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A Qualitative Study of Blue Ribbon Elementary School Principals: Perspectives on Promoting Student Achievement

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF BLUE RIBBON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
PRINCIPALS: PERSPECTIVES ON PROMOTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Jacie Maslyk

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

May 2012

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In the current age of accountability, there are increasing pressures on building principals to raise standardized test scores. School administrators must identify and implement effective leadership practices that will exert a positive influence on classroom instruction and ultimately enhance student achievement. Research has shown the leadership practices of school principals have significant effects on student learning (Blasé & Blasé, 1998; DeMoss, 2002; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003).

The purpose of this case study was to gain a greater understanding of the leadership practices of principals in Pennsylvania who have been successful in earning the Blue Ribbon School designation for their elementary schools. The study explored how principals perceive their own leadership behaviors and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability with regards to their impact on student achievement as measured by the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA).

The theoretical framework for this study was rooted in efficacy (Bandura, 1977), specifically collective teacher efficacy created by leadership practices (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). The conceptual framework was based on Hallinger's (1987) Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) and its three domains: (1) defining the

school's mission, (2) managing the instructional program, and (3) promoting a positive school learning climate.

The participants included three elementary school principals currently leading Blue Ribbon Schools in Pennsylvania. Longitudinal assessment data were collected from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, interviews were conducted, and relevant artifacts were analyzed in order to explore this topic.

Findings show that the role of an effective principal is a complex one that requires knowledge and skills in many areas. Four significant themes emerged: organization and operations, roles and relationships, data-driven practices, and an instructional leadership model. The research confirmed the importance of the importance of principal involvement in the development of collective teacher efficacy, as well as the potential of transformational leadership as an effective leadership model. Gaps were identified in leadership practices that could inform changes to principal preparation programs and school districts. This study concluded that more research is needed to further explore the effective leadership in Blue Ribbon Schools.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Within the last eleven years, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2001) has changed public education, altering the practices of schools and districts across the United States. Accountability for student achievement and overall school success has never been greater (Wohlstetter, Datnow, & Park, 2008). Overwhelming accountability pressures from state and federal government mean that educators can no longer choose teaching methods and materials based on personal preferences or ease of implementation (Englert, Fries, Goodwin, Martin-Glenn, & Michael, 2004; Guskey, 2007). Alignment to state standards and academic rigor dominate decisions made in public school today. Assessments are used throughout the school year to collect data on student achievement and school leaders are responsible, not only for analyzing student data on standardized tests but also for devising a plan to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The *No Child Left Behind Act* has determined the growth that students must make each year on standardized tests if schools are to approach the lofty goal of 100 % proficiency in reading and mathematics by 2014.

As a result of such changes, the leadership role of school principals has transformed significantly (Wohlstetter, Datnow, & Park, 2008). In this current age of accountability, there are intensifying pressures on building principals to increase student achievement and raise standardized test scores (Ylimaki, Jacobson, & Drysdale, 2007). Effective leadership practices have been studied at both the elementary and secondary school levels. Research has shown that leadership practices of school principals can have significant effects on student learning (Blasé & Blasé, 1998; DeMoss, 2002; Leithwood

& Riehl, 2003; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). More specifically, research conducted in Pennsylvania suggests that principals exert a positive influence on student achievement as assessed by the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) (Cantwell, 2003; Riker, 2006). The PSSA is Pennsylvania’s response to the mandated, standardized testing that NCLB has set forth for public schools.

The PSSA is the current measure for student achievement in the state of Pennsylvania. It is a standards-based assessment administered each spring to students in grades 3-8 and 11 in math and reading. The test is also administered in science at grades 4, 8, and 11, and writing at grades 5, 8, and 11; however this student data does not currently contribute to the AYP status of a school. National benchmarks for academic achievement set in math and reading in order for school districts to reach the national goal of 100 % proficiency by 2014 are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1

Adequate Yearly Progress Benchmarks

School year	<u>Subject Area</u>	
	Math	Reading
2006-2007	45	54
2007-2008	56	63
2008-2009	56	63
2009-2010	56	63
2010-2011	67	72
2011-2012	78	81
2012-2013	89	90
2013-2014	100	100

Note. The values represented are shown as percentages of students scoring proficient or advanced on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)

AYP status is published each year through the Pennsylvania Department of Education. This measure further determines where the school stands in the eyes of the

local community, its stakeholders, the state, and federal governments. When schools do not meet the AYP benchmarks, disciplinary action may be taken towards the district and its leadership. Failing to meet AYP in the first year will result in schools being placed on a warning list. Schools will move to “school improvement” status if the scores do not improve in the second year. Lastly, “corrective action” can be taken on schools that do not meet AYP for the third year in a row (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2010). Sanctions for these labels include: the mandating of improvement plans, the removal of principals from their position, or school management by state government officials. For this reason, national, state, and local education agencies continue to focus on educational performance and have become “almost obsessed” with accountability (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

According to the *Governor’s Report on State Performance* (2009), student achievement in Pennsylvania is on the rise. Academic increases noted at the elementary, middle, and high school levels over the last few years demonstrate positive trends in Pennsylvania. The Department of Education reported that 92 % of Pennsylvania’s school districts (460 out of 501) and 77.5 % of its 2,404 schools made AYP or were classified as “making progress” in 2006-07. Despite an increase in the number of grades and performance targets for which schools and districts are held accountable, more than nine out of ten school districts made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2007. In addition, 77 % of Pennsylvania schools met AYP targets in 2008 and 2009 as reported by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Overall, school districts have maintained that success, increasing to 94.5 % in 2010.

Since 2002, Pennsylvania scores have increased in both reading and math at all grade levels, including double-digit gains in 5th grade math, 8th grade reading, and 8th grade math (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2007). African-American students, Latino students, students from low-income families, and students with special education needs have demonstrated progress during the ten-year period, as well. Pennsylvania's success in raising student achievement levels has made it a leader among the other states.

According to the U.S. Department of Education's study of 2007 student national test data, only three states scored higher than Pennsylvania in fourth grade reading and only four states scored higher in eighth grade reading. Four states scored higher in fourth grade math and seven states scored higher in eighth grade math. In addition, the Commonwealth is one of only nine states making progress in elementary school reading and math since 2003 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), further identifying Pennsylvania as a state that deserves attention for its academic progress.

The United States Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reports that Pennsylvania schools are showing impressive scores when compared to other states. In 2007, Pennsylvania ranked 6th among states when measuring the percentage of students attaining achievement levels in reading. In math, Pennsylvania earned the number eight position. Based on these rankings, it is clear that Pennsylvania schools and districts are succeeding where others have failed. Increases in student achievement and continued gains over the last eleven years give reason for Pennsylvania leadership to be explored more closely.

Since 1982, the United States Department of Education (USDOE) has identified schools that meet and maintain high academic goals for their students. Through a rigorous process, the Blue Ribbon Schools Program recognizes the success of schools across the country. The program highlights excellence in teaching, student performance, school leadership, and school/community interaction (USDOE, 2010). Schools that attain this recognition are honored at an annual awards ceremony in Washington, DC. Pennsylvania ranks 7th among states in the number of Blue Ribbon Schools awarded since 2003 (USDOE, 2010). The Blue Ribbon Schools serve as models for others throughout the nation, and details of their achievements are disseminated via the United States Department of Education's website.

Recognizing that Blue Ribbon Schools have achieved at a high level, researchers have begun to study the leadership of those schools. In a study of Alabama Blue Ribbon schools, Prescott (2003) identified a cluster of three characteristics of effective principals evidenced by; a strong presence of (1) interpersonal, (2) organizational, and (3) intrapersonal skills. Capps (2005) also studied elementary Blue Ribbon awardees, exploring the development of learning communities and the achievement of students and identified leadership as a key determinant. Successful leadership in other Blue Ribbon schools will be discussed further in the review of literature.

With 2014 just around the corner, school districts in every state are focused on the goal to meet the high expectations of 100 % proficiency. Principals of Blue Ribbon Schools are well on their way toward meeting this benchmark. To what degree do NCLB and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) benchmarks impact the leadership behaviors of successful elementary principals? Increasing accountability at all levels of public

schooling compels districts to identify what their leaders can do to increase student achievement.

Current trends in education suggest that the intense focus on accountability will likely continue at all levels of the educational system (Wohlstetter, Datnow & Park, 2008). Success at the district and school levels requires effective leadership from principals. NCLB has provided the leverage needed to promote academic improvements at the school level (Wohlstetter, Datnow & Park, 2008). National, state, and local education agencies continue to focus on educational performance and fixate on school and district-level accountability (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Faced with accountability pressures, principals look to employ effective leadership strategies that will assist their teachers and lead to the ultimate outcome: student achievement. This expectation is combined with the already rigorous standards that principals must meet.

In 2008, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) published standards for *Leading Learning Communities: Standards For What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do*. Within these standards are indicators of what the NAESP believes a principal must know and be able to do to provide effective school leadership. The NAESP is an organization that provides administrative support and instructional leadership for elementary and secondary principals. It is clear that principals are required to fulfill a wide variety of roles and responsibilities. These include: (1) leading schools in a way that puts student and adult learning at the center; (2) setting high expectations for academic, social, emotional, and physical development of all students; (3) creating and demanding content and instruction; (4) creating a climate of continuous learning for adults; (5) using multiple sources of data as a measure of student

and school performance, and (6) actively engaging the community to create a shared responsibility.

With all that principals are required to accomplish in a day, it is imperative that they focus on the responsibilities that will have the greatest effect on the students and their success in school. Some researchers have gone so far as to say that “educational leadership is possibly the most important single determinant of an effective learning environment” (Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005, p. 17). Since principals have been perceived to have varied effects on student performance, a study of leadership practices may benefit those principals whose schools are struggling to meet the increasing AYP benchmarks.

Statement of the Problem

The AYP status of elementary schools in Pennsylvania is primarily based on student achievement on the PSSA. Elementary schools are under intense pressure to meet both state and federal assessment goals. While some research exists, more is needed to identify the leadership practices that can have a positive influence on student achievement. Principals of Blue Ribbon schools are of particular interest because they have already been recognized as successful in leading their schools to high performance on PSSA assessments despite outside accountability pressures. As effective leadership practices are identified, college and university principal preparation programs, school districts, and school and district administrators will be able to better focus their attention on the forms of leadership that are linked to increases in student achievement. While there is some agreement that the principal as instructional leader is a factor in the success of teaching and learning (Andrews, Soder & Jacoby, 1986; Hallinger & Heck, 1995;

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Stiggins & Duke, 2009), less is known about the specific leadership practices that contribute to that success. This study seeks to delve deeper into the descriptions of those leadership behaviors by exploring the work of elementary principals in Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of the characteristics of principals in Pennsylvania who have been successful in earning the Blue Ribbon School designation for their elementary schools. The Blue Ribbon Schools program, established in 1982 by the Secretary of Education, highlights excellence in teaching, student performance, school leadership, and school/community interaction. Each year, the program honors public and private elementary, middle, and high schools that are either academically superior or have made dramatic gains in student achievement on state assessments.

This study will explore how elementary principals leading Blue Ribbon Schools perceive their own leadership behaviors and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability with regards to their impact on student achievement as measured by the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). While there are many variables that affect AYP and the Blue Ribbon Awards, this study will focus solely on the possible influences of school leadership. Knowledge regarding the leadership characteristics of building principals can lead to increased implementation of effective leadership practices and the possibility of improved student performance in elementary schools. In addition, the study may contribute to the identification of new leadership trends, as well as

highlight gaps in principal leadership practices that could inform changes to preparation programs.

Questions to Be Researched

The questions that this study will focus on are:

- (1) What is the perceived influence of NCLB and AYP on the self-reported leadership behaviors of elementary principals from Blue Ribbon Schools?
- (2) What are the perceptions of elementary principals regarding their leadership practices and the possible contributions they make to the overall success of their Blue Ribbon Schools?
- (3) How do principals from Blue Ribbon Schools describe their roles in the school mission, the instructional program, and the school climate?
- (4) What underlying themes about school leadership emerge from interviews with Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon principals and from the analysis of public documents/artifacts that were submitted as part of the application for the award?

Definition of Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) - a component of No Child Left Behind that established the growth those students must make each year on standardized tests if schools are to meet 100% proficiency by 2014. For example, in 2010-2011 AYP benchmarks are 72% in reading and 67% in math. These will increase by 9 and 11 % respectively each year. Schools that continue to meet AYP are those that consistently achieve the increasing benchmarks each year in both math and reading.

Blue Ribbon School- a rigorous national program that highlights excellence in teaching, student performance, school leadership, and school/community interaction. The program

honors public and private elementary, middle, and high schools that are either academically superior or have made dramatic gains in student achievement, especially among students from low-income backgrounds.

Collective efficacy- a group's shared belief in its capabilities to organize and carry out the action necessary to produce accomplishments (Bandura, 1997; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

Distributed leadership-a leadership practice that takes shape through the interactions of people and their situation, rather than from the actions of an individual leader. It is often used interchangeably with "shared leadership" (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).

Effective elementary principal- For the purposes of this study, an effective elementary principal is one who is the leader of a Blue Ribbon School and has continued to meet the AYP benchmarks on state assessments.

Instructional leadership- is conceptualized as consisting of three dimensions: (1) defining the school mission, (2) managing the instructional program, and (3) promoting a positive learning climate (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger, 2010).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)- the federal law for K-12 education, that made major revisions to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, NCLB elevates the federal role in education and calls for significant changes in the way schools educate our nation's children and evaluate their achievement of agreed upon standards in each state (No Child Left Behind: Resources, 2007).

Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA)- A standards-based, criterion referenced assessment used to measure a student's attainment of the academic standards in reading, math, science, and writing. Results provide information to students, parents,

educators, and the public regarding the achievement of state standards (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2010).

Professional Learning Community- Defined by DuFour (2004) to create a professional learning community, focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself accountable for results.

School Climate- The relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by participants, affects their behavior, and is based on their collective perceptions of behavior in schools (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2004).

Transformational Leadership- This style of leadership occurs when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group” (Bass, 1990, p. 21).

Significance of the Study

Within the last five years, research focusing on accountability has increased, resulting in a plethora of findings associated with leadership styles and models. Studies have revealed that the instructional leader is a key factor in the success of teaching and learning (Andrews, Soder & Jacoby, 1986; Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). While many researchers have attempted to identify what leadership practices contribute to that success, there is little agreement in the research. This study was designed to add to the research regarding specific leadership practices that contribute to student achievement. In addition, by analyzing this topic through the lens of collective teacher efficacy, this study will address a current gap in the literature.

Schools are changing in response to pressures from parents and policy makers, as well as technological advances and new public school alternatives (Institute of Educational Leadership, 2000). “No one can say for certain how the schools of the new century will differ from those of the last century, but there can be little doubt that these schools will require different forms of leadership” (IEL, 2000 p. 1). Identifying the factors that contribute to effective leadership in today’s schools is important, while also acknowledging the leadership challenges of tomorrow. This study sets out to investigate the leadership practices that are implemented by successful elementary principals.

Results from this study will allow principals to better focus their energy on the practices and behaviors identified for improving student achievement. This data can also inform superintendents as they monitor principal effectiveness, emphasizing specific leadership practices that impact student achievement. The potential benefit of this research is that it could be used to clarify the instructional practices that impact student achievement.

Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001) explained that “while there is an expansive literature about what school structures, programs, and processes are necessary for instructional change, we know less about how these changes are undertaken or enacted by school leaders in their daily work” (p. 23). This study will explore the leadership practices of principals whose schools have been recognized by the Blue Ribbon Schools Program. By examining the structures, programs, and people who contribute to successful schools, this study adds to the research connecting school leadership and student achievement, emphasizing its impact through developing collective teacher efficacy.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this study. By focusing on recognized, effective schools that are thriving despite intense accountability pressures, the initial pool of participants was limited. It was further limited to elementary schools in the state of Pennsylvania whose schools have earned a Blue Ribbon designation. The leaders of these identified schools had to serve for at least three years before earning the Blue Ribbon distinction to ensure that their leadership practices influenced the success of the school. Although every attempt was made to sample a diverse population, it was difficult to find a balance of gender, race, and culture within the existing pool of Blue Ribbon elementary principals.

Summary

Principal accountability for student achievement is stronger than ever. School principals are being called on to lead academic improvements. The leadership role of a principal is critical to the effectiveness of the school and educating its students (Lambert, 2002; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, Garnier, Helsing & Rasmussen, 2006). In order for principals to accept this responsibility, it is important for educational research to further explore the specific leadership practices that affect student achievement on standardized tests. By distinguishing the practices that contribute to successful schools and student achievement, schools, districts, and institutions of higher education can focus their attention on promoting successful leadership practices across Pennsylvania and throughout the country.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Public schools are under increasing pressures to meet academic benchmarks by the year 2014. Accountability demands from NCLB have caused schools and school leaders to adjust their practices in response to these pressures (Portin, Alejano, Knapp, & Marzolf, 2006). Principals are often the ones to bear the brunt of the responsibility to ensure that demands for school accountability are met (Heim, 1996; Elmore, 2005). The work of school leaders can influence the success or failure of our schools (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2003), which is why the work of effective school principals needs to be explored in more depth.

This study explores the leadership practices of elementary principals of Blue Ribbon schools. In order to obtain a deeper understanding, it is important to have a background in the current accountability pressures in public education and the success that school systems in Pennsylvania are having, both with regards to their standardized test scores and their success in obtaining the Blue Ribbon designation.

Within this review of literature, the history of school leadership over the past 90 years will be presented. The role of the principal as instructional leader will be defined and supported by current scholars in the field. The accountability and assessment plan in Pennsylvania will be explained, clarifying various terms that are critical to this study. A description of the Blue Ribbon Schools program will be included, connecting both accountability and effective leadership. The theory of collective efficacy will serve as the theoretical framework for the study. Research on principal effectiveness will also be

shared, including relevant studies that have attempted to identify the practices of school principals that may affect student achievement.

Instructional leadership by the school principal is a key component to effective schools (Litchka, 2003). The role of the building principal has shifted over the years to the important leadership position that it is now. The past 90 years have demonstrated significant change in some responsibilities of principals.

History of School Leadership

From the 1920s through the 1960s, it was important that principals possessed the ability to manage schools effectively (Sergiovanni, 2008). Their primary role was to address the everyday operations of the building and maintain order. During the 1970s, responsibilities shifted as principals were expected to serve more as human resource managers (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2008). This change required principals to not only look more closely at hiring teachers, managing people, and coordinating effort, but also to fulfill traditional tasks of setting goals, allocating resources, monitoring lesson plans, and evaluating teachers.

The 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* asserted that principals needed to develop school and community support for educational reforms and implement leadership skills involving persuasion and goal setting. Persuasion includes the skills that principals develop to build relationships and influence the organization to work towards long-term goals. It also encompasses communicating effectively with individuals and groups that have different perspectives than the leader. In 1987, the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration published *Leadership for America's Schools*, which supported a shift in focus on principals as instructional leaders. Not only would

principals need to operate buildings and supervise teachers, now they would lead all efforts in instruction, curriculum, and assessment.

With the rise of the standards movement in the 1990s, principals were called upon to align curriculum and instruction to the standards, coordinate standards-based report cards, and integrate emerging technologies. Leadership at this time called for more collaboration to improve schools and practices (Gupton, 2010). As education moved into the new millennium, more responsibilities were placed on principals, including identifying best practices, leading professional development, coordinating standardized assessments, and disseminating test data (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Firestone et al., 2001; Vanderhaar, et al., 2006). With the multitude of school reform movements during this time, transformational leadership, defined as a supportive approach in which transformational leaders build a sense of purpose and commitment towards common goals, while providing support to followers during the change process (Leithwood et al., 2001) began to overshadow instructional leadership.

Transformational leadership gained ground in the early 2000s. With this shift, the leader was thought to be the inspirational guide who engaged in relationships, supporting the emotions of the school staff. This style of leadership, first attributed to James MacGregor Burns (1978), developed from studies of political and corporate leadership. More recent research suggests that transformational leadership directly affects school conditions which influence classroom environments (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Transformational leaders demonstrate charisma, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and consideration, working side-by-side with their staff- talking, observing, critiquing, and planning together. These leaders model open communication and build

structures that support collaboration and eliminate teacher isolation. Common planning time, team meetings, and the opportunity to engage in professional learning communities (PLCs) are characteristics of the transformational leadership style.

As education moves forward into the twenty-first century, leadership is changing yet again. A focus on improving teaching and learning, led by the principal, has returned the qualities of instructional leadership to the forefront (Hallinger, 2003). In fact, “there is widespread agreement that principals should function as instructional leaders” (Stiggins & Duke, 2009, p. 285). However, acknowledging the important role of teachers in the race to 100 % proficiency on state assessments, the role of a transformational leader to cultivate a collective sense of mission and develop strengths of followers is also needed. Many researchers are now calling for a blend of the two types of leadership, instructional and transformational, redefined by Hallinger (2003) as educational leadership.

Principals find themselves at the center of accountability and school improvement with an increasing expectation that they will serve as effective leaders (Gewirtz, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Stricherz, 2001), supporting teachers in ways that will produce positive results on academic assessments. This focus on instructional leadership demands different behaviors and practices than the managers of earlier decades (Checkley, 2000; Stiggins & Duke, 2009). The principal no longer spends time behind a desk shuffling papers, but takes responsibility for all aspects of the educational process. This role requires a leader who can serve as a model for scholarship and professionalism.

Just as the business world has a chief executive officer (CEO), some researchers (Ash & Persall, 2000; Greene, 2010) suggested that schools need a chief learning officer (CLO). They defined a CLO as an effective leader that model the behaviors they want to see in others- talking about teaching and learning, attending seminars, keeping abreast of current research and educational trends, and encouraging the faculty to do the same. Being the CLO requires the development of a school climate where teachers are involved in decision making and the ongoing process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data for continuous improvement. Through these leadership tasks and others defined in the next section, we can begin to define the qualities of effective school leadership.

Defining Effective Leadership

The success of any organization is often dependent on the effectiveness of its leader (Drysdale, Goode, & Gurr, 2009). In any successful organization, strong leadership is necessary in order to excel and this is no less true in schools. School and district leadership has been analyzed over many years as researchers try to define the qualities of effective leadership (Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Heck, 1994; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). While there are many commonalities found within the literature on effective school leadership, some differences also exist.

Kaplan and Owings (2004) state:

Research confirms that teacher and teaching quality are the most powerful predictors of student success. The more years that students work with effective teachers the higher their measured achievement, far outpacing their peers who start with comparable achievement but spend consecutive

years studying with less effective teachers. Teacher effectiveness is one of the most decisive factors in student achievement. In short, principals ensure higher student achievement by assuring better teaching (p. 1).

Instructional leaders embrace this role of ensuring better teaching. They recognize the important role of the teachers they assign to the classrooms. Prioritizing time in the classrooms and supervising teacher effectiveness is a hallmark of instructional leaders.

In Edmond's study (1979) of effective schools, the importance of strong administrative leadership was described. The study identified various characteristics of effective schools including a positive school atmosphere, the alignment of resources to support instruction, a climate focused on student achievement, and the leadership required to sustain all of these characteristics. Nadeau and Leighton (1996) found that school leaders cultivate a community of learners, give voice to all stakeholders, envision key values, and demonstrate interpersonal skills to pull it all together resulting in an effective school.

Ubben, Hughes, and Norris (2001) indicated that most effective schools have creative principals who work with the school team to set the agenda and form committees to address issues critical to the success of the school. These effective principals concentrate on creating a positive school image, delegating authority, providing opportunities for professional development, and bringing new resources to the school. Principals must also anticipate problems or changes and plan accordingly to meet needs of their students. Developing this skill requires that principals have both knowledge and foresight as they continually look ahead to improve their schools.

Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) defined school leadership through the essential responsibilities of the principal. Building a vision and setting the direction for the school is established and communicated by the school principal. Through open communication, effective school leaders can begin to understand and develop the teachers and staff members in their schools. Effective school leaders not only manage the teaching and learning program in a school but also possess the insight to redesign programs as needed. Effective leadership requires that principals are visible in the classrooms, communicating with teachers, and looking for ongoing evidence of the success of instructional programs.

While there are many leadership styles and models that may be considered effective, this study will focus primarily on the concept of the principal as instructional leader. Instructional leadership, as defined by Hallinger (1983, 2008), will serve as the conceptual framework for this study, described fully in the next section.

Conceptual Framework

Throughout the literature on effective school leadership, many researchers identified principal instructional leadership as a key factor in successful schools (Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan & Lee, 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1995; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Leithwood and Duke (1999) analyzed articles on educational leadership over a ten-year period and found that instructional leadership was the most frequently-mentioned leadership concept.

One of most frequently-used tools to measure effective leadership is the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS). This tool, designed by Phillip Hallinger (1983), has been used in 119 doctoral studies conducted between 1983 and 2011

and measures three dimensions of leadership: *Defining the School's Mission*, *Managing the Instructional Program*, and *Promoting School Climate*. Effective leadership requires that the mission of the school be a primary focus of the school leader. A vision, along with a mission statement followed by goals and objectives, must be clearly communicated by the school leader. Principal involvement in the instructional program of a school has become a more important role in school leadership with the push for increased student achievement. The school climate is one that supports student learning and is established by the principal. These dimensions serve as the foundation for the instructional leadership model in this study and will be further described in the following sections.

School Vision and Mission

The school vision represents the overall purpose of the school. Manasse (1986) defined vision as “the force which molds meaning for the people of an organization” (p. 150). If any group wants to move forward, an agreed-upon purpose must be developed. An important aspect of vision is the idea of a shared vision. A leader’s vision needs to be shared by those who will be involved in the fulfillment of the vision. By including the teachers, students, parents, and community members helps all stakeholders reach a common understanding. Wesley and Mintzberg (1989) wrote that a “vision comes alive only when it is shared” (p. 21).

The vision of a school provides purpose, meaning, and significance to the work of the school and enables principals to motivate and empower teachers to contribute to the realization of the vision. According to the Task Force on Developing Research in Educational Leadership (2003), "Effective educational leaders help their schools to

develop or endorse visions that embody the best thinking about teaching and learning" (p. 3), noting the importance of the leader in this process. Pejza (1985) stated that "without a vision to challenge followers, there's no possibility of a principal being a leader" (p. 10). The vision provides guidance and direction for the school staff, students, and administration. Buell (1992) argued that principals must actively intervene when others are "out of alignment" with the vision, implying that formulating a vision is an ongoing process that needs revisited by all stakeholders. The principal monitors the vision, eliminating possible barriers along the way to ensure that all efforts are coordinated towards achieving the vision set forth.

The school mission flows directly from the school vision. A mission statement is specific and defines what the school is trying to accomplish, providing both a clear picture of what the school values and the motivation and direction to accomplish it. At the center of every school mission should be a focus on the improvement of instructional practices and student achievement (Gupton, 2010). In order to be effective, Schwan and Spady (1998) explained that mission statements should be brief, challenging, and exciting. Gupton (2010) added that the mission should be well thought out, shared by all stakeholders, and in the genuine interest of the students. The mission outlines what must happen to realize the vision set forth by the school leader. Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1996) suggested that stronger instructional leadership is associated with clearer school mission, with the mission influencing teachers' expectations and students' academic success.

Goals and objectives provide the direction for fulfilling the school's mission and vision (Gupton, 2010). Goals and objectives are more specific and concrete, stem from

the vision, and can serve as a means to focus improve efforts. Clearly defining and communicating school goals was identified as a critical skill of effective school leaders (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979). It is the responsibility of the principal to ensure that everyone is accountable and that policies, practices, and resources are properly aligned with school goals. Setting and monitoring goals is a critical step in continuous school improvement (Wohlstetter, Datnow, & Park, 2008). McEwan (1998) suggested that, unfortunately 40% of principals seldom or never discuss school goals with students, 50% seldom or never model effective teaching techniques, and 33% seldom or never help teachers develop strategies for good teaching.

Researchers have identified a positive correlation between establishing and communicating the school vision, defining the school mission or goals, and academic achievement. Many have found that principals exert their greatest influence over the instructional program when they set clear goals for the school (Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008) and when they establish the school's mission (Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003).

Goal-setting is also suggested in findings from Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger's (2003) meta-analysis of research on the effects of leadership on students' academic achievement. While the overall impact of leadership on students was not significant, the direction-setting role of the principal directly influenced student outcomes when compared to the other six dimensions of leadership in the study. This dimension of direction-setting was also identified by Marzano et al. (2005) in their meta-analysis as an important link between leadership and student outcomes.

Individual studies have also uncovered the importance of establishing a vision, communicating the mission, and focusing in on school goals. Young (2007) studied

high-performing high school principals from Texas to determine effective leadership characteristics. Through a panel discussion, he found that a vision for goal achievement was one of the critical attributes, reported by sixteen high school principals, who were participants.

In an international study of leadership, Raihani (2006) found the importance of visioning strategies and fostering professional development important to the principalship. The visioning process included articulating and aligning the vision, explaining it to all stakeholders, and maintaining high expectations for school performance. Professional development strategies included sending teachers to training, motivating by modeling, and providing incentives and funds for teachers to continue their education. In his study, ten interviews were held in each of three schools to determine principals' perspectives on common practices of successful schools in Indonesia.

Principals influence student learning by shaping school goals, providing direction, and maintaining organization (Hallinger & Heck, 1995), but more is needed for school leadership to be effective. After the vision, mission, and goals and objectives are established, the school principal must move forward with putting ideas into action. Principal involvement in the instructional program is the primary way that school leaders can ensure that school focus is embraced and executed with fidelity.

Managing the Instructional Program

Many models of educational leadership emphasize the importance of school leaders being heavily involved in the school's instructional program (MacNeill, Cavanaugh & Silcox, 2003). Gupton (2010) emphasized that a principal's focus on student learning is the most critical part of the job. When student learning is the focus, principals are actively engaged in managing teaching and learning through the school's

instructional programs. In order to manage the instructional program of a school, principals must possess the knowledge to lead instructional initiatives, requiring both an understanding of educational techniques and best practices and a clear vision of effective classroom strategies that will lead to academic improvement. Hallinger (2003) described these leaders as "hands-on principals, hip-deep in curriculum and instruction, and unafraid of working with teachers on the improvement of teaching and learning" (p. 332). Research on the specific role of instructional leaders provides greater insight into this leadership style.

Fink and Resnick (2001) investigated principals' instructional leadership in one New York school district over a period of more than ten years to find what set them apart from other successful schools. With a continued rise in test scores, the district implemented a plan that resulted in effective instructional leaders creating a positive culture for learning. By strengthening knowledge about curriculum and content, and actively participating in professional development the principals in this district were able to drive positive change in their schools. It is important to note that professional development was provided to principals to further enhance their learning, but also that principals participated side-by-side with their staff during teacher professional development sessions. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) agreed that when school leaders work directly with teachers to plan and coordinate instruction and engage in professional growth collectively, student outcomes are significantly higher. This type of involvement in managing the instructional program leads to positive student outcomes.

Effective instructional leaders discuss instructional strategies with teachers, provide evaluations that help teachers improve their practice, and encourage the use of

different instructional strategies when necessary (Bamburg & Andrews, 1991). Supovitz and Poglinco (2001) studied the principals of eight schools that followed the America's Choice Reform Model. Through interviews and site visits, they observed that effective instructional leaders arranged their schedules to allow themselves time to focus on instructional matters. These leaders consistently visited classrooms, focusing on student work and student explanations to ascertain students' level of understanding. The common thread through all of their findings was that effective instructional leaders prioritized their time to focus on matters of instruction above all other tasks of the principalship. When principals involve themselves directly in the school's instruction and classroom practices, student learning improves (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Nelson & Sassi, 2006; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010).

When principals serve as instructional leaders, they are the lead teacher modeling best practice and scholarship (Gupton, 2010). In managing the instructional programs, principals facilitate teaching, the learning environment, teacher education, and professional growth. These characteristics are only possible when the school environment is conducive to teaching and learning. A more thorough discussion of the principal as instructional leader will be discussed later in this chapter.

School Climate

School climate is another factor revealed in the literature that defines effective leadership (Chauncey, 2005; Fulton & Lee, 2005; Hallinger, 2003). The National School Climate Center (NSCC) refers to school climate as the quality and character of school life. This organization emphasizes the importance of norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe. They suggested

that educators model attitudes that demonstrate the benefits gained from learning. In schools, this means students, families, teachers, and principals work together to develop and contribute to a shared school vision (NSCC, 2011) connecting this characteristic of instructional leadership to defining the school mission.

Previous research suggests that there are four essential areas of school climate including: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the physical environment. A school's climate can create healthy learning places, nurture a child's dreams and aspirations, stimulate teacher creativity and enthusiasm, and promote achievement (Freiberg & Stein, 2003). Principals who create a climate for learning consider the psychological climate for teachers and students, as well as the physical conditions of the buildings and grounds (Gupton, 2010). Setting the tone, providing focus, and building relationships to support the psychological climate while also maintaining the operations of the school and its physical climate are the role of the school principal. School principals establish an overall learning climate for the school which affects both teachers and students.

The principal holds the primary responsibility in shaping the learning environment to facilitate student learning (Edmonds, 1979; Sergiovanni 2008). As leadership practices are implemented by principals, school climate can be enhanced or diminished. Principals can prioritize their tasks to support school climate by minimizing outside intrusions into classroom time, being visible in the hallways, and providing rewards for achievement. Fook and Sidhu (2009) described the principal as a "sense maker", possessing leadership characteristics to create a sustainable school climate and enhance students and teacher productivity. School climate is also influenced by high

expectations, friendliness, and organizational personality (Lashway, 1995, Sergiovanni & Staratt, 1998); all factors in which the principal is a key determinant.

Researchers have studied the relationship between school climate and student achievement in school. A series of studies have shown that school climate is directly related to academic achievement (Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger & Dumas, 2003; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Freiberg, 1999; Kimball, 1985; MacNeil, Prater & Busch, 2009). As school climate has become a well-researched topic, more recent studies have become available.

Kimball (1985) surveyed 1294 teachers in 94 schools to determine if principal leadership and school climate explained math and reading achievement on California Achievement Tests, revealing that higher-achieving schools had higher teacher ratings on climate and leadership than lower-achieving schools. A safe and caring school climate fosters attachment to a school and provides a foundation for social, emotional, and academic growth (Osterman, 2000).

Brand, Felner, Shim, Seitsinger, and Dumas (2003) surveyed students and teachers in middle and high schools over a two-year period. Their work revealed that student achievement is likely to improve when comprehensive changes are made to the school climate. MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009) also studied the effects of school culture and climate on student achievement. Upon completion of an inventory, schools that were labeled “exemplary” with regards to academic achievement scored significantly higher than the “acceptable” schools. The findings of this study suggested that students achieve higher scores on standardized tests in schools with healthy learning environments.

In a recent study, Black (2010) administered questionnaires to 231 teachers and 15 principals in Ontario to identify a relationship between leadership and school climate. This research revealed a correlation between traits of servant leadership and the development of a collegial and supportive school environment. These studies show that fostering a positive school climate is an important role of school leaders, but other factors are necessary for effective school leadership.

The Role of the Instructional Leader

Earlier in this chapter, the importance of managing the instructional program was discussed. Principals are required by law (Title II, Section 2113 (c) to serve as instructional leaders. NCLB calls for principals to have “the instructional leadership skills to help teachers teach and students learn” (p. 146). Instructional leadership has been a topic of consideration for the last few decades (Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan & Lee, 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1995; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Since standards and accountability have created demands on education, the principal is expected to lead curricular initiatives that are aligned with state and local standards. They are called upon to model effective instruction and analyze assessment data, in addition to the general management of the school building. This responsibility does not take into account the paperwork, public relations, committee meetings, and general communications required of the school leader. According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001):

Elementary and middle school principals are essential to helping students reach standards. The business of schools has changed. Principals can no longer simply be administrators and managers. They must be leaders in improving instructional

and student achievement. They must be the force that creates collaboration and cohesion around school learning goals and the commitment to achieve those goals (p. 1).

The role of the instructional leader is also conveyed through the work of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). This organization is responsible for establishing the principal certification standards, working under the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The first set of standards was developed in 1996 with more recent revisions occurring in 2008. Currently, 43 of 49 states with administrative certification base their standards on the ISLLC standards (Gupton, 2010). The ISLLC's Standards for School Leaders address six broad themes that education leaders must demonstrate in order to promote the success of every student. These standards call for: (1) setting a widely-shared vision for learning; (2) developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth; (3) ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment; (4) collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources; (5) acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and (6) understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts.

Prior to the ISLLC standards, Murphy (1990) suggested similar components in the role of the principal as instructional leader: He emphasized the importance of defining the mission and setting goals for academic achievement. Similar to Hallinger's work, Murphy pointed to coordinating curriculum, conducting teacher evaluations and aligning

instructional materials with curriculum goals as essential instructional leadership practices. Supporting the concept of school climate, Murphy also reinforced the importance of promoting the academic learning environment and creating a culture based on collaboration among staff, community support of school programs, and communication between home and school.

According to the National Staff Development Council (2002), instructional leadership means sharing responsibility, establishing a culture that supports student achievement, using ongoing information to monitor progress, and holding groups accountable. The council adds that instructional leaders focus on helping teachers improve classroom instruction. Effective instructional leadership can be accomplished by spending time in classrooms, observing teachers, tracking test scores and focusing teachers on this information, providing staff development, and setting aside time to share ideas, collaborate, and plan curriculum and instruction (NSDC, 2002). Helping teachers to improve instruction includes the development and supervision of quality professional development by principals. Principals can improve the quality of their teachers by providing professional development opportunities and implementing teacher induction and retention programs (Fancera, 2008).

Many researchers have studied instructional leadership, each exploring various aspects of the principal's role. Early research (Eberts & Stone, 1988; Bossert, 1988) focused on the instructional practices that principals influence and identified variables as critical to the role of the instructional leader, particularly that the frequency of classroom observations allowed principals to better serve as instructional leaders. In addition, effective principals spend time on curriculum development and program planning and

evaluation. An emphasis on school goals and strong decision making are also the responsibility of the school leader.

Smith and Andrews (1989) explained that, as an instructional leader, the principal is required to provide resources so that the school's academic goals can be met. Their research emphasized the importance of principal knowledge and skill in curriculum and instructional matters. Principals serve as a visible leader for the staff, students, and parents, communicating effectively in a variety of settings.

Marsh (1997) referred to the instructional leader as the one to lead school reform. He described four key elements: (1) defining the school mission, (2) managing and coordinating the curriculum, promoting instruction, evaluating teacher performance, aligning instructional materials, and monitoring progress, (3) promoting an academic climate, promoting professional development, and maintaining visibility and (4) developing a safe, collaborative school environment. Krug (1993) supported this view with his “five factor taxonomy” for instructional leadership. Defining of a school mission, managing curriculum and instruction, supervising teaching, monitoring student progress, and promoting school climate are activities in which an instructional leader should engage. Though instructional leadership is supported throughout the literature, this model also has limitations.

Limitations of Instructional Leadership

While instructional leadership continues to be an important skill for the building principal 30 years after this practice emerged, educational researchers have noted limitations of instructional leadership. One flaw in instructional leadership is that sometimes great leaders are not always great classroom teachers (Blase & Blase, 2004;

Hallinger, 2003; Liantos, 1992). The principal who is an instructional leader must have a solid understanding of effective teaching and student learning.

The problem with instructional leadership is that in many schools the principal may not be the educational expert. There are some principals who perceive their role to be only administrative. In turn, they distance themselves from the classroom environment and instruction. Hallinger (2003) suggested that in many instances principals have less expertise than the teachers they supervise. In fact, many school principals are so inundated with the managerial and administrative tasks of daily school life that they rarely have time to lead others in the areas of teaching and learning. Archer (2003) added that some principals do not possess the skills needed to be effective in this age of accountability. Borba (2009) found that effective school leaders are those who were first skilled teachers and suggested that in order to create effective instructional programs within a school; successful principals need to achieve success as classroom teachers.

Effective instructional leaders take action to move their schools to academic success, putting programs in place to support struggling students and enriching the students that are ready for a challenge. This success shows in the achievement of the students. Successful principals support their teachers in their professional growth and work to enhance the climate of their school. All of these factors are taken into consideration when being formally considered as a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence. This program has recognized the success of effective schools and their leaders for almost 30 years.

The Blue Ribbon Schools Program

During the effective schools movement in the early 1980s, the Department of Education established a program to recognize schools that were meeting and exceeding certain criteria. Originally intended only to highlight excellence in public secondary schools, the program eventually began recognizing elementary and private schools as well. The criteria used to identify excellence in these schools were derived from the effective schools research. In 1996 the program was formally named the Blue Ribbon Schools Program (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

In 2002, the program was revised by the Secretary of Education to reflect the significant influence of the No Child Left Behind Act on education. The Blue Ribbon Schools Program would now honor public and private schools serving students in grades K-12 that were either academically superior in their states or that demonstrated dramatic gains in student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Schools of this caliber are invited to apply for the Blue Ribbon distinction.

The Blue Ribbon Schools Program recognizes schools across the country for student achievement. These schools have continued to reach academic benchmarks in spite of the accountability pressures from state and local governments. Blue Ribbon schools must meet one of two criteria: qualify as a “high-performing school” or as an “improving school”. High-performing schools are ranked among the states highest-performing schools as measured by state assessments in math and reading. Improving schools must have at least 40% of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds while also making academic growth over a three-year period (Blue Ribbon Schools, 2010). They must make AYP two years prior to their nomination. Improving schools must meet

the disadvantaged student criteria, as well as show that they have reduced the achievement gap in math and reading. School data must demonstrate an overall positive trend in student achievement scores. Students subgroups (small groups of racial populations, economically disadvantaged or special education) must also show improvements similar to the total student population. Rallis and Goldring (2000) stated that:

Dynamic schools are those that are actively involved in change efforts that make a difference. These are schools that are responding to several forces that have impact on them and proactively searching for improvement. The principal is crucial. The principal of a dynamic school worthy of distinguishable award status coordinates, motivates, and activates the total school community to implement and sustain change in an ongoing search for growth and improvement (p. 25).

Once nominated as a candidate for a Blue Ribbon School, a National Review Panel reviews the applications. The panel includes approximately 100 educators from public and private, elementary and secondary schools. Next, the panel recommends a site visit for the most promising submissions. The purpose of the visit is to verify the information in the application and gather additional information about the school. Experienced educators visit the schools, observing for two days. The site visit culminates with a written report provided to the National Review Panel. This group then assesses the reports and applications of all candidate schools to determine which ones most exemplify the Blue Ribbon Schools. Final recommendations are made to the Secretary of Education, who then announces the winners (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

Blue Ribbon Schools have been studied over the last 15 years in an attempt to pinpoint the features of these successful schools. Knab (1998) studied the leadership styles of the principals of schools receiving the Blue Ribbon School status, finding that principals emphasized a common vision that focused the efforts in the school. He also discovered that these leaders were proactive in their approach and made celebrating the achievements of students and school staff a priority.

Capps (2005) completed a case study focused on four award-winning elementary schools. She identified several strategies to improve student achievement including: developing and sustaining shared vision and values, focusing on student learning, collective inquiry and reflection, team learning and collaboration, and continuous improvement. She categorized this information into six broad themes: building relationships, providing direction and focus, encouraging change, providing resources, building staff capacity, and creating systems and structures.

Andrejack (2007) examined the perceptions of Pennsylvania middle-level teachers and principals regarding the contributions of teaming to their schools' achievement and Blue Ribbon designation. A survey was initially sent to thirty-three identified Blue Ribbon middle schools' teaching staff and principals. Following the questionnaires, in-depth interviews and a focus group were conducted by the researcher, identifying vision, collaboration, and shared leadership as components that contributed to school success. While leadership was not the focus of this study, principal support of these components was a common thread found throughout the research. Overall, the concept of teaming was identified as an important factor within Blue Ribbon Schools in Pennsylvania.

In Lyles's (2007) study of principals, she found that Blue Ribbon School leaders were much more likely to be associated with a transformational leadership style. In addition, these principals exhibited positive leadership characteristics significantly more often than school leaders from a normative comparison sample as measured by The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-x5) and a leadership inventory. This tool measures a broad range of leadership types and identifies the characteristics of transformational leaders, helping individuals discover how they measure up in the eyes of those with whom they work. Transformational leaders believe in the importance of establishing a vision and building a shared sense of purpose. Whether in corporations or schools, transformational leaders model optimism and enthusiasm-- working to engage staff members in the collective purpose of their organization. Transformational school leaders focus on (1) developing and maintaining school culture, (2) fostering teacher development, and (3) helping teachers solve problems effectively (Leithwood et al., 2004).

In response to the imperfections in the instructional leadership model, some researchers advocate for yet another form. Leithwood (1992) suggested that transformational leadership would replace instructional leadership as the dominant leadership style in successful schools. Transformational leadership is a viable model that maintains similarities with instructional leadership.

Transformational Leadership

Marks and Printy (2003) studied the connection between instructional leadership and transformational leadership. They found that the combination of both, called integrated leadership, was reported by teachers and administrators to lead to quality

teaching and learning. Their mixed-method study found a marked increase in student achievement in schools where integrated leadership was prominent.

Hallinger (2003) suggested that transformational leadership directly affects school conditions which influence classroom environments. Similar to instructional leaders engaged in managing the instructional program, transformational leaders visit each classroom every day, assist in classrooms, and encourage teachers to visit one another's classes. Using action research teams or school improvement teams is one way transformational leaders share the decision-making power with their teachers (Leithwood, 2003). This leadership behavior is also found to increase collective efficacy. Transformational leaders find ways to publicly recognize the work of staff who implement strategies and programs that contribute to school improvement. In turn, this impacts the overall school climate. In recent years, the climate of public schools has been overshadowed by the accountability placed on school districts.

Assessment and Accountability

NCLB is arguably the most ambitious federal education law, since it aims for the lofty goal of 100 % student proficiency by 2014. This law mandates accountability more than any other previous version of the law. The original law, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), provided funding to school districts to help low-income students but included very little accountability for results. The purpose of this legislation was to establish a national goal to improve the quality of education for all students with a specific focus on closing the achievement gap for economically disadvantaged and minority children and their peers.

Pressures to increase student achievement have changed the role of the principal (Lyles, 2007; Wong & Nicotera, 2007), in part due to these changes in legislation. A focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment is at the core of their work. In fact, “one in three principals says implementation of NCLB is the most pressing issue he or she is facing” (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 44). With all of the pressures from NCLB, principals who ignore their responsibility to improve school performance put themselves and their schools at risk (Jackson, 2000). Hoff (2008) reported that “almost 30,000 schools in the United States failed to make adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act in the 2007-08 school year” and “half those schools missed their achievement goals for two or more years, putting almost one in five of the nation’s public schools in some stage of a federally-mandated process to improve student achievement” (p. 2). Many schools in this category are now required to submit formal improvement plans, including additional data to show progress in their schools. Unfortunately, educational accountability has been more about regulation than educational improvement (Blackmore, 2001; Ransom, 2003).

Schools are under tremendous pressure to make progress, particularly when schools do not make AYP in three consecutive years. Principals, teachers, and students must demonstrate increased achievement each year or be subject to stringent sanctions. It is imperative that school leaders have knowledge about curriculum and instruction in addition to the managerial skills that were the primary responsibility of principals in years past.

In his National Governor’s Association report, *Knowing the Right Things to Do: School Improvement and Performance-Based Accountability*, Richard Elmore (2004)

explained, “Holding schools accountable for their performance depends on having people in schools with the knowledge, skill, and judgment to make the improvements that will increase student performance” (p. 9). Principals are called on to lead the improvement efforts necessary for increasing student performance. Waters (2003) pointed to the focus on accountability as critical to affecting change at the school level. According to Schmoker (2001), accountability ultimately promotes higher achievement. He stated that accountability and school improvement are linked because, as principals take responsibility for the successes and failures of their schools, change occurs and schools improve.

When accountability is applied to school leadership, it means that principals are responsible for student learning. Moller (2009) identified managerial accountability as the type that holds school accountable for results. This accountability represents a shift “from a focus on providing educational inputs and processes, to a focus on measurable outcomes” (Moller, 2009, p. 3). Principals lead the effort to use data to inform the successes and failures of instructional practices (King, 2006). The principal is the one person who is held accountable for the achievement of students (Rhinehart, Short, & Eckley, 1998). It has become common place that the performance of school leaders is not measured on a variety of indicators, but more on their ability to increase test scores (Glickman, 2006; McGhee & Nelson, 2005; Glickman, 2006).

Dolde (2008) studied 450 principals in Wisconsin and revealed that NCLB changed their roles and responsibilities, particularly with regards to accountability for staff and principals and the effective teaching of reading and math. Responsible for setting the stage for effective instruction, principals must work directly with others to

ensure evidence of achievement. Within any accountability system, there must be assurance of high-quality instruction resulting in increased student learning (Guskey, 2007). This is the job of the building principal.

Using data to drive instruction

With the increase in accountability, data-driven decision making has become an important part of the principal's role. Guskey (2007) suggested that accountability incorporates looking at evidence, analyzing results, and assigning responsibilities. Student achievement data can be used for different purposes, including evaluating progress towards state standards, monitoring student improvement, and judging instructional practices (Crommey, 2000). The ongoing collection of data in schools leads to changes in instruction.

Ross and Gray (2004) recommended that principals assist teachers to set instructional and assessment goals, engage teachers in the analysis of achievement data, and provide teachers with meaningful professional development around using data to inform their instruction. With the principal involved in this process, data-driven decision making has the potential to increase student performance (Alwin, 2002; Doyle, 2003; Peterson, 2007). Englert et al. (2004) surveyed 330 principals from Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, and South Dakota to investigate their use of data in this era of accountability. The researchers compared schools that experienced exceeded proficiency levels on state assessments with those that just met state benchmarks (identified as "high proficient" and "low proficient"). Their analysis identified high expectations for all students, the use of diagnostic data, and the alignment of resources, support, and assistance for improvement were significant in "high proficient" schools.

While outside accountability is not going away anytime soon, school leaders and teachers need to also look at ongoing, formative, classroom-based assessments to analyze student progress and improve the learning process (Guskey, 2007). Meeting the pressures of school accountability requires leadership that emphasizes collaborative strength and commitment to student success.

Since the implementation of NCLB, states have been required to develop assessments that are aligned with established state standards. These assessments are intended to hold school districts accountable for students' annual academic progress. Pennsylvania's response to the NCLB mandate was the Pennsylvania System of State Assessment (PSSA). This data is published each fall in the form of district report cards available on numerous public websites.

Accountability in Pennsylvania

In the spring of 1995, Pennsylvania public schools administered the first PSSA in math and reading to students in grades 5, 8, and 11. NCLB required that students were assessed once within each grade span: elementary, middle, and high school. Its purpose was to provide information to guide the redesign of curriculum and instructional strategies to enable students to achieve academic standards (22 Pa. Code 451). The test continued to be modified and administered each year, eventually adding additional grade levels and measures in science and writing. In 2001, performance levels of below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced were established and reported at the school and student levels (Kohr, 2001).

The Pennsylvania Accountability System applies to all public schools and districts within the state. It is a complex approach based on the Commonwealth's content and

achievement standards, student testing, and other key indicators of school and district performance. The system uses the state's academic standards, which are measures of achievement of content at each grade level. The Pennsylvania Accountability System meets the requirements of NCLB and has the same end goal that every child in the Commonwealth be proficient or advanced in reading and mathematics by the year 2014. Pennsylvania school districts are deeply engaged in this type of accountability and will continue to be if districts are to meet increasing AYP benchmarks.

Although the focus is academic achievement, AYP status also includes other school factors as well. A 95 % participation rate on the PSSA, ongoing improvement in student attendance at school, and graduation rates at the secondary level also encompass AYP status. Schools are evaluated based on the minimum AYP target level of improvement that is set for each year. The benchmark for each year is set to provide increasing expectations until 100 % proficiency is reached. While science and writing are also assessed at specific grade levels, these scores do not currently affect a school's AYP.

Assessment and accountability are the current reality for public schools. Principals must support teachers while finding a balance between the pressures to meet NCLB mandates and the day-to-day work of public school employees. If schools are to work together to provide an education for their students and meet academic benchmarks, then it is the role of the principal to ensure that teachers are poised to meet that challenge. The development of collective efficacy, further explained in the next section, provides a framework that aligns with the instructional and transformational role that is needed to lead successful schools.

Theoretical Framework: Collective Efficacy

The theoretical framework for this study is based on efficacy, the collective efficacy created by leadership practices (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Efficacy is relevant when considering the current challenges of leadership. Bandura and Locke (2003) explained that efficacy beliefs “affect whether individuals’ think in self-enhancing or self-debilitating ways, how well they persevere in the face of difficulties, the quality of their well-being and their vulnerability to stress and depression, and the choices they make at important decision points” (p. 27). With the accountability pressures that surround school leaders, establishing and enhancing efficacy is critical to the success of schools.

Wood and Bandura (1989) defined self-efficacy as “belief in one’s abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet situational demands.” (p. 48). Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1997) provided the foundation for teacher efficacy as well as collective efficacy. The social cognitive theory shows that efficacy is the key for individuals and groups to choose tasks that they believe they will succeed in. Collective teacher efficacy (CTE) in the educational context describes a group’s beliefs about achieving goals and making improvements to the teaching and learning process. It is an organizational characteristic that provides the faculty as a whole with the ability to influence student learning (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2004).

Positive collective efficacy promotes a group’s beliefs that they can engage and perform successfully. For schools, collective efficacy refers to the perception of teachers in a school that they can plan and implement what is needed to have a positive effect on

students (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2004). Leadership practices can contribute to this belief through the way the school mission is established and communicated, the manner in which the instructional program is managed, and the style approach that is taken regarding school climate.

School leaders have to demonstrate personal action as well as encourage action in those individuals they are leading (Bandura, 2000). In education, several studies have documented a strong link between perceived collective efficacy and differences in student achievement among schools (Bandura, 1993; Goddard, 2001; Goddard et al., 2000). Leadership self-efficacy has not only been associated with higher levels of performance for individual leaders, but it has also been linked to higher levels of performance for grade level teams and school staffs. One possible way to explain this link is that leadership self-efficacy could increase the collective efficacy of the team (Kane et al., 2002).

Over the last thirty years, educational researchers (Guskey, 1987; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990) have recognized the important link between teachers' sense of efficacy and student achievement. The initial study investigating this relationship occurred in a RAND study of Los Angeles city schools by Armor, Conry-Osequera, Cox, Kin, McDonald, Pascal, Pauly and Zellman in 1976. They found that teacher efficacy was strongly related to increases in reading achievement. The results of study revealed that teachers' beliefs in their ability to influence student motivation and achievement were stronger predictors of student academic success than any factors outside of school including socioeconomic status.

Goddard and Goddard (2001) proposed that “when a school as a unit experiences genuinely high levels of student achievement, it is axiomatic to conclude that one or more teachers were directly successful with their students” (p. 810). In their study, teachers were surveyed on both teacher efficacy and collective efficacy. Teacher efficacy was higher in schools where collective efficacy was higher. The researchers concluded that strong leadership and teacher empowerment may build collective efficacy.

Principals and district leaders should turn their attention to improving CTE as it has shown a positive impact on schools. Bandura’s study (1993) showed that collective efficacy is positively related to school-level achievement. The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2007) reported that strong collective efficacy improves student performance, reduces the negative effects of low socioeconomic status (SES), enhances parent/teacher relationships, and creates a work environment that builds teacher commitment to the school.

Development of Collective Teacher Efficacy

When the principal is actively involved with instruction and works cooperatively with teachers, efficacy is increased (Fancera, 2008; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002). Creating an environment that is conducive to learning is partially determined by a teacher's sense of efficacy (Jahnke, 2010). Chase, Germundsen, Brownstein, and Distad (2001) agreed that when a teacher’s disposition towards learning is one of confidence, this attitude is often transferred to their students. Teachers with a high sense of efficacy, who communicate high expectations for all students, are less likely to give up on struggling learners and are more likely to put forth a greater effort (Chase et al., 2001).

Bandura (1997) identified four areas that can influence collective teacher efficacy. He suggested that principals can develop collective efficacy through mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. These areas align with the work that principals engage in each day.

Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith (2002) proposed that principals might improve collective efficacy by focusing on mastery experiences. In this study, teachers from 97 Ohio high schools were surveyed to investigate school climate and school trust. They suggested that principals monitor school climate and solicit ongoing feedback from teachers in order to make improvement to the overall collective efficacy of the school. For teachers, these experiences include collaborating on school goals, developing curriculum, and spending time planning with colleagues (Fancera, 2008). Mastery experiences for teachers is developed over their years of classroom experience and with the attainment of advanced degrees. Principals can support mastery experiences by providing consistency, allotting planning time for teachers, and including teachers in curriculum writing and implementation.

The vicarious experience can be supported through peer observations and modeling of instructional practices after highly-eficacious teachers. Principals who encourage peer observations and provide time to do this help to develop vicarious experiences for teachers. As principals serve as instructional models and provide instructional coaching, the collective efficacy of teachers is enhanced. Mahwinney, Haas, and Wood (2005) surveyed 2,448 teachers in Connecticut and found that elementary teachers perceived higher collective efficacy and a willingness to engage in

professional learning communities when compared to teachers in middle and high schools.

Providing professional development, conducting walkthroughs, and sharing feedback with teachers are all examples of verbal persuasion. Verbal encouragement and thoughtfulness by the school leader serve as a guiding force in teacher efficacy.

Principals that support verbal persuasion not only plan professional development but are actively involved in conducting in-service training and follow through on the instructional strategies through classroom visits.

Teacher efficacy can be influenced by the principal (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993; Moore & Esselman, 1992). Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall, and Strauss (2009) suggested four paths in which schools leaders influence student learning; rational, emotional, organizational, and family paths. Of these, the emotional path aligns with the theoretical framework of CTE. Ashton and Webb (1986) reported that principals significantly influenced teacher motivation and student achievement through behaviors, such as: (1) recognizing and supporting efforts; (2) clarifying roles and expectations; (3) encouraging a sense of confidence in teachers and students; (4) empowering teachers to make decisions; (5) minimizing classroom interruptions; and (6) fostering relationships in and among the school community. As principals take on the responsibility of encouraging, empowering, and fostering teacher success, schools experience positive collective teacher efficacy.

Woolfolk and Hoy (1993) began to establish the connection between efficacy and leadership behaviors. Their work emphasized that a healthy school climate, a strong academic emphasis, and a principal who works on behalf of teachers support the

development of teachers influence learning. This research team has expanded on concepts surrounding efficacy for the last 18 years with their work serving as a foundation for later studies.

Ross (1995) suggested that teacher efficacy increases when principals engage in specific practices such as emphasizing accomplishments, providing responsive supervision, and minimizing the destabilizing effects of change. Efficacy can be enhanced when principals pull teachers into the educational process. This is done through shared decision making and the collaborative culture established by the principal. Leaders who promote an academic focus and emphasize accomplishments (both of students and teachers) contribute to teacher efficacy. Ross (1995) also found positive affects when principals provided responsive supervision to teachers.

Hipp (1997) examined the effects that the principals of three middle schools had on teacher efficacy perceptions and identified a direct relationship between principal behavior and teacher efficacy beliefs. Through a series of interviews, recognizing teacher accomplishments, providing support, inspiring group purpose, and promoting a sense of school community were found to influence teacher efficacy.

In a study of 452 elementary teachers, Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk-Hoy (2000) found that a one-point increase in a school's collective efficacy score (on a six-point scale) is linked to an 8-point increase in student achievement scores. The positive effects from CTE on student academic performance outweigh the negative effects of low SES. Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk-Hoy (2000) agreed that between-school differences in collective efficacy had a stronger positive relationship with mathematics and reading achievement than low socioeconomic status had a negative relationship. These results

suggested that principals who work to build collective teacher efficacy can make greater strides toward closing the achievement gap.

Teachers who collectively perceive themselves capable of promoting student achievement in turn create a positive culture for achieving academic success (Olivier, 2001). In Olivier's study (2001), school culture, teacher self-efficacy, collective efficacy, human caring, and organizational effectiveness were studied within a professional learning community model. Olivier and Hipp (2006) continued to examine leadership in a school with an established professional learning community and increasing student achievement. Through surveys, on site interviews, and standardized test scores, this study provided evidence of the relationship between leadership capacity and collective teacher efficacy. Four themes emerged from this research: high leadership capacity, strong sense of collective efficacy, focus on learning for students and teachers, and a strong sense of collective responsibility, collaboration, and teamwork.

A similar focus on learning and collective responsibilities was found in Supovitz and Christman's study (2003), indicating that schools that achieve better academic results had leaders who provided ongoing opportunities for instructional discussions. The researchers investigated the relationships between instructional practices and student work and suggested that when principals provided guided opportunities for teachers to focus on discussing and improving their teaching practices, teachers were able to transfer this new knowledge into more effective classroom instruction.

Ross and Gray (2004) examined the link between leadership and perceived collective teacher efficacy, identifying leadership behaviors as sources that affect efficacy beliefs. Encouraging collaboration and fostering teacher participation in decision making

were found to be critical behaviors that principals can employ. In 2006, they found that schools with transformational leadership had higher CTE, a greater commitment to the school mission, and higher student achievement.

In a study documenting the link between collective efficacy and high school achievement, Goddard, LoGerfo, and Hoy (2004) suggested that high levels of collective efficacy are found in groups that share organizational decision-making powers. The researchers studied successful high schools, focusing on 12th grade achievement on standardized tests and found that collective efficacy remained a significant positive predictor of student performance across all content areas. Goddard (2002) indicated that the more teachers are given the power to influence school decisions concerning the instructional program, the greater their levels of perceived collective efficacy. Similarly, Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, and Gray (2003) found that teacher ownership of school processes strongly predicted teacher efficacy.

Demir (2008) studied 66 elementary schools in Turkey to investigate the relationship between transformational leadership and collective efficacy. Using surveys, he concluded that collective efficacy is influenced by an individual's self efficacy. In addition, when the principal encourages collaboration it is likely to increase collective teacher efficacy.

Jahnke's study (2010) investigated the relationship between active principal supervision and individual teacher efficacy. She surveyed middle school teachers from eight high-achieving schools in the Midwest and found that a commitment to teaching is influenced by the principal through enhancing personal efficacy. She suggested that an important factor in teacher success is making sure teachers believe the principal supports teachers' efforts in educating the students in their classroom. When teachers feel

supported by principals in this way, collective efficacy increases. This increase in efficacy combined with a focus on student achievement establishes academic press.

Academic Press

The concept of academic press brings together the framework of collective efficacy and the importance of student achievement. Hoy et al. (2002) defined academic press as:

the extent of which the school is driven by a quest for academic excellence. In such schools, teachers set high but achievable goals; they believe in the capacity of their students to succeed; and students, teachers, and principals all respect academic achievement and work for success. (p. 79).

Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy (2000) suggested that teachers who work in a school with high academic press are more likely to vary their instructional strategies, plan lessons to address to various learning styles, and provide feedback to students on their progress. Teachers in schools with high academic press also demonstrate behaviors that build efficacy including collaborating with colleagues and pursuing professional development. Hoy et al. (2002) contend that the academic press of a school “may positively affect numerous teacher behaviors that tend to increase student achievement” (p. 81).

Naumann (2008) agreed that when teachers are committed to strong academic performance, social and environmental pressures may push them to increase their efforts. Her research investigated the collective efficacy of Texas middle school teachers. This study revealed that the middle school in the case study did not have the opportunity

develop strong academic press due to the frequent changes in leadership and the lack of a reported collective efficacy from the teachers.

Effective schools create academic press by maintaining high standards and expectations with a focus on continuous improvement. It is the responsibility of the instructional leader to align the school's practices with its mission and create a climate that supports teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2003). A handful of studies have identified leadership practices that are likely to increase academic press including: developing shared goals, promoting professional development, providing feedback on instruction, and protecting instructional time (Alig-Mielcreek, 2003; Jacob, 2004; Jurewicz, 2004). Goddard et. al (2000) found increases in academic achievement when academic press scores were increased; a 16 point gain in mathematics achievement and an 11 point gain in reading achievement on standardized tests.

Alig-Mielcreek (2003) also studied academic press with regards to collective efficacy and school leadership, collecting data from 146 elementary schools in Ohio. She surveyed teachers using an instructional leadership inventory and found a positive effect on student achievement through the academic press of the school. More specifically, she identified a direct effect on student achievement in both mathematics and reading at the elementary level.

Instructional leaders that promote academic press provide support for increasing the effectiveness of their buildings. They are attentive to school policies, highlight best practices, and maintain clear expectations. These factors work together to create an academic environment experienced by teachers and students. This presses the participants in the school to strive to do well in school.

Teachers who work in a school with high academic press are more likely to use a variety of instructional strategies, plan lessons to meet different learning styles, monitor and provide feedback on student progress, collaborate with colleagues, and pursue professional learning opportunities (Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000).

Effective Leadership and Student Achievement

Terry (1996) stated that schools that succeed “are invariably led by a principal who is recognized as an instructional leader” (p.3). So what are the behaviors that principals demonstrate to influence student achievement? Studies over the last 30 years suggested that student achievement increases when certain instructional leadership practices are implemented.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) found that the effects of leadership on student learning are small but educationally significant, explaining about three to five percent of the variation in student learning across schools, nearly one-quarter of the total effect of all school factors. In fact, they found that leadership is second only to the effects of the quality of curriculum and the instruction of the classroom teacher. Leaders influence student learning indirectly by helping to promote a vision and goals and by ensuring that resources and processes are in place to enable teachers to teach well (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). School leaders influence learning by focusing efforts on ambitious goals and establishing conditions that support teachers and help students succeed (Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) specifically identified twenty-one leadership responsibilities that impact student learning, many of which connect to the

practices of the instructional leader. Waters et al. also state the importance of instructional management through curriculum, assessment, and instruction, allocating resources, and possessing content knowledge. The study also recognized the need for direction-setting through communication, serving as a change agent, demonstrating flexibility, and displaying situational awareness.

Summary

The review of literature presents a case that principal leadership practices contribute to the success of the elementary schools. Furthermore, the research shows that some Pennsylvania public schools have made strong academic progress despite numerous challenges; these schools should be studied as exemplars of collective efficacy. With few leadership studies focusing on Blue Ribbon Award winners, this study will fill a gap in the existing research. Since these institutions are already recognized for their accomplishments, further investigation of leadership in these institutions is warranted. Insight into the leadership practices of elementary principals with administrative responsibility for Blue Ribbon Schools could identify key characteristics and possible trends in successful leadership during this era of accountability.

The exploratory nature of this study suggests the need for a qualitative approach. The next chapter will describe the methods and procedures that were used to gather information from the elementary principals of Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Schools.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology and procedures used to explore the perceptions of principals in Pennsylvania who have been successful in earning the Blue Ribbon School designation for their elementary schools. This case study focused on the leadership behaviors and experiences of three elementary principals in an era of high-stakes accountability with a focus on student achievement as measured by the PSSA. The chapter begins with a rationale for the use of qualitative methods. A brief review of qualitative research and its history will be presented. The following sections of this chapter include a discussion of the research design, the sample selection, setting, instrumentation, and data collection procedures.

Qualitative Research

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of elementary principals regarding their leadership of Blue Ribbon schools, a qualitative approach was employed. This is an appropriate method considering the exploratory nature of this study. Qualitative researchers describe how to make sense of their world and assign meaning to those experiences (Merriam, 2009), providing rich data about real-life people and situations. Creswell (2009) suggested the use of qualitative research because of the need to present a detailed view of the topic while studying individuals in their natural setting. It is the intent of this researcher to describe the perceived leadership practices of elementary principals in an effort to uncover commonalities among the successful leaders of Blue Ribbon schools in Pennsylvania.

History of Qualitative Research

As early as the 1930s and 1940s, prominent researchers began to utilize a qualitative approach. Waller (1932) employed descriptive data to analyze the social interactions between students and teachers. Through her field work, Mead (1942) studied schools through observation in an effort to improve teaching. Becker (1952) implemented qualitative interviews to collect data on Chicago school teachers in the 1950s. While the studies focused on teaching and learning, these early researchers were anthropologists and sociologists. Educational researchers began practicing qualitative strategies in the 1960s. Many scholars debated the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative research through the 1970s and 1980s, with the approach being more accepted by the 1990s. Currently, qualitative research is widely accepted in all fields.

Case Study

Qualitative inquiry answers how or what rather than why, while exploring a topic in-depth (Creswell, 2009). Within qualitative research, there are five major types: phenomenology, ethnography, case study research, grounded theory, and historical research. Case study is an appropriate method for obtaining information regarding the motivations and habits of individuals in the workplace (Berg, 2004), which is why this exploratory study is based in case study research. According to Yin (2003), a case study is considered when the focus of the study is to answer “how” questions, uncovering conditions relevant to the phenomenon under study. The case study is most appropriate when the researcher seeks to provide a detailed description of a subject using a variety of sources, such as interviews, observations, and documents (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Yin, 2003).

This study investigated the kinds of leadership practices implemented in Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Schools and how accountability pressures affect school leadership. Seidman (1998) explained that the primary way a researcher investigates an educational organization is through the experience of people who make up that organization. As the leader of a school organization, the principal has experiences to share.

One way to explore the experiences of people is through interviewing. Hatch (2002) described formal interviews as being “structured, semi-structured or in-depth,” in that the researcher is in charge of the interview, an established time has been set, and the interview is recorded. With structured interviews, there is little variation in responses and few open-ended questions included in the interview guide. Questioning is standardized with the ordering and phrasing of the questions kept consistent from interview to interview. The goal of an in-depth interview is to elicit rich, detailed material that can be used in analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) and are often characterized by extensive open-ended questions. Semi-structured interviews in qualitative studies are open-ended, have a flexible structure, and flows more like conversation (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). By taking a semi-structured approach in gathering similar information from multiple principals, the researcher was able to obtain an in-depth look at the leadership practices of the participants (Berg, 2004).

This study focused on elementary principals in Pennsylvania whose schools have been awarded the Blue Ribbon designation. Interviewing is an appropriate technique when past events are being studied and “when conducting case studies of a few selected individuals” (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). Only a limited number of Pennsylvania elementary

schools met the criteria for this study, so interviewing the awardees is a particularly appropriate method. Establishing validity in any type of research is important. Several approaches were used to ensure validity in this study. The following section describes those approaches.

Triangulation

There are several types of triangulation used in qualitative research. Denzin (1978) has identified four basic types of triangulation: (1) data triangulation, (2) investigator triangulation, (3) theory triangulation, and (4) methodological triangulation. One of the more common forms employed is data triangulation in which different data sources are used. Some qualitative researchers have argued that the term validity is not applicable to qualitative research; many recognize the need for some kind of qualifying check for their research. Johnson (1997) explained that if the validity or trustworthiness in qualitative research can be maximized, then the credibility and defensibility of the results would be increased. In an effort to maximize the validity of this study, the researcher chose three methods of data collection to achieve triangulation and improve the validity and reliability of the study--semi-structured, in-depth interviews, artifact analysis, and a review of existing data.

To further illustrate how qualitative researchers can check the accuracy of their findings, Creswell (2009) described eight methods including: triangulation, rich and thick description, member checks, clarifying researcher bias, peer review, negative case analysis, external audits, and observation. In this study, the researcher gathered information from multiple sources, attempting to provide a thorough and rich description of the cases. The researcher used member checks to verify the data. Using multiple

methods enabled the researcher to collect information and triangulate the data to confirm findings.

Participants

Participants in this study were elementary principals currently leading Blue Ribbon schools in the state of Pennsylvania. An elementary school, for the purpose of this study, was defined as any public school providing an education to students in any grade configuration involving students in grades 3-6 (K-3, K-5, 4-6, etc.).

This qualitative study used purposeful sampling, as this group of participants was constructed to serve a very specific purpose, investigating the leadership of Blue Ribbon Schools. As a first step in the selection process, assessment data from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and data gathered from the United States Department of Education (USDOE) regarding Blue Ribbon Awards was used to identify elementary principals whose leadership may have contributed to the honor of being designated a Blue Ribbon School. A list of Blue Ribbon Schools was obtained from the Department of Education website highlighting Blue Ribbon status from 2003-2010. This initial search revealed 80 Blue Ribbon awards in the state of Pennsylvania during that time period.

After a review of the 80 schools, the researcher identified 63 that were at the elementary level. Of the 63 elementary schools, 49 were public with 15 others being parochial schools or specialized academies. By narrowing the pool by school level, school type, and region, 12 participants met the inclusion criteria. To further refine the pool, only principals whose schools continue to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) benchmarks on state assessments were considered for inclusion. Schools not continuing

to meet academic benchmarks were eliminated since the purpose of this study was to find successful schools that continue to make gains in student achievement.

Further analysis was needed to determine the number of principals who were still in their position since the school was awarded a Blue Ribbon. Upon informal research of school district websites, the researcher identified two potential participants who retired and four others who moved onto other schools or were promoted to superintendent level positions. Participants were also limited to principals who had at least three years of experience in that leadership role before becoming a Blue Ribbon School. Those serving a minimum of three years presumably had applied leadership skills that stimulated the educational environment at their school site and student performance on the state assessment (Gieselmann, Fiene & Wagner, 2007). Furthermore, Fullan (1999) found that elementary schools can make academic improvements in three years. This process resulted in six potential participants, with three agreeing to participate.

Setting

This study was conducted within three different school districts in western Pennsylvania. Each district was within one hour of Pittsburgh. The exploration of leadership practices took place in locations preferable to the participants, with each participant inviting the researcher into her school to conduct the interviews. The opportunity to conduct the interviews within the principals' buildings contributed to the comfort and openness of the participants. By conducting the interviews within the participants' school settings, the researcher was also able to gather peripheral information about the schools and the principals' practices. Observing displays, reading materials in

the office, and viewing interactions of the principals with others provided additional information to the researcher.

Instrumentation

As a result of the literature review, a semi-structured interview guide was constructed by the researcher to advance the understanding of principal perceptions about leadership and student achievement in this era of accountability. Initial interview questions allowed the participants to share information about their educational and professional background. The remaining sections of the question guide came from the topics that were continually referred to in the literature.

As discussed in Chapter 2, instructional leadership continues to be a prominent leadership style. A series of questions addressed Hallinger's three dimensions of instructional leadership: (1) defining the school's mission, (2) managing the instructional program, and (3) promoting school climate. Accountability pressure for student achievement on state tests was also a strand within the literature, so questions focused on principal's responses to these pressures and any changes that these pressures have had on their work as school leaders. Within the literature, a growing body of research on Blue Ribbon Schools also exists, which provided a foundation for questions in this area. The guiding questions concluded with summarizing questions and an opportunity for participants to contribute additional information.

Hatch (2002) recommended that guiding questions be prepared in advance of the interview to steer the conversation. The semi-structured interview protocol allowed for spontaneous reactions and ideas with regards to the leadership practices of each principal. Planned questions allowed the interviewer the opportunity to follow new leads while also

demonstrating thorough preparation. Since the researcher only intended to interview each participant once, careful consideration was taken with designing the guiding questions.

The guiding questions for the interview were field-tested by three principals who were not involved in the study prior to the actual interviews. Field-testing interview questions with a group of participants is similar to that of a focus group and provides the interviewer with opportunities to improve the guiding questions before the actual interview and assisted the researcher in determining weaknesses or limitations within the interview design (Kvale, 2007). This also allowed the researcher to make necessary revisions prior to interviewing actual participants for the study. Turner (2010) recommended that a field test be conducted with participants who have similar interests as those who will participate in the implemented study. Each elementary principal volunteering in the field test served as a principal for at least three years, obtaining experience with Pennsylvania assessments and the accountability facing public school leaders. In addition, each principal earned an advanced degree in leadership, aligning his/her interests with the topic of this study.

Each preliminary interview was conducted over the telephone and lasted between 30-40 minutes. These volunteers provided immediate and specific feedback regarding the structure of the questions, the order of the questions, and areas that were unclear. Questions were modified after each field test to gain greater clarity, deeper responses, and improved interviewer techniques. The interview guide contained 22 open-ended questions and can be found in Appendix C.

Guiding questions for the interviews also align with the research questions for this study. Aside from the opening demographic questions and final summarizing questions, each subsection of questions connected to one of the research questions. This alignment is demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Alignment of Guiding and Research Questions

Guiding questions	Topic	Research question
<p>How would you describe your school?</p> <p>Please describe the professional collaboration processes in your school.</p> <p>What factors do you believe contribute to becoming a successful school leader?</p> <p>How are the accomplishments of students celebrated in your school?</p>	School Climate	(3) How do principals from Blue Ribbon Schools describe their roles in the school mission, the instructional program, and the school climate?
<p>What are your primary responsibilities as an elementary principal?</p> <p>How would you characterize your role in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Defining the school mission? b. Managing the instructional program? c. Promoting a positive school Climate? (Hallinger, 1995) <p>In your view, what does it mean to be an instructional leader?</p>	Instructional Leadership	(3) How do principals from Blue Ribbon Schools describe their roles in the school mission, The instructional program, and the school climate?
<p>Has your focus as a principal changed since you entered administration? If so, how?</p> <p>How has NCLB and the increasing AYP</p>	Accountability	(1) What is the perceived influence of NCLB and AYP on the self-reported leadership behaviors

benchmarks affected your role as a principal?

of elementary principals from Blue Ribbon Schools?

How does data-driven decision making influence student achievement in your School?

What strategies have you implemented for monitoring student achievement?

With 2014 approaching, what will be different in the next few years, as opposed to the last few years?

What existing or new structures and programs are in place to reach these goals?

In what ways do you encourage collective efficacy?

Theoretical Framework

(3) How do principals from Blue Ribbon Schools describe their roles in the school mission, the instructional program, and the school climate?

Describe the opportunities that your teachers have to engage in:

- a. Action research projects
- b. Study groups
- c. Peer observations
- d. Walkthroughs

What are the steps in becoming a Blue Ribbon School?

Blue Ribbon Schools

(2) What are the perceptions of elementary principals regarding their leadership practices and the possible contributions they make to the overall success of their Blue Ribbon Schools?

What was your role in the Blue Ribbon process?

How did the Blue Ribbon designation impact your teachers? The school climate?

Procedures

In the fall of 2010, a list of Blue Ribbon Schools was obtained from the Department of Education website, as well as the corresponding PSSA scores from those schools. This began the process of participant selection as described earlier in this chapter. In addition to this review, information was also gathered from existing public sources to determine the current status of Pennsylvania achievement, as well as data from other high-achieving states. This information was presented in the introduction of this research.

In February of 2011, the initial protocol for this study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Upon minor revisions, the final approval for this research was granted in March 2011.

In the summer of 2011, potential participants were contacted by phone. During these calls, the study was briefly explained and all participant questions were answered. Potential participants were then sent a letter of introduction (Appendix A) and the informed consent form (Appendix B). Once all of the informed consent forms were received, individual participants were contacted to schedule a date, time and location for a one-hour face-to-face interview. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher and reviewed by the participant before being analyzed.

All data collection was completed during the fall of 2011, with all data sources placed in secure storage and locked in the researcher's home office. Only the principal investigator and her faculty sponsor had access to this data. In accordance with federal regulations, all data will be maintained in a locked file for three years.

Data Collection

The goal of the data collection was to gather information about the participants and their schools, discuss how each participant perceived her leadership practices, and explore the impact of leadership on student achievement in this age of accountability. The data collection phase was conducted over several months in the late summer and fall of 2011. Data were collected for this study using one research instrument, relevant artifacts, and several archived data sources.

The interview transcriptions were analyzed in two stages. First, the data were analyzed manually by the researcher, who initially looking for categories to emerge and answers to research questions. Relevant quotes and information were highlighted and noted by the researcher. Coding categories were generated by examining the themes found within the various data sources. Lastly, data were entered into NVivo 9 software to assist with organization and data analysis. Since qualitative research often involves the analysis of any unstructured material, qualitative research software enabled the researcher to shape and make sense of the information. This tool was also used for classifying, sorting and arranging information, identifying themes, and developing meaningful conclusions. A discussion of the data sources are described more fully in the following sections.

Review of Existing Data

In order to determine potential participants for this study, a review of existing data was needed. Information regarding Blue Ribbon Schools and PSSA data are public and were accessed using public websites. A list of Blue Ribbon schools was obtained to determine the award-winning schools around the Pittsburgh area. PSSA data was

obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of Education web site to determine if the initial schools have continued to meet AYP. One school was eliminated, as their test scores had not met increasing AYP benchmarks. It was important to focus on schools that have sustained success and retained their Blue Ribbon leaders.

Existing data were also extracted from various public websites. School district websites provided information regarding each school and school district. Additional information was collected on the schools through other public databases and clearinghouses. Demographic data about each school and pertinent district information are presented in the next chapter.

Interviews

The primary data collection method for this study was face-to-face interviews with support from existing data and artifacts collected at each site. Each interview was scheduled for 60 minutes and was conducted in the school location where the principal was assigned. Prior to the interview, the researcher reviewed the purpose of the study with each participant and obtained the signed consent form. The researcher answered any outstanding questions related to the study.

Interviews with each principal allowed the researcher to get the story behind each participant's experience. McCracken (1988) suggested that the interview format uses prompts which give structure to the interview and allow the participant to use her own voice to relate experiences in an individual fashion. Gall et al. (2003) stated:

The major advantage of interviews is their adaptability. Skilled interviewers can follow up a respondent's answers to obtain more information and clarify vague responses. They can also build trust and rapport with respondents, making it

possible to obtain information that the individual might not reveal by any other data-collection method (p. 153).

The guiding questions were designed to begin with several general questions regarding the participant's schooling and how she became a principal. The purpose of these questions was to gain background information and serve as a means to put participants at ease. Follow-up probing questions were used when clarification was needed or to engage more deeply in a topic. The researcher took notes during the interviews which included questions that arose for the researcher, areas for clarification, and key words and phrases. The researcher ended each interview by asking the participants if there was anything else that was not addressed in the interview that they believed was critical to their success.

The conversations from each interview were transcribed by the researcher. Within one week of the interview, the researcher e-mailed the interview transcript to each participant for review. Each interviewee was given the opportunity to review and verify the accuracy of the documentation from the interviews. A transcription of each interview was e-mailed to the respective respondent seeking clarification of the accuracy of the interview. All interviews were audio-taped, allowing the researcher to take notes and guide the participants to discuss areas in more depth. After each interview, the researcher reviewed the tapes as well as the notes taken during the interview to consider what main themes emerged. Clustering themes and categories was an on-going process which was repeated by the researcher throughout the data-gathering process.

While a single interview may not yield the depth of results provided through other qualitative approaches (Patten 2002), carefully crafted open-ended questions allowed for

principals to fully share their individual perspectives, freely and reflectively. In conjunction with pre-existing data and relevant artifacts, the single interview captured the story of each participant and provided an in-depth perspective on leadership.

Review of Blue Ribbon Documents

The use of documents is also an appropriate form of data when constructing case studies. Documents “corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (Yin, 2003, p. 87). During each interview, the principals shared information and documents that related to the Blue Ribbon Award. Participants also shared their written applications to the Blue Ribbon Program. The Blue Ribbon application process included a thorough 15 to 20-page document that principals were required to complete. Along with providing demographic information and a general summary of the school, the applicants provided a detailed description of their indicators of academic success. These indicators will be described in Chapter 4. The applications also included a comprehensive account of the school curriculum, programs, and instructional strategies. A section of each application also provided information regarding the professional development and school leadership in each building. Lastly, the Blue Ribbon application required that principals indicate their current assessment results, as well as a longitudinal look at PSSA scores over the previous 4 years. Newspaper articles and publications describing the work of the principals were also shared. These items were used to confirm the data collected and were only taken or copied with permission from the principal.

Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research, it is important to protect the participants, as well as the research process. The researcher conducting this study took precautionary measures to

address the ethical issues that commonly arise in qualitative research. This study was designed to eliminate as much as possible risk to participants by disclosing the purpose of the study, seeking voluntary participants, and assuring their confidentiality. Written permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the individual participants. Strategies “such as triangulation, member checks, use of rich, thick description” (Meriam, 2002, p. 30) provide evidence that an ethical study was conducted. The identification of participants and their schools was not made public. Instead, an alphabetical system was used to refer to individual participants and their schools. Field notes and audio files of the sessions were also labeled using the alphabetical coding system rather than the actual names of participants. Artifacts gathered from each participant were labeled using the researcher’s coding system. At no time did anyone besides the researcher and her faculty sponsor have access to this data. In accordance with federal regulations, all data will be maintained in a locked file in the principal investigator’s home office for three years.

While familiar with her own experiences as a principal, the researcher continued to maintain an open acceptance of the view of others regarding their instructional leadership throughout the study. The researcher also had no supervisory responsibility over any of the participants in the study. These factors helped to protect the participants and the research process in this study.

Summary

Chapter 3 focused on the methodology and rationale for the research design for this case study on instructional leadership. This chapter provided a rationale for the use

of qualitative methods and an argument for why this was an appropriate method for this study. The chapter described the qualitative research conducted in order to explore school leadership. It described the participants, setting, and interview procedures used throughout this qualitative study. In addition, the ethical considerations were described. The study investigated the leadership behaviors that are present in elementary principals currently leading award-winning schools. In Chapter 4 results are presented and the data are analyzed.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents emerging themes and supportive data from individual interview sessions with building principals, the review of existing data, and an artifact analysis, while analyzing common distinctions within the data. The interviews with the participants are classified according to the various elements of the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) in an effort to gain an understanding of how this leadership framework may influence the practices of elementary principals. The presence of significant themes may suggest that the leaders of Blue Ribbon Schools possess many traits of instructional leaders and develop a sense of collective teacher efficacy despite accountability pressures that exist today.

Data Analysis

Data were gathered through qualitative methods in this study. Through interviews, artifact analysis, and a review of existing public data, the researcher explored the perceptions of principals in three award-winning schools. The collection of student achievement data and a list of Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Schools were completed online using public resources. The PSSA scores for each elementary Blue Ribbon school were reviewed to determine which schools have maintained AYP since their Blue Ribbon designation. The schools that met these criteria were invited to participate in the study.

As Merriam (2009) suggested, “the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection” (p. 162). This process enabled the researcher to look for patterns while collecting data. Wiersma (2000) explained data analysis in qualitative research is a process of categorization, description, and synthesis.

These tasks occurred repeatedly throughout the data collection and analysis process. During this time, the researcher made sense out of what was revealed and categorized the data into groups of information (Creswell, 2007). Merriam (1998) expressed that, “devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study’s purpose, the investigator’s orientation and knowledge and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves” (p. 179).

The process for analyzing the data in this study followed several steps. The transcripts for each individual interview were read twice by the researcher before being returned to the participant for review. At this time, a preliminary list of categories was developed. The transcripts were reread and coded using the themes and categories that emerged. In an effort to manage the data, the researcher created and organized a file for each participant containing the transcriptions from each interview, the researcher’s interview notes, as well as copies of any relevant documents that volunteers shared during the interviews.

All relevant documents were then uploaded into the NVivo 9 software program. Whereas statistical software manipulates numbers, qualitative software manipulates words. This program was used to analyze the words from each source: existing data sources, interview transcripts, and relevant artifacts. The researcher used the program to code the text, highlighting information and assigning categories. The program sorted and grouped the data so that similar statements were displayed together. NVivo 9 was also used to organize data (interviews, observations, etc.) and link them with researcher’s notes and codes.

From these analyses, four primary categories emerged: organization and operations, roles and relationships, data-driven practices, and an instructional leadership model. Many of these strands were also prominent within the literature review. Each category was evident within the Blue Ribbon documents and being discussed in some capacity during each interview.

Analysis in NVivo 9

The interview transcriptions and other documents were coded using “nodes,” NVivo’s title for representing characteristics. The responses that were coded to the nodes were examined to look for other themes within the nodes of management and operations, roles and relationships, data-driven practices, and instructional leadership. After further analysis of the categories, additional sub-categories surfaced within the four primary categories. Diagrams were then generated by NVivo9 to provide a graphical representation of the relationship of the primary nodes, titled “parent node” and sub-nodes or “child node.”

The tree map in Figure 1 represents the items coded in each node. This figure shows the primary nodes titled at the top of each rectangle. Within each larger node, smaller areas represent the sub-nodes that were added as a result of subsequent reviews of the passages that were initially coded. The proportion of each part of the tree map provides evidence as to the number of items coded within the analysis. The use of these diagrams allowed the researcher to examine the parent-child relationships of all the coding nodes and sub-nodes. For example, within the instructional leadership model managing the instructional program and promoting school climate were much more prevalent than defining the school mission, with these sections of the tree maps being

much larger. While roles and relationships were evidenced throughout the analysis, connections to collective efficacy made up over half of the sub-nodes within that parent node and a smaller proportion devoted to items related to shared leadership, as shown in the middle rectangle of the tree map.

Nodes compared by number of items coded

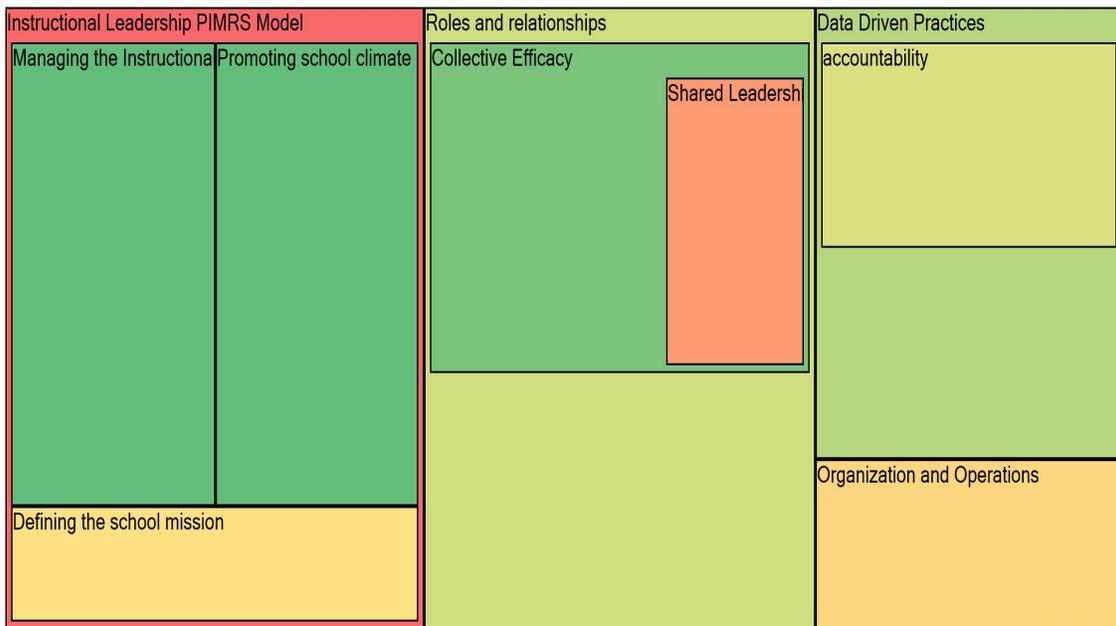


Figure 1. Tree map of nodes by number of items coded

The relationship between all of the nodes was also revealed through the analysis. Figure 2 represents the interconnectedness of each node and sub-node, demonstrating the hierarchy of the four parent nodes and the sub-nodes that were found within each broader category. As in Figure 1, organization and operations appear to play a minor role in effective leadership. This node did not prove to connect in many ways to the other nodes discovered in this research.

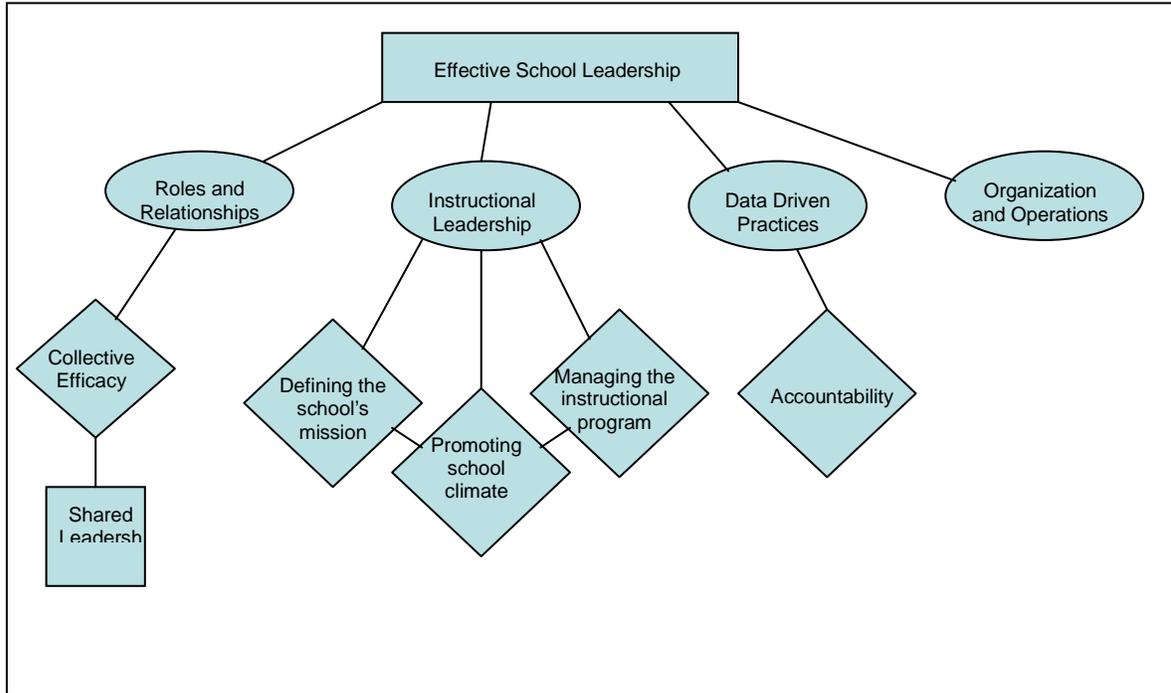


Figure 2. Concept map of parent and child nodes

Throughout the analysis, some sources were found to provide more powerful evidence than others, which is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Figure 3 provides a diagram created in NVivo 9 to represent the items coded within the node for roles and relationships. Analysis of this node revealed the strength of the interviews of Principals A and B with regards to roles and relationships. The Blue Ribbon applications also demonstrate more evidence in this characteristic than with Principal C. This same trend was also evident within the nodes of instructional leadership, school climate, and collective efficacy. Conversely, Principal C demonstrated strength within the organization and operations node.

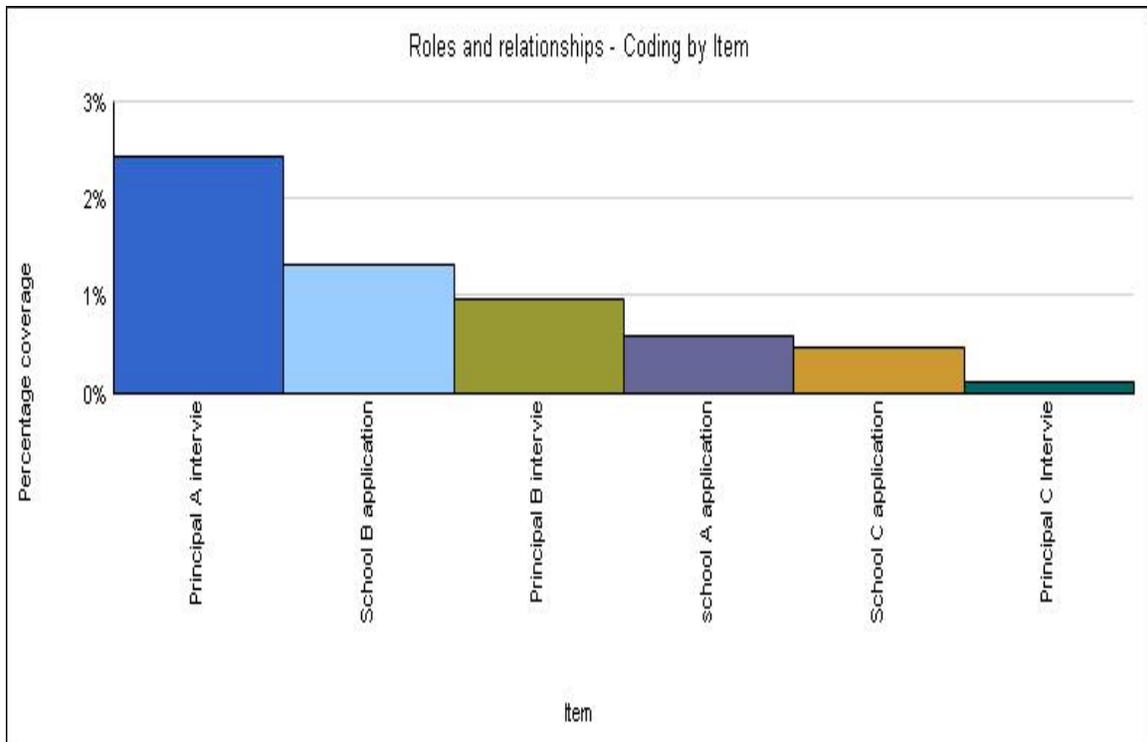


Figure 3. Roles and relationships-coding by item

Once all the interviews were coded, additional reports were generated using NVivo 9 to illustrate which files, including interviews and other artifacts, were coded to each sub-node. The last step in the analysis of the coding was to examine the frequency of coding to each sub-node, allowing the researcher to examine which sub-nodes were coded the most. Managing the instructional program and promoting school climate had the highest number of coding references, words, and paragraphs throughout all three data sources. Organization and operations and shared leadership had the fewest references within the analysis of interview transcripts, Blue Ribbon applications, and other relevant documents.

Table 3

Node Summary

Source	Number of Sources	Number of coding references	Number of coded words	Number of coded paragraphs
Data-driven practices	4	19	378	19
Accountability	4	16	328	16
Defining the school mission	3	12	334	12
Managing the instructional program	6	26	547	25
Promoting school climate	6	26	606	28
Organization and operations	3	11	252	11
Roles and relationships	6	17	318	17
Collective efficacy	5	24	364	24
Shared leadership	3	5	140	5

Data Sites

This study focused on three principals of Blue Ribbons Schools in Western Pennsylvania. It was important to consider the general information about each school and the background information pertaining to each participant. The following sections present information that serves as a foundation for this analysis.

School A is in a district comprised of two townships within a 14.6 square mile area with a population of nearly 40,000 people. When the school was awarded the Blue Ribbon, it was a K-5 building with approximately 235 students and 18 full-time teachers. The student demographics included 95% Caucasian, 2% African American, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% Hispanic. Twelve percent of the student population was considered to be low income and therefore qualified for free or reduced lunch.

The principal of this building has been in education for 30 years and 16 years in the district. Her teaching experience began in the parochial school system. While teaching in a parochial school, she also worked in the field of social service. Her public school work began in her current district as an Instructional Support Teacher (IST) and behavioral specialist, providing both academic and behavioral interventions to elementary students. After obtaining her master's degree and principal certification, she began working as an elementary principal and has remained in this role for the last 9 years. These data are also represented in Tables 3 and 4.

School B is in a district serving two cities north of Pittsburgh with a population of about 18,000. When the school was awarded the Blue Ribbon, it was a K-3 building with approximately 200 students and 12 full-time teachers. The student demographics included 51% Caucasian, 47% African American, and 2% Hispanic. 75% of the population of School B was considered to be low income.

The principal was a classroom teacher for 15 years, then worked as a counselor and instructional support teacher for two additional years. She served as a middle school assistant principal for one year before becoming the principal of her current school for the last 19 years.

School C is in a district serving three communities with approximately 18,000 residents. District enrollment is approximately 2500 students K-12. When the school was awarded the Blue Ribbon, the building served 92 K-5 students with seven full-time teachers. The student demographics included 91% Caucasian and 9% African American. Thirty-seven percent of the population was considered to be low income.

The principal has been in education for 38 years with most of that time spent as a classroom teacher in the intermediate grades 4, 5, and 6. She became the principal of the school where she taught approximately 8 years ago and remains in that position.

Table 4

School Information

	School configuration	Local population	Student enrollment	Socio-economic status
School A	K-5	40,000	235	12% low income
School B	K-3	18,000	200	75% low income
School C	K-5	18,000	95	37% low income

Table 5

Student Demographics

	African-American	Asian-Pacific Islander	Caucasian	Hispanic
School A	2	2	95	1
School B	47	0	51	2
School C	9	0	91	0

Note: all values are presented as percentages

Demographic Information

Six demographic questions were considered concerning the subjects' (1) gender, (2) ethnicity, (3) highest level of education obtained, (4) number of years as a classroom teacher, (5) primary subject taught as a classroom teacher, and (6) total overall years as an administrator.

All of the participants were females, with one being African-American and two Caucasian. All earned their master's degree and their principal certification. When asked about the number of years as a classroom teacher, experience ranged from 15-29 years, with a mean of 22 years of teaching experience. One of the participants was a teacher of core subjects such as reading, mathematics, science, and social studies. The other two provided academic and behavioral support through counseling and instructional support positions. Administrative experience as a principal ranged from 9-19 years, as presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Participant Demographic Information

	Gender	Ethnicity	Highest level of education obtained	Number of years as a classroom teacher	Primary subject taught as a classroom teacher	Number of years as a principal
Principal A	Female	Caucasian	Masters Degree	21	Instructional Support-Elementary	9
Principal B	Female	African American	Masters Degree	15	Counseling K-12, Instructional Support-Elementary	19
Principal C	Female	Caucasian	Masters Degree	29	Intermediate grades-Elementary	9

Findings

Various findings were revealed through the analysis of data. This process explored how principals perceived their leadership practices and the possible contribution this has to earning a Blue Ribbon. In addition, the analysis also explored the pressures of academic accountability and the ways that collective teacher efficacy were supported in each building.

An examination of the data focused on the commonalities of participant responses and how they might transfer to an understanding of the needs of all principals. The results identified the importance of four primary categories: management and operations,

roles and relationships, data-driven practices, and an instructional leadership model. These themes are discussed within each research question in the sections that follow.

Research Question 1

The first research question for this study focused on the perceived influence of NCLB and AYP on leadership behaviors. The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) has set benchmarks for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for all public schools. Overwhelming accountability pressure from this legislation has changed the way schools are implementing programs and the ways that leaders are running their schools (Englert, Fries, Goodwin, Martin-Glenn, & Michael, 2004; Guskey, 2007). Alignment to state standards and the use of multiple measures of academic performance are the reality in public school today. Building principals are called upon to increase student achievement and base decisions on student data (Ylimaki, Jacobson, & Drysdale, 2007).

The participants acknowledged the remarkable shift towards accountability, particularly within the last five years. Many discussed the changes that they have made to their leadership as well as the way that accountability pressures are felt within the public school system. A sense of focus and responsibility was evident throughout the discussions with each principal. “We’ve always been very kid-centered, but we really looked at the scores and changed how we taught. We really tried to do more hands-on activities. The kids needed that, more than just concepts,” explained Principal A.

This focus on data-driven practices was found throughout the data analysis. With the ever-growing accountability pressures schools face, principals need to have experience looking at relevant data and creating a plan to address strengths and weaknesses. This was evident through Principal A’s work:

I really pushed data analysis before it became popular. We certainly didn't have all of the tools that we have now. We've always looked at PSSA scores, benchmarks, and standards. This district is exemplary for standardizing the curriculum. It provides very focused instruction. I think that is important to achievement.

While a plethora of data is available to schools, it cannot be assumed that teachers or principals are adept at analyzing this information and using it to improve classroom practice. School leaders need to be a part of this process. Principal A spoke about placing some responsibility onto her teachers to explore with new data tools and utilize the information to make adjustments to curriculum and instruction:

Part of what I do with every new tool that comes down; I don't necessarily digest everything and spit it out. Teachers have their own PVAAS log in. They go in, search, and print out reports. The teachers have taken on this responsibility. In math, it's like an inch deep and a mile wide, where it should be a mile deep and an inch wide. We needed to look at that and make some determinations.

This participant mentioned the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS) an online data tool used to provide school districts with information regarding student growth on state assessments. Districts can make instructional decisions to ensure the academic achievement of their students, analyzing their trajectory towards proficiency with the data shared through the PVAAS site, <https://pvaas.sas.com/evaas>.

As the accountability pressures build, effective principals recognize the need to make changes. The participants spoke about some of the things that were put into place within their schools to address the challenges of meeting AYP. Principal A reported that

teacher teams meet once a week to discuss the 4Sight and DIBELS scores. The 4 Sight is a benchmark assessment administered quarterly in Reading and Math for grades 3 to 11. Developed by the Success for All Foundation, the assessment intends to mirror the PSSA and provide an estimate of student performance on the PSSA. This diagnostic information is used by Pennsylvania school districts to guide classroom instruction and professional development efforts.

Another piece of data mentioned by this participant is the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). These are a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills from kindergarten through sixth grade. Administered three times per year, the results are used to evaluate individual student development as well as provide grade-level feedback toward instructional objectives.

Available data has changed over the last 10 years. Schools have access to a great deal of information to potentially guide their classroom instruction. Principal A went on to explain past practices in data analysis.

Now it's all electronic and on our data management system. Teachers can just go in and get the information. We've come a long way with that. Before, I'd be given the raw report. Then I'd divide it up and put it in Excel and give it to the teachers. Then they'd have to reflect on that. What did they do best in? Where did they do poorly?

Not only must principals have knowledge of these available tools and programs, but they must also be able to provide some level of guidance as teachers are expected to analyze and make sense of the data provided. When asked about her responsibility to accountability pressures one principal remarked, "I try to get to the grade level meetings

every week. The reading coaches and math coaches meet with the teachers. Hopefully it points to the areas you're weak in." When principals are actively involved in the data analysis process, teachers view them as active members of the academic improvement process. Some schools have instructional coaches and other leaders who are able to provide support in this area.

At the beginning of her principalship, Principal A recalled, "I remember a parent saying to me, 'scores are important to you, but not to us.' So we started down that journey of becoming partners with parents." She described this change as being very gradual. Changing the school focus and pulling parents into that process required a lot of effort on the part of the principal and the teachers. "Fridays were 'flashcard Fridays.' We had parents come in and work on sight words and sounds with students in K, 1, and 2. We really tried to bridge those partnerships."

Not only did the participants describe the implementation of instructional strategies within their discussion of accountability pressures, but also the changes in the structure of their buildings and the way that standardized testing is now approached. Principal C described the things that she perceived to make the difference in test scores in her building. She felt strongly that this approach allowed her school to meet the increasing AYP benchmarks.

As far as the strategies, I tried to put as much support in the reading and math classes as I could. So if there was a class of 17, I had three teachers in there. Somebody would do whole group instruction and then would break off into groups, trying to remediate. The smaller the groups, the better it was. Three times a year we give the benchmarks and those reflect the PSSA. Teachers

should be sitting together going over the data. We didn't do a lot of that before (prior to the Blue Ribbon being awarded).

In School B, the approach focused more on data analysis and classroom observation. "We take a lot of time to review the PSSA test; we look at where their weaknesses are and plan different lessons so that we can be on point for the next test." When asked specifically about her role in this process, she stated, "I'll go into a classroom and not just to observe. I try to go into each classroom at least once a week. I need to find out what they're doing and have the children talk to me about what they're working on." This principal went on to describe the way that she facilitates this for teachers. "I have had teachers observing other teachers and collaborating on different things. I tell them, if you want to, you can observe a lesson and I'll watch your class." This strategy serves as a means for teachers to add to their repertoire of teaching strategies and discuss instruction with their peers.

Each participant also talked about the expectation of 100% proficiency by 2014. As this looming goal approaches, school leaders have a heightened awareness of increases in achievement needed in their schools. "The pressures are extraordinary. The expectations are phenomenal," Principal A explained:

There's much more pressure on test scores and that's unfortunate. It's not about kids. It's how we score. I just read an article about how they're going to use students' results to evaluate teachers. Boy, I think that's a big mistake. It's going to inspire a bunch of things that shouldn't happen.

The accountability pressures are felt at many levels. The principals described this effect on themselves, the teachers and the students. "There's a lot of pressure on

principals. There's going to be because of the testing," Principal B remarked. She went on to explain the impact she sees this having on her students:

Frankly, I think we're applying too much pressure on the 3rd graders. We're expecting a lot from them. I think the primary years should be the primary years. We should be teaching them the concepts they need to be successful (not testing them). But believe me, the children rise to the occasions.

Principal C agreed and took issue with the format of the testing, describing the inconsistency associated with testing all students on grade level. "So, that 5th grader who's reading at a second grade level, they're still taking a 5th grade test. How fair is that? And by 2014, they're all going to be magically cured." Another principal concurred, "Reaching that goal is setting us all up for failure; in all school districts. I'm really hoping that the state will really look at this and change things."

When asked what changes they foresee with the principalship in the next few years, each participant expressed concerns about accountability. Principal C explained:

I'm curious what we're going to do (when 2014 comes around). I mean, is the state going to take over every school? I'm not saying that we shouldn't try to get there, but there's always going to be that group of kids (who will not meet the increasing benchmarks).

The bottom line for each of the participants was the centrality of the students. "You always strive for student achievement. Earning a Blue Ribbon just wasn't first and foremost in our minds. It's about educating all of your kids." While accountability doesn't appear to be diminishing anytime soon, these principals recognize the pressure and have implemented strategies to focus on the priorities within their schools. These

priorities are further defined within the discussion of the instructional leadership model in research question 3 later in this chapter.

Research Question 2

This question highlighted the possible contributions school leaders make to the overall success of their Blue Ribbon Schools. Much of the information regarding this research question was obtained from a review of the Blue Ribbon applications. The application gathers information in the following categories: (1) student focus and support, (2) school organization and culture, (3) challenging standards and curriculum, (4) active teaching and learning, (5) professional community, (6) leadership and educational vitality, (7) school, family and community partnerships, and (8) indicators of success (USDOE, 2002).

Each participant spoke about her role in the application process and her responsibility for completing the requirements with the help of her teachers, refraining from taking any credit for the award. The application process actually begins with the Secretary of Education sending a letter to the Chief State School Officers (CSSO), the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), and the Council for American Private Education (CAPE) requesting the submission of information for nominated schools. The Department of Education then invites schools nominated to apply for recognition as National Blue Ribbon Schools. One of the principals described their initial invitation to apply for the Blue Ribbon award:

We got a letter and funny enough, I ignored the initial letter. They (the Department of Education) sent the letter and I really ignored it. I was under the impression that you had to be handicapped accessible and you had to have all these things, so I

thought, there's no way we're qualifying. I put the letter aside. They sent a second letter and I set that one aside too. Finally they sent a third one and said if you don't fill this out by November, then forget it. I called my supervisor and said, you know, I got this letter. He was like, "Are you kidding me that you ignored this?" So we really scrambled to get this together with the application, the cover sheet and the narrative. I was very lucky. There were a lot of people that had long histories with the school and they helped out. I also had a very supportive administration. They would have done anything for us to have gotten this!

Each principal detailed the rigor of the application and the data collection that was necessary to complete the lengthy process. The application to become a Blue Ribbon School requires that schools collect information regarding school demographics and longitudinal student achievement. They must also provide descriptions of school programs and supports available to students.

Within the application analysis, each school shared components of their school that they perceive contributed to their overall success. All three applications described programming within the school day that supported struggling students, often through Title I. Title I is part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and ensures that all children have a fair and equal opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. One of the program's primary goals is to close the achievement gap between high and low-performing children. This goal can be accomplished by targeting resources to make a difference in schools. In turn, Title I serves as a means for improving and strengthening accountability, teaching, and learning, and increasing achievement overall.

As a part of the application requirements, schools also reported their methods for using and communicating assessment results. This aligned to the data-driven concepts that were presented in the previous section. School C reported:

Presentation of the data occurs at an afternoon in-service during which the staff are provided the opportunity to discuss the data, compare standardized test results with the results of teacher-developed assessments, identify areas of weakness or inconsistencies, and develop action plans designed to meet individual or district needs. Additional half-day meetings are scheduled on a regular basis to continue the dialogue on data and to monitor and adjust previously made decisions.

School B described a strategy within their application that was not revealed within the interview regarding accountability and data-driven practices:

The school team analyzes the data by concept or area of concentration for flex grouping. By grouping the students according to areas of weaknesses for instruction, the teachers, specialists and coaches can provide the needed instruction to ensure all students succeed. Once the students are grouped as a whole, each student's test results are analyzed for growth, patterns, and weak areas. The team then utilizes the data to create and plan interventions for each student as needed. These interventions involve all members of the community.

While much of this study focused on the perceptions of principals regarding their own leadership, one portion of the application required that the district describe building leadership. This section provided insight into the contributions of each participant and her contribution to the Blue Ribbon award. School C's application conveyed:

The district's elementary configuration creates both opportunities and challenges and requires that the principal foster an atmosphere of shared leadership while continuing to be viewed as the educational leader. The shared decision-making process within the school is designed to increase staff autonomy, enhance the educational process, and create accountability among staff members. This blended approach to leadership offers greater flexibility to the teaching staff, which results in greater efficiency and a system that is more responsive to student needs.

The leadership in School B was described as:

Encouraging others to lead, try new things, and accept responsibility for all students. Strong leaders inspire others, create opportunities, and supply support for others to lead. Learning throughout the community is not only encouraged but expected as all strive for the best practices. Leadership is a shared entity as all take on leadership roles, implement and facilitate positive change.

Both descriptions highlight the need for a shared responsibility. The shared or distributive leadership model is one that contributes to collective teacher efficacy. This approach implies that teachers are a part of the decision-making process and involved in leadership tasks.

Within the application for School B, additional leadership responsibilities also included: "ensuring all district policies are followed, staying abreast of current educational trends, and building positive relationships with community, state, and federal educational partners." These characteristics also align with the components of the instructional leadership model that is discussed in more depth in the next section.

Research Question 3

This research question explored the way principals described their roles in the school mission, instructional program, and school climate within their Blue Ribbon Schools. As discussed in the literature review, many researchers identified principal instructional leadership as a key factor in successful schools (Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan & Lee, 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1995; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). A commonly-used tool to measure effective leadership is the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS), designed by Hallinger (1983). This tool focuses on three dimensions of leadership: *Defining the School's Mission, Managing the Instructional Program, and Promoting School Climate*.

Supovitz, Sirinides, and May (2010) concluded that principals who focus on instruction, foster a sense of community, and communicate the school mission and clear goals are associated with teachers who make changes in their instructional practice. These leaders foster an environment where teachers collaborate and engage in issues surrounding teaching and learning. Since NCLB calls for principals to utilize instructional leadership skills, it was important to analyze the presence of these skills in the practices of the participants. While each principal spoke about the importance of the school mission, the instructional program, and the school climate, principal involvement in these areas varied.

Mission and Vision

Many schools have changed directions in response to accountability pressures over the last 5-10 years. While the principals in this study did not speak frequently about the mission and vision, it became clear through our conversations. Principal A stated,

“We’ve always had the right focus” of being student-centered. She explained the decisions that she made early on in her principalship to make student learning a priority.

It was gradual. The Halloween party got whittled down. The content of our assemblies changed. I stressed quality over quantity. I said ‘I don’t want you to spend money to bring in 14 amusement acts’; these are the kinds of things that we want (support with building student skills and activities to enhance academics). We encouraged parents to come in and help us. We really tried to bridge those partnerships but yet on the other hand, we tried to keep the boundaries up too. It was about taking the school back, because previous to me coming there, the parents dictated what happened at the school. The parents ran the school. I’ll never forget that first year a parent came in with a letter. She said, here, sign this. She had my name at the bottom of the letter. I took it and read it and said, I really want to thank you for thinking about me and really trying to make my job easier but this is not what we’re focusing on this year.

The mission of the C School District was described in the Blue Ribbon application as the ability “to prepare all students to use their minds, talents, and abilities so that they may become independent responsible citizens, lifelong learners, and contributing members of society.” Their Blue Ribbon application disclosed:

It is the principal’s responsibility to articulate the school’s goals and vision and advocate for the school’s educational programs, students, and staff.

The viability of the organization and program success depend on the ability of the principal to build consensus when it becomes necessary to establish priorities and allocate resources.

The vision of these leaders was not to earn a Blue Ribbon. Some of them even stated this in their interviews. The common thread that was evident within the interviews was the focus on children. While each approach may have differed, the conversation always returned to the children. Whether through the work in the classrooms or the involvement of the parents, each principal conveyed the importance of keeping the students as the priority in her daily work.

School Climate and the Learning Environment

School principals establish a learning climate which can create safe and encouraging places for students and teachers by setting a positive tone, directing the focus, and fostering relationships. Effective principals also maintain the operations of the school and its physical surroundings. Each of the participants in the study discussed the school climate and their role in its development.

Principal B conveyed the importance of the school climate early in her interview, “The environment here is wonderful for kids. I actually feel like this district is the best kept secret in the valley. The teachers here go above and beyond. Whatever the kids need, if we have to change things around to see that kids learn, then we do it.” Principal C set the tone with a different approach as she explained, “You have to affect change through other people who may not be of your philosophy. You can’t do it on your own. You’re always in a position where you have to finesse people, but it’s a very comfortable atmosphere. I’m accessible. You have to be.”

When asked what contributes to a positive school climate, Principal B offered, “Every year we have a theme. The biggest thing that we work on is behavior. We talk about it every day. Throughout the month as I’m walking and talking with children, I’ll

say, how were you kind today?” Each principal had a different perspective when it came to establishing a climate for student success. Principal A stated:

We’re a team here, because it takes all of us to raise your child. I’ve tried to cultivate the feeling that we’re a family. We have to care about everything that happens. Everybody realizes that everything that we’re doing isn’t about one person, it’s about everybody. To be successful, we have to be united; that’s what it’s about.

Principal C responded, “I set the climate. I’m very consistent and I treat them fairly. I think people here have a tendency to feel good about themselves, teaching in an atmosphere that’s non-threatening. When they do (feel good about their school atmosphere), I think people have a tendency to do more.” Principal A expressed “there has to be a cohesiveness. I didn’t create that. I stepped in and gave it direction.” She went on to describe other school level factors that contributed to the cohesiveness that she described.

We are a very small school (200-250 kids), which really leads to that ownership. Many, many parents would say that they chose to stay in the community because of our school. It’s that sense of community that was so important. When we were awarded the Blue Ribbon, the district really took pride in it. So did the community. There has to be a level of acceptance. I don’t want to idealize the staff as never having any issues; they did. When they came into school, they came for kids and that was their focus. Everything they did was for kids and that’s where you get your success. And maybe you don’t get a Blue Ribbon, but

you can still create a community and place for kids to grow, and be happy and safe. It just takes time.

It was the idea that “we’re a team here and it takes all of us to raise your child” that resounded in the conversations with these Blue Ribbon principals. The team approach to increasing student achievement connects with the concept of collective teacher efficacy; teachers working together to achieve a common goal. When this type of tone is set by the school leader, it permeates through to the work of the teachers, the involvement of the parents and community, and the success of the students.

Supporting Classroom Instruction

Effective school leaders are actively involved in the school’s instructional program (MacNeill, Cavanaugh & Silcox, 2003). A focus on student learning is a primary responsibility of the school principal. When principals possess the knowledge to lead instructional initiatives and contribute to instructional programs, they can support teacher instruction and, ultimately, student learning. Teddlie and Reynolds (2000) found that high-performing principals monitor classroom-level expectations to ensure alignment with school goals. They further suggested that effective principals expect high levels of participation in professional development, high-quality instructional practices, a primary focus on student achievement, and manage time to focus on agreed-upon instructional priorities. Though each principal revealed a different focus, each described an aspect of the instructional program that needed to be addressed in order for her schools to be successful.

As discovered through the interviews, the participants addressed the instructional program in one of two ways: a managerial approach or a coaching approach. The

managerial approach used by Principal C consisted of management tasks, like scheduling. This method relied on instructional coaches to lead the instructional efforts rather than the principal. The coaching approach positioned Principal A to lead her instructional program through modeling, observing, and working side-by-side with the teachers on instructional initiatives.

One of the first things we did was a writing workshop, which concentrated efforts on how to teach writing. So what I would do is give them (teachers) common planning time. We would also structure our master schedule so that grade-level people would have their specials at the same time and they would be available to work together as much as possible.

While managerial principals may put these structures in place, it takes an instructional leader to create momentum and support teachers in their efforts as evidenced in Principal A's response: "My role in the collaboration was that I would go in conference with kids and be part of the lesson. Unfortunately, you don't always have the time that you would like to be able to do that."

In an effort to focus instruction, "each kid has almost an individual education plan", explained Principal A. She went on to talk about the kinds of questions that she poses to teachers as data is reviewed and specific plans for improvement are established. "What are his weaknesses? What are his strengths? What are you, the classroom teacher going to do to influence these areas? As a whole, what does your class need to work on?" Principal C stated, "I try to work out my schedules so that each grade level has at least three plan periods during the week. My third grade teachers get one or two days a quarter that they can get subs for the day to collaborate and plan things". The school

schedule focused on the academic needs of the school in an effort to protect instructional time (Cotton, 2003; Nettles & Herrington, 2007).

“We’ve always looked at PSSA scores, benchmarks, and standards. This district is exemplary for standardizing the curriculum. This is done by the teachers, not by someone (outside the district) who came in and did it.” This alignment is “important to achievement. We’ve got it aligned to the standards. Now it’s my job to make sure that everyone’s following that. Everybody uses the same quarterly assessments. We’ve always made sure that we are benchmarking against a standard.” As evident through her response, Principal A accepted responsibility for leading this effort, realizing that follow-through is needed to hold teachers accountable.

Principal B also spoke about the collaboration required for meaningful instructional change. “The teachers have their morning time and after school to meet. They also have 1 or 2 days a quarter that they can get subs for the day to collaborate and plan things. We review the PSSA test. We look at their weaknesses and plan different lessons so that we can be on point for the next test.”

Research Question 4

This research question explored the underlying themes regarding school leadership that emerged from interviews with Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon principals and from the analysis of public documents/artifacts that were submitted as part of the application for the award. While the focus on data-driven practices and the instructional leadership model were discussed in previous sections, this section will address management and operations and roles and relationships, as well as the undercurrent of collective teacher efficacy.

Management and Operations

Management and operations were evident characteristics in two of the three interviews. Principal C felt strongly that management was the key to success in her school. Her responses repeatedly returned to scheduling and school procedures throughout the interview explaining, “I’m pretty steadfast and pretty consistent. I think you have to be. I have to be fair with everyone. Sometimes they’re not going to agree with your decisions, but that’s just the way it is.” She went on to explain, “One of the biggest things was the schedule I set. It was a good management tool, because I was guaranteed that everyday those kids were getting at least 45 minutes of math, 45 minutes of reading and it was an equal distribution. It worked for me, obviously.” This principal returned to management in many of her responses. She communicated that this was the primary key to her success as a building principal.

Principal B spoke about the importance of following procedures and maintaining open communication with staff. “If you make a mistake, come and tell me, and we’ll work it through. I don’t like it when someone calls me with something and the teacher didn’t tell me about it.” Principal C also addressed this topic. “You don’t send out a note without me seeing it. You don’t do anything without me knowing about it. I’ll clear it, but if something goes wrong, how do you expect me to defend you?”

Within the discussion with Principal A, very little could be categorized as management. While a level of management had to be present for the school to run efficiently, her responses focused more on instruction and the sense of community required to make a positive change, not her managerial efforts. The emphasis or lack thereof, represented one of the primary differences between the participants.

Roles and Relationships

Another theme that was uncovered throughout the data analysis process was the need for relationships with parents, students, and teachers. Principal B detailed one way that her school involves parents in the importance of academic achievement and standardized testing. “For the last 4-5 years, we have had a PSSA meeting. We’ve brought parents in 2-3 times a year to tell them about the PSSA and what’s coming home, like PSSA booklets and things.”

Within the theme of roles and relationships, the relationships with the teachers should also be discussed. The participants each demonstrated qualities of distributed leadership. Distributed leadership means that the leadership responsibilities are shared across the members of an organization. Harris (2005) described this leadership style as the direction and guidance being provided by many sources while maintaining a common goal. Spillane (2005) argued that while schools have formal structures that allow for distributed leadership, through department chairs or committees, informal distributed leadership can also take place when the school culture is open and opportunities for teacher leadership are encouraged by building principals. Harris (2005) concluded that leadership can be both distributed and top-down, which was evidenced in the example of the managerial approach of Principal C.

Within the framework of collective efficacy, the principals uncovered several characteristics that contributed to the development of their teachers. Some of these comments were revealed in direct comments within the interviews, but much of it became apparent to the researcher through the course of the interviews. Some participants spoke directly using “I.” For example, “I set the schedule” or “I gave them common planning

time.” These statements present a much different focus than, “We’ve always been very student-focused” or “We had to look at the data and make some determinations.” The manner in which the participants spoke about their school success revealed the way that they perceived their roles within the school building. When principals approach management, instruction, or other school factors with a sense of shared responsibility, this contributes to collective efficacy.

Summary

Chapter 4 reported on the findings from this qualitative study of principal leadership in Blue Ribbon Schools. Although each participant presented a unique perception of their leadership in a Blue Ribbon School, many commonalities were also presented. The information gleaned from these similarities can guide schools striving for success in this age of accountability. Chapter 5 provides a thorough discussion of findings and implications for future practice and research.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSIONS

In response to the current accountability pressures that demand continual improvement in academic achievement, it was worthwhile to explore principal leadership in award-winning, public elementary schools. A case study model was used to investigate leadership practices, as well as possible connections to collective teacher efficacy and instructional leadership. This chapter begins with a recapitulation of the results. A discussion of the implications of the study's results for theory and practice is followed by a brief conclusion. The chapter closes with recommendations for future research.

This study explored how elementary principals leading Blue Ribbon Schools perceive their own leadership behaviors and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability with regards to their impact on student achievement as measured by the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). Knowledge regarding the leadership characteristics of building principals can lead to increased implementation of effective leadership practices and improved student performance in elementary schools. In addition, the study may contribute to the identification of new leadership trends, as well as highlight gaps in principal leadership practices that could inform changes to preparation programs for public school administrators.

The study examined the following questions:

(1) What is the perceived influence of NCLB and AYP on the self-reported leadership behaviors of elementary principals from Blue Ribbon Schools?

(2) What are the perceptions of elementary principals regarding their leadership practices and the possible contributions they make to the overall success of their Blue Ribbon Schools?

(3) How do principals from Blue Ribbon Schools describe their roles in the school mission, the instructional program, and the school climate?

(4) What underlying themes about school leadership emerge from interviews with Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon principals and from the analysis of public documents/artifacts that were submitted as part of the application for the award?

Summary of Findings

Findings in this study are consistent with other studies on leadership of Blue Ribbon Schools (Andrejack, 2007; Capps, 2005; Lyles, 2007; Prescott, 2003) supporting the importance of establishing a vision, promoting collaboration, and sharing leadership in effective schools. Some of the findings concur with earlier research done in the area of instructional leadership (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008) as principals work side-by-side with teachers on instructional tasks and professional development activities, use data to make instructional decisions, and take a collective approach to school-wide issues. Similar findings were also revealed regarding collective efficacy (Fancera, 2008; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000; Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002; Olivier, 2001) as effective principals are actively involved in setting a positive learning climate and establishing a tone for academic growth and instructional improvement. Since this study focused on the perceptions of three elementary principals from western Pennsylvania, the findings may not be generalizable to a broader population, but do offer insight into the success of three Blue Ribbon Schools.

There were several key findings derived from the study of principals' perceptions of leadership and the contributions to exemplary elementary schools that add to current research in this area. Data were collected for this qualitative case study from several archived data sources, interviews, and an analysis of artifacts. The 2003-2010 list of Blue Ribbon School and the PSSA results from the Pennsylvania Department of Education were examined in this study. An interview guide was developed from the review of literature and administered to three elementary principals currently leading Blue Ribbon Schools in western Pennsylvania. The principals spoke candidly about their perceptions related to leading award-winning schools during this age of accountability. They offered detailed answers to all interview questions providing a meaningful look into their work as building principals. The research questions were answered using a combination of the responses from the interviews, public assessment data, and the written documents associated with the Blue Ribbon Application.

The influence of NCLB and AYP was evident throughout all three data sources. The participants indicated numerous times that they felt the pressure to meet increasing benchmarks on state assessments. Within the interviews and the Blue Ribbon applications, it was expressed that changes in leadership demands have occurred over the course of the last five years in response to accountability. All of the participants identified numerous ways that data-driven practices were an integral part of their responsibility as building principals. The increased access to sources of academic data and the call to use this information to make instructional decisions was evident in each school. Some principals were more involved in the data analysis process, while others relied on coaches and teachers to lead this effort. It should be considered that principal

preparation for effectively using data was not discussed and could be a topic for future research, since much of this responsibility falls to the principal. It is clear that schools need to collect data on an ongoing basis, analyze and discuss the information, and use the results as a tool for improving student achievement.

Perceptions of principals varied regarding their contributions to the success of their schools and obtaining the Blue Ribbon award. Within the conversations with each participant, one took more personal responsibility for the success than the other two. This was evident through the use of “I” versus “we” as mentioned in the previous chapter. Principal C approached many of the questions from an individual approach, detailing the changes that she made and the procedures that she put in place. The responses from Principals A and B stemmed from a more collective approach, as their responses centered on what the team decided, what the school accomplished, and how the community contributed.

While this concept was not specifically identified in other studies, some researchers connect the “I” versus “we” approach to shared goals and shared leadership. Capps (2005) connects this sense of “we” to the vision set forth by the principal. In her research of Blue Ribbon Schools, she described the shared goals developed by principals as a contributing factor to school success. Leithwood et. al (2008) remarked on the influence that shared leadership can have on schools. In all of the Blue Ribbon Schools studied, some aspect of this style was present, either through formal ways with instructional coaches or teacher leaders or less formally with the way that teachers took the initiative to collaborate and focus their instruction as a team. Leithwood et. al (2008) also suggested that school leaders improve teaching and learning most through their

influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions. These factors were also threads found within the interviews when participants discussed collective efficacy.

Sparks (2005) added:

Leaders matter. What leaders think, say, and do--and who they are when they come to work each day profoundly affects organizational performance, the satisfaction they and those with whom they interact derive from their work, and their ability to sustain engagement with their work over the period of time necessary to oversee significant improvements. (p. vii)

A sense of encouraging and inspiring others to lead and try new things was connected to those principals with a more collaborative approach. These principals also created opportunities for themselves to be actively involved in the educational process. Open communication also appeared to be more commonplace when “we” was used. It would appear that this approach might also lead to a greater sense of trust. Goens (2008) studied trust and leadership and found that teachers perceived more trust toward their principals when a transformational leadership style was utilized. Tschannen-Moran (2004) agreed that leaders create trusting school environments through honesty, openness, and reliability. Empowering teachers and including them in all aspects of the educational process fosters the “we” model evident in two of the Blue Ribbon Schools in this study.

This trend connects to the transformational model of leadership discussed in the Review of Literature. Transformational leaders work side-by-side with their teachers talking and planning together while providing motivation and instructional leadership. These leaders model open communication and build structures that support collaboration

and eliminate teacher isolation. When it comes to building leadership, school districts can learn from the experiences of high-performance businesses. These organizations are also faced with pressures to meet escalating standards. Flattening the organizational structure allows leaders to place the power and decision-making into the hands of teams, rather than following an “I” model of leadership. When transformational leaders work cooperatively with teachers, a team approach is taken, which also serves to flatten the hierarchy and includes all educators in the educational processes of the school.

Principal roles regarding the school mission, the instructional program, and the school climate were evident throughout the interviews, as well as within the Blue Ribbon applications. Each of these strands from the PIMRS tool was communicated by each participant, although some areas were more strongly emphasized than others. It is important for principals to recognize the importance of these three domains, ensuring that they are capable of providing leadership in each area. Principals need the knowledge and skills to create and maintain an environment that supports academic, social, and emotional growth of students and teachers.

The sustainability of academic success over several years was addressed by each participant in the study, as she described the learning environment of her buildings. Both Principals A and B spoke at length about the dedication of their teachers and the way that staff were willing to “do whatever it takes” to help the students. This positive staff attitude and commitment to ensuring that students succeed is an underlying characteristic of collective teacher efficacy. While the perceptions of Principals A and B were that CTE was apparent in their schools, they were not able to articulate exactly what they did to cultivate it over time, but that it was more in the nature of their day-to-day practice

rather than a specific task or event. Collective teacher efficacy is an area that principals should understand and develop within their schools. Maintaining a successful school requires the collective efforts of teachers, staff, and school leaders. By developing CTE, building principals can emphasize the importance of everyone's contribution to the improved teaching and learning in our schools.

Other common threads were also revealed within the data analysis. One commonality among the three Blue Ribbon Schools studied was the small size of each building. With fewer than 250 students enrolled these schools made strong academic gains and maintained them over time. It should be considered whether smaller schools may lead to more academic success for students or if school size is not a relevant factor. Extant research of Blue Ribbon Schools has not specifically investigated school size as a factor in award-winning schools.

A smaller school setting might contribute to more positive staff relationships and the development of CTE. In general, lower enrollment and fewer staff to supervise might also mean less managerial tasks for principals. With less time spent on organizational and operational responsibilities, principals could devote more time to instructional leadership, data-driven practices, and fostering strategies that support the collective efficacy of teachers. While this research does not associate school size with earning a Blue Ribbon, it is a topic that deserves further consideration.

The researcher anticipated that principal involvement in aspects of curriculum, instruction, and assessment would be present in these Blue Ribbon Schools. While active participation in classroom instruction was most evident with Principal A, the other two principals did not emphasize involvement to the same extent. Contributions to school-

wide instructional initiatives and involvement in direct interactions with the students set Principal A apart in this area. Her understanding of instructional issues and willingness to engage with her teachers helped to establish her as an instructional leader, as well as contribute to a sense of collective efficacy. More reliance was placed on instructional coaches in School C with responsibility falling to the teachers in School B. With instructional leadership being so prominent in the literature, more attention to this characteristic was expected. Unfortunately, management, school discipline, and other outside factors often take principals away from the student-centered focus that they want to maintain.

Overall, the findings from this study support extant research in several areas of school leadership. The exploration of leadership practices of principals leading Blue Ribbon Schools emphasizes the importance of defining a school mission, promoting school climate, and managing the instructional programs in elementary schools. This study also supports current research on accountability pressures in schools and the need for principals to be well-versed in data-driven practices. In addition, the importance of collective efficacy and the development of this by the principal were also supported in this research.

Implications

School leadership has been studied for decades. Researchers have examined the possible effects that school principals have on student achievement, school climate, and many other factors. This study has implications for principals, principal preparation programs, and school districts. This section of Chapter Five will look at each

aforementioned area and offer recommendations for the changing demands of the principalship.

Building Principals

The job of the building principal is a complex one, demanding many responsibilities of school leaders. This study has several implications for the practices of building principals at any level. Principals need to understand that when leadership is shared among teachers regarding school decisions about the instructional program, collective efficacy increases. A sense of transformational leadership was evident in at least two of the principals studied. Their efforts to share ownership with and work alongside their teachers led to more ownership over student success but also the drive for continued progress. The commitment on the part of the school staff to do whatever is necessary to help students learn is strengthened by collective teacher efficacy. Marks (2009) posited, “One of the most powerful phenomena that can occur is for the group to believe they can make a difference for all students” (p. 143). The literature discussed in Chapter II indicated that teachers who professed to have more freedom regarding decisions that affected their classrooms had higher levels of efficacy.

Building principals should make every effort to understand the importance of collective teacher efficacy and the practices that they can implement to increase this sense among the teachers in their buildings. Developing instructional knowledge with teachers and securing time for collaboration are key determinants in supporting CTE. Principals can enhance efficacy within their buildings by including teachers in the decision making process and increasing their involvement in data-driven practices.

School leaders can transform their schools when attention is paid to collective teacher efficacy.

Closely related to collective teacher efficacy, principals need to recognize the importance of school climate. Promoting the school climate was found repeatedly through the analysis of interview data and Blue Ribbon documents in this study, as well as within the research. This characteristic was evident through the ways that principals support teachers, interact with parents and community members, and celebrate student learning and achievement.

The tone that is set by the building principal determines the environment in which students and teachers will work. While this can be approached in different ways, effective principals must possess leadership characteristics that will enhance student and teacher productivity. Setting the tone, providing focus, and building relationships are critical to schools sustaining a positive school climate. Stakeholders could be surveyed so that building principals have an accurate view of the school climate. Results would help to provide feedback to principals on areas of strength or weakness.

It is clear that principals need to be skilled at using data including PSSA scores, benchmark assessments, and progress monitoring tools. Accountability and pressures to meet AYP continue to be felt by building principals. The responsibility falls to school leaders to ensure that teachers have access to pertinent data and that time is allotted to analyze data to make instructional decisions. Building principals need to have the knowledge and leadership skills to discuss data with their teachers, understand scores and trends, and provide the direction needed for the team to make data a part of their daily practice. This may require professional development for school leaders, as well as for

their teachers. Local intermediate units and other educational groups have provided opportunities for schools and districts to work as a team analyzing data. Completing needs assessments, strategic plans, and other comprehensive documents are appropriate exercises for teams to look closely at data.

Goodlad (1994) warned principals about allowing management tasks to overshadow their priorities of effective teaching and student learning. Two of the principals in this study did not let the general school operations get in the way of their focus on academic success. Many characteristics of instructional leadership were evident with these leaders, but instructional leadership is not the only model that warrants further discussion. Transformational leadership, discussed earlier was also apparent in this study. Hallinger (2003) suggested that one difference between the two leadership models is that instructional leadership emphasizes a coordinated, directive strategy while transformational leadership takes more of an empowering approach. The supporting approach of transformational leadership also aligns with the collaborative work of principals that work to develop CTE.

This study confirms a more integrated model as suggested by Marks and Printy (2003) and supported by Peariso (2011) combining instructional leadership and transformational leadership styles. These researchers suggested that although transformational leadership and instructional leadership are systematically different, they fit together in practice. Building principals should investigate both models and take from them the strategies that will help to move their schools forward. Changes within the school building would be led by the school principal. This study also provides insight

into implications on a larger scale. School districts and central office administrators might also benefit from the findings in this study.

School Districts

While much of this section focuses on the implications for individual principals, school districts, superintendents, and school boards need to emulate and replicate the success of Blue Ribbon Schools. Information to benefit districts can be gleaned from this study, but also from taking a closer look at Blue Ribbon Schools in their region. These award-winning schools should be visited. Classroom practices and leadership practices should be observed and serve as a model for others, especially those struggling to meet the increasing AYP benchmarks.

More specific areas should also be addressed by school districts in relation to the topics mentioned in the previous section. School systems need to review how schools are organized and how teachers and administrators utilize time for collaboration and reflection. If these opportunities are not available, efforts should be made to support team collaboration within the structure of the school day. School boards need to review policies and union contracts to ensure that barriers are removed so that principals are empowered to structure their schools in a way that fosters collaboration and school improvement.

Recognizing the accountability pressures felt by all school districts, it is critical that schools have data systems to assist with collection and analysis of student information. While many public data sources are available to teachers and principals, comprehensive systems are also available to house district-wide data, making it more accessible to teachers. These systems can be used to incorporate multiple data sources

(PSSA, DIBELS, 4 Sight, etc.) and provide reports to initiate the discussion of student progress and academic performance that is so critical to the success of public schools. While this was not specifically discussed by the participants, it would be a partial solution to the overwhelming nature of data collection and analysis within school districts.

School districts can also take steps to improve collective teacher efficacy. Central office administrators and school boards should work to developing a district climate that focuses on teaching and learning. In addition to developing a positive climate throughout a school district, district officials also need to recognize the importance of developing the people within the district, providing professional development opportunities and supporting their needs. Setting district goals and priorities can help to set this tone. School districts can also emphasize teamwork and communication to support the development of CTE.

Principal Preparation Programs

While districts must take on the responsibility for the ongoing development of building principals, colleges and universities also need to better prepare principals for the realities of public education. Many colleges and universities offering principal certification provide coursework limited to leadership theories, legal implications, and teacher supervision. Programs in most Pennsylvania institutions are also offering online courses and performance-based programs with aspiring principals responsible for directing their own learning through online discussion forums and internships. Unfortunately, this results in varied experiences for participants when they enter the principalship.

Principal preparation programs need to include intensive courses on data analysis and data-driven practices, developing the school mission, vision, and climate, investigating theories of efficacy, and in-depth studies of multiple models of leadership (instructional, transformational, distributed or shared leadership, etc.). Coursework must include exposing aspiring principals to various data sources and the opportunity to make sense out of this information, since this is a frequent task of principals as they face accountability pressures. These trends were all apparent within this study, yet none of the participants conveyed a clear sense of preparation to truly lead these efforts in their schools.

Limitations of the Study

Within any study, limitations exist. As with any qualitative study, the data cannot prove a causal relationship (Berg, 2004). The principals who agreed to participate in this study all happened to be female. The research may have produced different results had male leadership been represented within the sample. The study was also somewhat limited in that each participant was only interviewed once. Subsequent interviews may have revealed additional information pertinent to the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on this study, there are several directions that future research could take, extending to different school levels, as well as pursuing emerging themes. A follow-up study could be conducted at individual sites to involve other stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, or other administrative leaders. This qualitative study could be expanded to include all Blue Ribbon Schools in Pennsylvania including middle and high schools, parochial schools, and charter schools. In studying various levels and

school types, a researcher could compare and contrast the practices of principals in each of the aforementioned settings. Investigating the shared leadership practices of principals and teachers could also serve as a possible research topic.

A quantitative approach could also be used to further explore leadership practices. The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) could be administered to teachers, principals, or superintendents regarding the instructional leadership model. It would also be beneficial to gather quantitative data from school stakeholders regarding the development and sustainability of collective efficacy. Colleges and universities could be surveyed to explore the content of the principal preparation programs and their emphasis on the themes of data-driven practices and accountability, as well as other topics revealed within the current research. It would be interesting to determine the leadership practices that are supported in various programs.

The current research on leadership in Blue Ribbon Schools has not followed a specific group of principals as they begin the application process and beyond. A longitudinal study that follows the experience of principals through the application process and through the first years after earning the award could shed light on the sustainability of school success and effective leadership. A follow-up study could be conducted with the participants of this study to determine where their schools are five years from now.

This study opened the possibility for research extending to other aspects of leadership. Both quantitative and qualitative studies should be considered in order to gain a more comprehensive look at school leadership in award-winning schools. This

chapter has provided a summary of the research findings, implications for practice, and recommended topics for future research.

Conclusions

Through the process of collecting and analyzing the data and reporting the findings, the researcher concluded that serving as the principal of an award-winning school requires many leadership practices that are interconnected. In comparing the data gathered at the three sites, it was interesting to explore the views of the participants as they related to leadership practices. The three schools were different in geographic location, socioeconomic status, and educational programs, yet all were able to achieve the Blue Ribbon distinction. Reflecting on these factors, it seems that each school required a slightly different leadership approach to find success and obtain the Blue Ribbon-- one more managerial, one transformational, and one more shared. Based on the results of this study, it is clear that Blue Ribbon School leaders are not identical. Overall, Blue Ribbon Schools leaders tend to exhibit several positive leadership characteristics including attention to school climate and collective efficacy, involvement in data-driven practices, and features of instructional and/or transformational leadership. The pursuit of these leadership practices is encouraged, as discussed in the implications section of this chapter.

Many commonalities were also revealed throughout the study. This indicates the possibility of specific leadership behaviors associated with Blue Ribbon principals. Not only must successful principals manage the general operations of the school, they must foster relationships and keep stakeholders informed. Setting a positive climate for learning and providing direction through a clear vision and mission are also the

responsibility of the principal. Beyond their daily work, these leaders must also be skilled in understanding and implementing data-driven practices and serving as an instructional leader. It is this complex role that building principals take on every day.

This study affirmed the accountability pressures in education and increasing demands on school principals. The *No Child Left Behind Act* expects 100 % proficiency in reading and mathematics for all students by 2014. In response to this demand, successful principals of Blue Ribbon Schools have embraced data-driven practices. Instructional and transformational leadership serve as positive models for leading elementary schools with a clear vision and mission as critical components of effective leadership. The fostering of a positive school climate and the development of collective teacher efficacy only serve to strengthen schools. The interwoven nature of effective school leadership and the practices of successful school principals are lessons to learn from as schools strive for continuous improvement.

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Appendix A

Cover Letter



School of Professional Studies in Education

----- --, 2011

Dear Fellow Principal,

I am a student in the Doctoral Program in Curriculum and Instruction in the Department of Professional Studies in Education at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I am inviting you to participate in this study in an effort to gain a greater understanding of the characteristics of elementary school principals in Pennsylvania who have been awarded a Blue Ribbon Schools designation.

As the principal of a Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon elementary school, your school has been recognized as a successful educational institution. Your contribution to this success as a school leader is worthy of study. You are invited to participate in a study to explore how principals perceive their own leadership behaviors and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability with regards to their impact on student achievement.

The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision as to whether or not you would like to participate.

My study will be based on information collected through an interview with you, public assessment data, and any other artifacts relevant to the Blue Ribbon Award. The tape-recorded interview will take approximately one hour and will focus on questions related to leadership behaviors in successful elementary schools.

As a principal myself, I understand how busy a principal's day can be. By taking time to talk with me about your success and the success of your school, we can inform our colleagues and aspiring principals about the quality leadership that exists in Pennsylvania schools.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in the strictest of confidence. You will not be identified by name, school or district. In the event the findings in this study are published, pseudonyms will be used to conceal the identities of the participants. Participants may withdraw at any time by notifying the principal investigator via email at J.L.Bejster@iup.edu. If you withdraw from the study, all data pertaining to your involvement in the study will be destroyed.

Within the next week, I will contact you to answer any questions and determine if you are willing to participate in this study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jacie (Bejster) Maslyk, Principal Investigator
Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP)
Professional Studies in Education
1874 Crafton Boulevard
Pittsburgh, PA 15205
(412) 287-2887
J.L.Bejster@iup.edu

Dr. Mary Jalongo, Faculty Sponsor
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Professional Studies in Education
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Indiana, PA 15705
(724) 357-2417
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**This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Telephone
724.357.7730).**

Appendix B
Informed Consent Form



School of Professional Studies in Education

**A Qualitative Study of Blue Ribbon Elementary School Principals:
Perspectives on Promoting Student Achievement**

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form, and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential, and that I have the right to withdraw at any time by emailing the principal investigator at J.L.Bejster@iup.edu. I hereby agree to participate in this research study. If I have any questions in the future about this study Jacie Maslyk, principal investigator, will answer them. This consent ends at the conclusion of the study.

Name (PLEASE PRINT)

Signature

Date

Phone number or location where you can be reached:

Best days and times to reach you:

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signatures.

Date

Investigator's Signature

Appendix C
Guiding Questions

General Background

1. What is your educational background and professional experience?
 - a. Number of years in education
 - b. Number of years as a principal
 - c. Number of years in your current school
2. What led you to become a principal?

School Climate

3. How would you describe your school?
4. Please describe the professional collaboration processes in your school
5. What factors do you believe contribute to becoming a successful school leader?
6. How are the accomplishments of students celebrated in your school?

Instructional Leadership

7. What are your primary responsibilities as an elementary principal?
8. How would you characterize your role in
 - d. defining the school mission?
 - e. managing the instructional program?
 - f. promoting a positive school climate? (Hallinger, 1995)
9. In your view, what does it mean to be an instructional leader?

Accountability

10. Has your focus as a principal changed since you entered administration? If so, how?
11. How has NCLB and the increasing AYP benchmarks affected your role as a principal?
12. How does data-driven decision-making influence student achievement in your school?
13. What strategies have you implemented for monitoring student achievement?

14. With 2014 approaching, what will be different in the next few years as opposed to the last few years?

15. What existing or new structures and programs are in place to reach these goals?

Theoretical Framework

16. In what ways do you encourage collective efficacy?

17. Describe the opportunities that your teachers have to engage in:

- g. Action research projects
- h. Study group or PLC's
- i. Peer observations
- j. Walkthroughs/opportunities for feedback

Blue Ribbon Schools

18. What are the steps in becoming a Blue Ribbon School?

19. What was your role in the Blue Ribbon process?

20. How did the Blue Ribbon designation impact your teachers? The school climate?

Conclusion

21. What changes do you anticipate in your leadership style or your administrative role in the next 5 years?

22. Is there anything else that you would like to share that would give additional insight into the success of your school?