development, provided as a part of the CSR was most effective for the:
  - a. Principal
  - b. Teachers
  - c. Staff

### CSR Impact

1. What CSR strategies/practices/activities can you identify that lead to academic improvement and closing the achievement gap?
2. What strategies/practices/activities did you implement to ensure faculty and staff buy-in into the CSR?
3. As you implemented the CSR for your school, please share one or two effective activities/strategies that were implemented for the following:
  - a. Curriculum change
  - b. Methods of instruction
  - c. Student groupings
  - d. School governance
  - e. Assessment of students' achievements
  - f. Parent involvement
4. What types of assessments were used to measure the following?
  - a. Annual evaluation of implementation practices
  - b. Student-achievement results
5. Can you identify two-five resources (financial or otherwise) that will assist you in sustaining the positive supports you put in place during the reform effort—after the resources provided by the reform are no longer available?

### Experiences and Recommendations

1. In summary, how has this experienced as a CSR high school principal impacted you?
2. What recommendations would you give to aspiring high school principals who are principals in a CSR school?

Concluding Comments: I would like to thank you for sharing your experiences with me. Your interview will be transcribed and a copy for your review can be provided. I will also contact you via telephone should we need to schedule follow-up interviews.

Thank you.

## Appendix D

### TRANSCRIPTIONIST CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, \_\_\_\_\_ transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audio files received from Lisa Linton related to her research study entitled, *Principals' Perception of their Impact on School Reform in South Georgia*.

Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence, the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of digitally recorded interviews.
2. To not make copies of any audio files of the transcribed interviews, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, Lisa Linton.
3. To store all study-related audio files and transcripts in a safe, secure location when they are not in my possession.
4. To return all audio files and completed transcriptions to Lisa Linton on the completion date specified in the contract.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive, Drop Box account, and any back-up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audio files and/or transcriptions to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Transcriber's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### *Whitaker's Eighteen Things That Matter Most*

Things That Great Principals Do Differently	Description
1. It's People, Not Programs	Great principals never forget that it is the people, not programs, which determine the quality of a school.
2. Develop an Accurate Sense of Self	Great principals have clarity about who they are, what they do, and how others perceive them.
3. Who is the Variable?	Great principals take responsibility for their own performance and for all aspects of their school.
4. Treat Everyone with Respect, Every Day, All the Time	Great principals create a positive atmosphere in their schools. They treat everyone with respect. They understand the power of praise.
5. Be the Filter	Great principals consistently filter out the negatives that don't matter and share a positive attitude.
6. Teach the Teachers	Great principals deliberately apply a range of strategies to improve teacher performance.
7. Hire great teachers	Great principals take every opportunity to hire and retain the very best teachers.
8. Understand the Dynamics of Change	Great principals understand the dynamics of change.
9. Standardized Testing	Great principals keep standardized testing in perspective and focus on the real issue of student learning.
10. Focus on Behavior, Then Focus on Beliefs	Great principals know when to focus on behavior before beliefs.

11. Loyal to Whom?	Great principals are loyal to their students, to their teachers, and to the school. They expect loyalty to students and the school to take precedence over loyalty to themselves.
12. Base Every Decision on Your Best Teachers	Great principals ask themselves one central question, “What will my best teachers think of this?” before making any decision or attempting to bring about change.
13. In Every Situation, Ask Who Is Most Comfortable and Who Is Least Comfortable	Great principals continually ask themselves who is most comfortable and who is least comfortable with each decision they make. They treat everyone as if they were good.
14. Understand the High Achievers	Great principals understand high achievers, are sensitive to the best teachers’ needs, and make the most of this valuable resource.
15. Make It Cool to Care	Great principals understand that behaviors and beliefs are tied to emotions and they understand the power of emotion to jump-start change.
16. Don’t Need to Repair — Always Do Repair	Great principals work hard to keep their relationships in good repair---to avoid
Table 2.1 (continue)	personal hurt and to repair any possible damage.
17. Deal with Negative or Ineffective Staff Members	Great principals take steps to improve or remove negative and ineffective staff members.
18. Set Expectations at the Start of the Year	Great principals establish clear expectations at the start of the year and follow them consistently as the year progresses.

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Note: Adapted from *What Great Principals Do Differently: Eighteen Things That Matter Most*, by Todd Whitaker (2012). Eye On Education, Inc. Larchmont, NY.

## Appendix F

### *Cotton's Leadership Areas and Behavior Exemplars*

Leadership Areas	Leadership Behaviors
1. Safe and orderly school environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Set standards for student behavior.</li> <li>o Communicate high expectations for student behavior.</li> <li>o Apply rules consistently.</li> </ul>
2. Vision and goals focused on high levels of student learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Establish a vision of the ideal school.</li> <li>o Establish clear goals related to the vision.</li> <li>o Emphasize academic goals and the importance of learning continually.</li> </ul>
3. High expectations for student achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Communicates to everyone in the school their expectations of high performance.</li> </ul>
4. Self-confidence, responsibility, and perseverance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Hold themselves responsible for the schools' success.</li> <li>o Relentless in pursuit of goals despite difficult obstacles.</li> </ul>
5. Visibility and accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Visible to all stakeholders.</li> <li>o Frequently visit classrooms and interact with the teachers and students.</li> </ul>
6. Positive and supportive school climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Implements and maintains school-wide communication.</li> </ul>
7. Communication and interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Good communicator that shares with and solicits information from all stakeholders.</li> <li>o Builds positive relationship.</li> </ul>
8. Emotional/ Interpersonal Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Capable and caring communicators.</li> <li>o Support staff/students personal needs.</li> </ul>

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 9. Parent/community outreach and involvement                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Conduct vigorous outreach to parents and community members which includes those who are underrepresented.</li> <li>o Seek support for instruction and governance.</li> </ul> |
| 10. Rituals, ceremonies, and other symbolic actions         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Use of ceremonies and rituals to honor traditions.</li> <li>o Instill pride, recognizes excellence, and strengthens affiliation with the school.</li> </ul>                  |
| 11. Shared leadership/decision making and staff empowerment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Engage staff and constituents in decision-making.</li> <li>o Involve everyone in the necessary information and training.</li> </ul>  |
| 12. Collaboration   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Staff learn, plan, and work together collaboratively to improve the school.</li> </ul>   |
| 13. Importance of instructional leadership                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Actively involved in curriculum and instruction.</li> </ul>  |
| 14. High levels of student learning                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Make decisions as it relates to its impact on student learning.</li> </ul>   |
| 15. Norm of continuous improvement                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Continually push for improvement.</li> <li>o Ensure that improvement is a part of school life.</li> </ul>  |
| 16. Discussion of instructional issues                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Facilitates and participates in staff discussions of curriculum and instruction.</li> </ul>  |
| 17. Classroom observation and feedback to teachers          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Visit classrooms frequently.</li> <li>o Observes and provide feedback to teachers in a timely manner.</li> </ul>   |
| 18. Teacher autonomy  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Respect teachers' judgment and skills.</li> <li>o Allows self-governing in organizing and managing their classrooms.</li> <li>o Limit excessive intrusions.</li> </ul>       |



- 19. Support risk taking
  - o Take calculated risks to improve learning.
  - o Supports teachers to be innovative and experiment in their classrooms.
  
- 20. Professional development opportunities and resources
  - o Offer more and varied professional development.
  - o Are creative in securing resources needed to improve school.
  
- 21. Instructional time
  - o Values instructional time by limiting interruptions.
  - o Arrange for additional learning time outside the traditional school day.
  
- 22. Monitoring student progress and share findings
  - o Ensure there is a systematic procedure for monitoring student progress.
  - o Uses and disaggregate data.
  - o Communicate data to stakeholders.
  
- 23. Use of data for program improvement
  - o Know how to interpret data.
  - o Uses data to plan curricular and instructional improvement.
  
- 24. Recognition of student and staff achievement
  - o Make a point of recognizing achievements of students and staff members.
  
- 25. Role modeling
  - o Exemplify the outlook and behavior they expect.
  - o Work with staff in professional development activities as well as distributing their personal time in ways that support student learning.

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Note: Adapted from Principals and Students Achievement: What the Research Says, by Kathleen Cotton (2003). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA.

## Appendix G

### *Marzano et al.'s Leadership Responsibilities and Behaviors Exemplars*

Leadership Responsibility	Leadership Behaviors
1. Affirmation	Recognizes and celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges failures.
2. Change Agent	Willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo.
3. Contingent Rewards	Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments.
4. Communication	Establishes strong lines of communication with staff and students.
5. Culture	Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation.
6. Discipline	Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time.
7. Flexibility	Adapts to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent.
8. Focus	Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention.
9. Ideals/Beliefs	Communicates and operates from a strong ideals and beliefs about schooling.
10. Input	Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policy.
11. Intellectual Stimulation	Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices.
12. Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

13. Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.
14. Monitoring/Evaluation	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning.
15. Optimizer	Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations.
16. Order	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines.
17. Outreach	Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders.
18. Relationships	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff.
19. Resources	Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs.
20. Situational Awareness	Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school.
21. Visibility	Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students.

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Note: Adapted from *School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results*, by Robert Marzano, Timothy Waters, and Brian McNulty (2005). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA.