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Roles in Turning Schools Around for Success. (2012)
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The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine and describe the

instructional practices and behaviors of four elementary school principals who

implemented reform measures and practices under the requirements of No Child Left

Behind (NCLB) to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years in

both reading and math. Through a prolonged in-depth interview process, the intent was to

closely examine practices, procedures, and perceptions of these leaders in order to

provide other school-based administrators in similar situations guidance when carrying

out school improvement measures that build the capacity for student achievement.

The study found that principals in highly impacted schools that were persistently

low performing, exhibit five core practices when working to turn the school around.

Principals demonstrate: (a) Extensive and Effective Use of the School Improvement

Team; (b) Utilization of Multiple Professional Development Opportunities; (c)

Communication through Meaningful Conversations; (d) Developing and Articulating a

Vision for the School's Success; and (e) Practicing Strategic Leadership for Second

Order Change. While principals should be the instructional leaders in their schools, their

ability to be strategic in their planning and organizing the significant changes that must

take place is also a necessary skill. Graduate level programs preparing aspiring principals

should offer courses that provide real time experiences and opportunities for dialogue

with experts to discuss specific issues facing administrators in persistently low

performing schools. Furthermore, ongoing professional development specifically

designed for principals currently working in highly impacted schools should be provided.

Future research should explore the relationship between the principal and assistant

principal in highly impacted schools to determine what roles assistant principal should

play in successful school turnaround.

EXITING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: PRINICPALS'

ROLES IN TURNING SCHOOLS AROUND

FOR SUCCESS

by

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Approved by

 Dr. Ulrich Reitzug
Committee Chair

To Brad – You gave me hope!

Look Well to This Day
Anonymous

Look well to this day,
For it and it alone is life.
In its brief course
Lie all of the essence of your existence:

The Glory of Growth
The Satisfaction of Achievement
The Splendor of Beauty

For yesterday is but a dream,
And tomorrow is but a vision.
But today well lived makes yesterday a dream of happiness,
And tomorrow a vision of hope.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For over a decade, parents, educators, taxpayers, and policy makers have debated and lamented over the implications of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the effect it has had on school districts and individual schools across the country. This act required that states develop standard-based assessments for students that would be measured and the results be reported. Through NCLB, students were to be identified by race, gender, ethnicity, disabilities (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004) and English as a Second Language (ESL) as individuals and also in subgroups. The results of the individual achievement would be reported to parents and their performance results as a subgroup would be published so that parents, taxpayers, educators, and policy makers would have more information regarding the academic progress of students. It also called for sanctions to be applied to schools that failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The law required that all schools receiving NCLB aid would need to have "highly qualified" teachers, a response to research showing that low-income students have the least prepared and experienced teachers and that the quality of teachers substantially affects student achievement (Sunderman, Orfield, & Kim, 2006). The federal funds made accessible to all states were accepted voluntarily if the state chose to follow the federal education requirements of the law. However, any state that chose not to abide by the federal requirements could choose to not accept the federal funding. The law virtually affected

anyone associated or employed with a school system. All schools in a school district that accepted the Title I federal dollars had to provide the public with detailed information as to the school's ability to make AYP in reading, math and science. It shifted the general public's judgment about what constituted a good school and changed their view of a school's ability to be successful from the *outside* of the building, to the *inside.* With the new accountability model the focus turned to student proficiency, teacher effectiveness and the school's ability to meet AYP. With the new emphasis on student achievement, building level administrators became increasingly aware of the scrutiny and close observations of the public. Having been awarded my administrator's license just about the time the law was enacted, the following section outlines my personal journey as a school administer and the pressure I felt under the NCLB magnifying glass and how it is that I became so interested in offering other administrators assistance:

Personal and Professional Interest

My personal and professional interest in my study topic began in the spring of 2007 when the superintendent of Havershime County Schools invited me to become the principal at Oakhill Elementary School. This move necessitated leaving my principalship at Summerville Elementary School (for the purpose of confidentiality a pseudonym has been provided for the school district and the schools mentioned herein). The Oakhill staff had not been able to meet AYP in reading for the previous three years out of four years and thus was required to offer its students transfer options and Supplemental Education Services, i.e., free tutoring. The fact that the school had not made AYP in math for the previous two years added to their challenge. In the fall of 2007, the school was on a dual

course of School Improvement for both subject areas but at different levels of the penalty phases. The superintendent's charge to me was to work with the staff at Oakhill Elementary School to bring about the changes needed to improve student achievement. Essentially, I was cast in the role as a leader who would need to inspire change and increase student achievement in a positive way. In order to begin this directive, I had to examine the existing programs along with the staff, evaluate improvements, increase student achievement, and eliminate unsuccessful programs.

Several steps were needed to make the necessary changes. I had to begin by building Professional Learning Communities (PLC) where teachers collaborated, planned, and discussed students' opportunities for academic growth and learning. The staff and I had to examine the progress of the school in integrating technology into the classroom and across the curriculum to effectively elicit student inquiry and critical thinking so that student academic performance on the End of Grade tests could be achieved. The data that resulted from the End of Grade tests told the classroom teachers which students were not being successful. We had to begin to analyze the data in such a way as to identify individual children and groups of students who were in need of early interventions and remediation. Finally, while we had to acknowledge our school's inability to meet AYP in both reading and math, we also needed to celebrate and acknowledge the positive steps we were taking and what we were doing right.

Leadership accountability for student achievement is about results. In high stakes testing, results are perceived to be successful if overall percentages of students demonstrate improved proficiency on the tests. Over the three years of my tenure at Oak

Hill Elementary School, my staff and I worked diligently to improve the percentage of students who were achieving proficiency as determined by a Level III or Level IV score on the North Carolina End of Grade Tests for grades 3-5. In addition, I actively examined the practices of our K-2 programs in order to ensure that students at these levels were mastering the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. I hoped to ensure the primary teachers provided the educational foundation necessary for students to move to the high level of testing and accountability that awaited them in the next grade.

The changes in the programs, the technology, the PLC's, the examination of data, and the many other tasks that came about with making these changes, were not easy challenges. They were fraught with a combination of excitement, disappointment and disillusionment. Not once did I feel these goals were mine alone to achieve; but I knew the staff looked to me for guidance and leadership through my actions, my words, and my role in helping to shape the direction of the school. In essence, the school needed to do a 180-degree turnaround. That track to success was going to be a difficult one.

Never in all of my then 25 years of educational experience had I been so acutely aware that student achievement is the heart of my business of educating children. I was required to enable the conditions in classrooms that promoted student learning, inquiry, and critical thinking. Student achievement involves the stakeholders as well, meaning parents and community members who are invested in the success of each child. John Dewey, a philosopher and well-known advocate for educational reform, felt that education was more than just teaching children how to earn a living. He felt that helping "students develop the ability to think critically" and to use their "social intelligence to

engage in collaborative efforts" was essential in order to meet the challenges of a world fraught with change (Fishman & McCarthy, 2005, p. 60). No matter how much the focus emphasizes improving test scores, the moral purpose of education must always be at the heart of what we do. When conveying my convictions about what was the right thing to do for these students, it was important to me that I somehow convince the entire school staff of this fact. That meant it had to be important not only to the teachers but the office staff, the cafeteria workers, the custodians, and the bus drivers.

To improve student achievement and success and implement the necessary changes, I was required to critically examine and reflect on my instructional-style leadership and how my staff responded to it. Our students, who were at 46.8% proficient on the End of Grade reading test in the spring of 2008, were able to move to 59.4%, by the Spring of 2009, growing 13 points. Our percent proficient on the math End of Grade test went from 60% in the spring of 2008 to 73.6% proficient in the spring of 2009, growing almost 14 points and meeting the state's ABC expected growth. Now we were faced with the daunting task of doing it all over again. All of this led me to wonder what effective instructional practices I should display in the coming year, 2009-2010, to once again assist our school in meeting AYP in order to exit "school improvement."

Under the federal guidelines of NCLB, a school has to make AYP—meeting all target goals for all subgroups two consecutive years to exit school improvement status. It was important to celebrate our achievements but not to become complacent. The staff members, having tasted success, were beginning to turn around in their thinking of how to provide a quality education to all of our students. More importantly, they were

beginning to believe it could be done. It was important to capitalize on the momentum we had going into that school year; but "one does not engage in second order change by simply talking about it" (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 72). It was going to be a year where not only the *thinking* was going to have change about what was good for children but *behaviors* were going to have to change. That meant I was going to have to ratchet up my passion, idealism, and energy.

In our second year of turning the school around, there were many moments, hours and days where it seemed that this large task looming before us was unobtainable; however, often during those moments of low morale, we would find ways to encourage each other. Ours was a reciprocal relationship with key individuals on the staff who were there to encourage me and support me; and I, in turn, made it my mission to see us emerge from the quagmire that I felt the school had been in since before my arrival. In the spring of 2009, the students met their target goal with 70.9% proficient in reading and 84.8% proficient in math. We had gained 11 points of proficiency in both subjects. Within the state department's ABC model of accountability, the school also met high growth, which meant that according to the state's model, the school was demonstrating that students were making over a year's growth academically. The school staff had succeeded in coming out of school improvement status; but more importantly, children who had been marginalized and had been once described to me as "poor children who just can not do it" were now being extremely successful. A staff that had once been described as "lazy" was now empowered and perceived as capable educators.

I suspected that it was never one person, one thing, or one program that helped to create the conditions for exiting school improvement, but rather the right combination for each context. By identifying plans of action and practices that had been successful, we would provide hope to principals that what NCLB required was attainable.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to discover, identify, and detail the instructional practices and behaviors of principals who were able to turn their schools around in terms of student achievement tests. My intent was to examine the practices of principals in order to portray to other educators and state leaders how the implications of this study pertain to their own practices, procedures and perceptions necessary to turn a school around. Additionally, my own story as a turnaround principal was added to offer a first-hand account of these practices. By doing so this study of four principals provides guidance on how other school leaders might successfully lead their schools to meet the requirements of NCLB and carry out effective reform measures that would create major changes and increases in student achievement.

In this qualitative research study, my intent was to detail and thoroughly examine the instructional practices and behaviors of four elementary school principals who turned their schools around and were able to successfully achieve AYP for two consecutive years, thus exiting school improvement in reading and math.

Research Questions

The research questions were:

1. What were the *instructional leadership practices and behaviors of the principals* that helped to increase school improvement in the previous two academic years?

2. What were the *perceptions of the principals* about why the school was successful?

3. What role did each of the following play in the principals' instructional leadership:

    a. The principals' professional growth opportunities?

    b. The school improvement team?

    c. The district office?

    d. Various other stakeholders?

The following section provides the legislative history of the government's involvement in public education as it relates to educational reform measures and student achievement.

Background

History

The root of educational reform movements did not originate with NCLB. In the latter half of the Twentieth Century, the federal government expanded the role of state and local educational agencies to reform schools in order to improve the educational system. This idea of educational reform began to gain momentum with the 1965

authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty." It relied on state educational agencies to administer federal funds and monitor compliance with the law's requirements in order to rectify the inequality in education. It established the Title I program designed to distribute funding to schools and school districts with a high percentage of students from low income families (U.S. Department Education, 2011b). In 1981, the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA) reauthorized ESEA and furthered the states' responsibilities. Two years later, the National Commission of Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk* which placed a significant emphasis on increasing student achievement and reforming a deeply fragmented educational system. This publication was a response to the widespread lack of school reform efforts actually having an impact on the learning process. Prior to this publication, the educational environment could be "characterized by strong local control and limited external influences, relative isolation of schools and school districts from education-related agencies, and a weak or under-developed body of professional knowledge," (Croninger, Valli, & Price, 2003, p. 2) despite enacted legislation.

The Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA) was yet another reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. It also introduced the *Goals 2000* that focused on standards-based reform and provided resources to states, districts, and schools to help students reach high standards (Valli, Croninger, Chambliss, Graeber, & Buese, 2008). According to a report from the U.S. Department of Education (1995), this act introduced the federally-funded program of

Helping Disadvantaged Students Meet High Standards (Title I, Part A) that promoted greater family-school and community-school connections. In addition, it offered the Education of Migratory Children (Title I, Part C), the Bilingual Education Act (Title VII), and the Indian Education program (Title IX). In 1997, the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) was enacted by Congress. "Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) programs encompass virtually all aspects of school operations including instruction, assessment, classroom management, professional development, parental involvement, school management, and curriculum" (Sterbinsky, Ross, & Redfield, 2006, p. 368). Once again, reform measures were implemented for school improvement and designed to raise student achievement.

In 2002, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized once more as NCLB. It increased the role of the federal government in an "effort to achieve equity and excellence through standards and accountability" (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, p.7). To receive federal funding, the states had to develop and implement policies consistent with "legislative mandates for implementation and assessment" (Hunt, 2008, p. 583). Stiff sanctions were attached to schools and districts that under performed on state standards-based assessments. It was seen as the most sweeping educational reform policy in the history of the U.S. and a "major event in the evolution [of education] initiated by the release of *A Nation at Risk*" (p. 585).

Most recently, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) provided $48.6 billon in funds for the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF), (U.S. Department of Education, 2009b). In a special report by the Center on Education Policy

(2010), a description of how the funds would be used by states was provided with the assurance that if accepted, the states guaranteed the

> U.S. Department of Education (ED) they would carry out four types of education reforms: 1) developing rigorous standards and assessments, 2) establishing longitudinal student data systems, 3) improving the effectiveness and equitable distribution of teachers, and 4) providing support and interventions to turn around low-performing schools. Districts also had to sign memoranda of understanding with their states assuring that they would address these reforms. (p. 2)

The Blueprint for Reform presented by Arne Duncan, the Secretary of Education for President Obama's Administration, outlines the measures to be taken to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and emphasizes four areas: (a) Improving teacher and principal effectiveness; (b) Providing information to families to help them evaluate and improve their children's schools; (c) Implementing college- and career-ready standards and developing improved assessments aligned with those standards; and (d) Improving student learning and achievement in America's lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This blueprint for revising the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 promises to change the landscape of education as expectations in these four areas of emphasis will drive the practices of educators at the state and local levels across the country.

As recently as September, 2011 President Barack Obama said that states could begin to seek waivers around key provisions of the law. One provision would be to do away with the 2014 deadline. Under this plan, Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, stated that states could apply for waivers to design their own school accountability

systems; and the U.S. Department of Education posted that this flexibility would be offered "in exchange for rigorous and comprehensive State-developed plans designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction" (U.S. Department of Education, 2011a). While the anticipation of these implications for the flexibility and waivers for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act currently plays out in Washington, D.C., schools around the country continue to work towards meeting the requirements of the NCLB Act.

High Stakes Consequences

NCLB created sanctions in which schools, particularly those receiving federal dollars, not making progress would be identified and certain interventions and technical assistance would be provided. Furthermore, the stakes are high for schools that are identified as persistently low performing. In many cases, schools have progressed to the most severe penalty phases and have been closed or reorganized with staff members released and new staff members hired (Mathis, 2009). The anxiety associated with high-stakes testing has had an effect on "all populations associated with the institution of education, such as students, teachers, administrators, and parents" (Smyth, 2008, p. 134) and has created instances in which teachers and administrators have practiced less than ethical behavior in order to have students be determined as successful on these tests. The result has been a lack of faith in basic inalienable rights by the public for a quality education and a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of NCLB (Bushaw & Lopez, 2010; Thomas, 2005).

The fallout when a school or school district is not consistently successful at meeting the requirements of the high stakes testing can jeopardize reputations and jobs. The policy makers and individuals who endorsed the act appear incompetent, insensitive, and may appear to backpedal (Hess, 2006). When millions of federal dollars are poured into a controversial piece of legislation that doesn't produce immediate results, politicians become even more interested in figuring out what is next. Even more importantly, the general public hears through the media and from talking to teachers the amount of stress that students and teachers feel over the high-stakes testing. "Every teacher in a high-stakes test environment is aware of the headaches, stomachaches, and other symptoms exhibited by children but also by teachers and principals" (Johnson, Johnson, Farenga, & Ness, 2008, p. 15). This touches families personally when students are not successful and creates the impression that those making and endorsing the policies have very little idea about the consequences of high-stakes testing and further exacerbates the general public's negative feelings about NCLB (Hess, 2006).

High-stakes testing has changed the educational profession. Pressure to raise test scores above all other educational goals has placed the accountability of student success squarely on the shoulders of teachers and school administrators. High-stakes testing has reshaped the instructional presentations of teachers and has forced them, willing or not, to move out of anonymity. This anonymity was created through the isolated work that was all too familiar and comfortable for teachers. In many schools leaders are working to reduce some of those feelings of isolation by helping teachers learn to collaborate and share their ideas. For good instruction to take place, teachers should constantly look for

evidence from a variety of sources to make sense of what is happening in their classrooms (Wang, Beckett, & Brown, 2006). Through professional learning communities, teachers have learned to share their expertise and instructional practices; and administrators' roles have changed along with them as they make "good-faith efforts to establish goals and then to collectively and regularly monitor and adjust actions towards them to produce results" (Schmoker, 1996, p. 2). School administrators who feel the weight of accountability by creating a culture of academic excellence and who want to see their school meet the elusive AYP status year after year must not only monitor subgroups but individual students' progress as well. Thus some school districts have created data-rich environments where data analysis occurs after each formative assessment and data teams create lesson plans that drive the instruction to bridge the gaps of learning (Brookhart, Moss & Long, 2008).

For Title I schools, who must make AYP or face the sanctions of school improvement, the data has created environments in which teachers and administrators have a good idea of who has an opportunity to pass the test in reading and/or math and who does not. School personnel use that data to determine remedial groups and extra teaching opportunities in one or both subject areas for students who are at risk of failing. The argument becomes about who actually will receive the extra assistance and the kinds of motivations provided on test day. On test day, school personnel have been involved in extrinsically specific rewards where students were offered various kinds of incentives to try their best on the test, such as pep rallies, raffles, reward activities, and even money. The result is an environment where students are motivated to do well only when they

perceive the reward to be worth their effort. In the long term, little is done to motivate

them intrinsically (Haywood, Kuespert, Madecky, & Nor, 2008). The quandary for those

in education would be what a generation of learners will look like when provided

extrinsic rewards throughout their public school experience; however, the Title I school

personnel involved in these types of activities might argue that the end result is that the

school continues to see gains in individual and subgroups' achievement on the tests. The

reward system enables them to carry out the mission of NCLB and, at the same time,

avoid the harsh sanctions attached to the law.

The next section provides technical information and definitions about Title I

schools, the national and statewide implications of "school improvement" status and the

technical support provided by state and local educational agencies.

Technical Information and Definitions

Title I Designation

Schools designated as Title I schools are defined by the percentage of low-income

students with 40% or above, ages 5-17, meeting the free or reduced-price lunch criteria.

The U.S. Department of Education distributes funds to State Education Agencies (SEAs)

which in turn distribute the funds to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) or school districts.

The LEA then designates funds to the schools in the district that either meet the district's

overall level of low-income students or have at least 40% low-income students (North

Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011). The schools utilize federal, state, and

local funds to upgrade the instructional program for the entire school. "Schoolwide

programs are central to a comprehensive education reform strategy" (Le Tendre, 1996, p.

7) and are used to ensure that all students, including those most at risk, demonstrate proficiency on state academic achievement standards. Title I schools with less than 40 % low income students or that choose not to operate a schoolwide program offer a Targeted Assistance program in which the school identifies students who are failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet the state's challenging academic achievement standards (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2006). Services in a Title I school can include: hiring teachers to reduce class size, tutoring, computer labs, parental involvement activities, professional development, purchase of materials and supplies, pre-kindergarten programs, and hiring teacher assistants or others (U.S. Department of Education, 2011b). Additionally, there are resources and information available to school districts' educational leaders by organizations such as Education Resource Group (ERG). These organizations work with school districts that have multiple schools in school improvement sanctions to rethink how they use system and school-level resources to promote strategies for improving instruction and performance (Educational Resource Group, 2011).

A school identified as "in need of improvement" under the requirements of NCLB indicates that the school has not been able to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress target goal set forth by the state for two consecutive years or more in reading and/or math. These consistently poor performing schools are then required to make significant improvement in narrowing the achievement gap. "Schools that serve high-poverty communities in the U.S. are especially vulnerable to failure under the NCLB because of the pervasive achievement gaps that exist between disparate socio-economic groups"

(Woodside-Jiron & Gehsmann, 2009, p. 50). Greater improvements are often needed by schools that serve the poor because the students that attend the poorer school are often further behind than their economically-advantaged counterparts. Those waivers that states will most assuredly apply for may provide relief from the sanctions associated with failing to meet AYP each and every year and assist schools that currently serve the neediest students.

The National Context

There are schools all over the U.S. that are not meeting the national standards that set forth by the federal legislation NCLB Act of 2002. This act specifies that 100% of the students in each and every state perform successfully on each state's selected standardized test in specified subject areas by the year 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Educational leaders, such as school administrators, are under pressure to improve student achievement, decrease the dropout rate, and provide quality professional development that will enhance the learning community. Responding to accountability in the context of systematic change, school administrators and state leaders must continuously adjust to reform movements and new ways of examining assessment data. As recently as May, 2009, the North Carolina Department of Education submitted to the U.S. Department of Education a consolidated state application accountability workbook detailing the measures that the state of North Carolina will follow to receive funding to assist schools in meeting the requirements and how they will account for these funds (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a). In addition, they have had to address all these issues and the profound educational inequalities that plague our schools including

inconsistency in school funding, overcrowded classrooms, outdated text books, the lack

of technology that should be at the center of twenty-first century classrooms, and so

much more. Darling-Hammond (2007) acknowledges that "the United States has the most

inequitable education system in the industrialized world" (p. 1). Inequity can be found in

school districts across the country. This is evident in the small rural counties of North

Carolina where inequities can be found in school facilities that range from being five

years old to those that are over 80 years old, from the school facilities that have all

classrooms with twenty-first century technology to those that do not. These conditions

impact how students perform academically and significantly influence other factors such

as attendance (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Resources, 2010).

Attendance of students, especially students living in poverty, definitely plays a role in the

long-term academic success of a child (Cura, 2010).

Statewide Context

In order to understand the complexity of meeting AYP a definition and

explanation of Title I status should be provided. First, the North Carolina Department of

Public Instruction Department (2008) defines AYP as a series of performance targets that

states, school districts, and specific subgroups within their schools must achieve each

year to meet the requirements of NCLB. In each public school and Local Education

Agency (LEA) in North Carolina, the ten subgroups are: All, American Indian, Asian,

Black, Hispanic, Multi-racial, White, Economically Disadvantaged Students, Limited

English Proficient, and Students with Disabilities. Furthermore, grades 3-8 must also

meet the following targets: (a) 95% participation rate in reading/language arts assessment

and mathematics assessment, (b) Meet or exceed the state's Annual Measurable

Objective (AMO) for proficiency in reading/language arts and in mathematics, and (c)

The school as a whole must show progress on the Other Academic Indicator (OAI):

attendance for schools in grades 3-8. Secondly, a school becomes identified as a Title I

school when the LEA ranks all of its schools according to its percent of poverty. This is

determined by comparing the number of children attending each school, which is the

Average Daily Membership (ADM), with the number of low-income children for the

school (i.e., those eligible for free or reduced lunch). All schools at 75% or above will be

served by the LEA with Title I PRC 142 funds. The allotment for each school is based on

the greatest of needs and the ADM. These funds are used to provide a school-wide Title I

program that supports the academic programs of the school and to hire additional school

staff for early intervention and remedial purposes. Each school that receives a Title I

status and accepts the funds from the LEA has essentially accepted funding from the U.S.

Department of Education and is, therefore, subject to any and all requirements of NCLB.

In the state of North Carolina, the statutory requirements must articulate sanctions

and rewards for schools that are tied to their performance. With the sanctions being

sequential and additive in nature, each state must establish a statewide system of

intensive and sustained school support and improvement for local educational agencies

and schools receiving funds (U.S. Department of Education, 2011c). According to

information provided by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, each

school must meet the Adequate Yearly Target goal set by their state for reading and math

for the identified subgroups each year. If a school fails to do so for more than one year in

a row or fails to improve to meet the AYP for two consecutive years in any identified subgroup, they move into the sanction phase of school improvement. Once a school moves to the more progressive stages of "*School Improvement*," "*Choice*" or *"Corrective Action"* technical assistance from the SEA must ensure that the LEA implements fundamental reforms and offers technical assistance to improve academic achievement and enable a school to make AYP.

When a school fails to meet AYP for two consecutive years, the school must do the following:

1. provide parents with the *Choice* to transfer to another school,

2. develop a school improvement plan that includes the required ten components of:

   a. Comprehensive Needs Assessment

   b. Schoolwide Reform Strategies

   c. Highly Qualified Teachers

   d. Professional Development

   e. High Quality Teachers to High Needs Schools

   f. Parental Involvement

   g. Preschool Transitioning

   h. Measures to Include Teachers in Assessment Decisions

   i. Effective Timely Assistance

   j. Coordination of Programming

3. put aside 10% of Title I funds for professional development and technical assistance provided by the LEA,

4. supplement educational services provided when the school goes in to Corrective Action, and

5. Choose one of the following five options:

   a. Replace the staff who are relevant to the failure of the school to make AYP

   b. Institute and fully implement a new curriculum

   c. Significantly decrease the management authority at the school level

   d. Appoint an expert to advise the school on its progress toward making AYP

   e. Extend the school year or school day for the school

Finally, if the school should continue to function poorly as indicated by their inability to meet the Adequate Yearly Target goal of the state, the phase identified as *"Restructuring"* can occur. All of the above modifications would have occurred and the school, in a two-year period of time, would restructure itself and reopen as a charter school (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2008)

LEA Technical Support

Technical assistance for a school identified for improvement must focus on strengthening and improving the school's instructional program. This requires multi-layered support for staff development, technical support, and approaches that will yield considerable improvements in the goals and objectives of the school improvement plan.

Technical support must help the school address the issues that caused the school to make inadequate progress for two consecutive years.

Specifically, the LEA must ensure that the school in need of improvement receives technical assistance based on scientifically-based research in three areas:

1. **Data analysis:** The LEA must help the school to analyze results from the State assessment system and other relevant examples of student work. The LEA must teach school staff how to use these data to identify and develop solutions to problems in (a) instruction; (b) implementing the requirements for parental involvement and professional development; and (c) implementing the school plan, including LEA and school-level responsibilities for carrying out the plan.

2. **Identification and implementation of strategies:** The LEA must help the school choose effective instructional strategies and methods and ensure that the school staff receives high-quality professional development relevant to their implementation. The chosen strategies must be grounded in scientifically based research and address the specific instructional issues that caused the school to be identified for improvement.

3. **Budget analysis:** The LEA must provide the school in improvement with technical assistance in analyzing and revising its budget to fund activities most likely to increase student achievement and remove it from school improvement status. Reallocating resources to support improved student achievement is crucial to the successful implementation of the initiatives

contained in the NCLB and are required to be outlined in the school

improvement plan (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2010b).

School Improvement Plan Requirements

However effective they may be, school administrators cannot make the kind of

significant reorganizational changes needed to increase the necessary student

achievement to exit school improvement without altering the instructional practices and

improving the professional development for the staff through revisions and

implementation of the school improvement plan. A school's improvement plan must:

- Incorporate strategies based on scientifically based research that will strengthen the core academic subjects in the school;

- Adopt policies and practices concerning the school's core academic subjects that have the greatest likelihood of ensuring all groups of students enrolled in the school will meet the State's proficiency level of achievement;

- Directly addresses the academic achievement problem that caused the school to be identified for school improvement;

- Establish specific, annual, measurable objectives for continuous and substantial progress by each group of students enrolled in the school;

- Specify the implementation responsibilities of the school, the LEA, and the SEA serving the school under the plan;

- Include strategies to promote effective parental involvement in the school;

- Incorporate, as appropriate, activities before school, after school, during the summer, and during the extension of the school year;

- Incorporate strategies to promote high quality professional development;

- Incorporate a teacher mentoring program. (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2010a)

The school improvement plan must demonstrate that the school will implement programs and practices grounded in scientifically based research that are most likely to bring all groups of students to proficiency in reading and mathematics. Included among these strategies, as appropriate, would be additional learning activities for students that take place before school, after school, during the summer, and during any extension of the school year.

> Because elementary school principals are responsible for carrying out state and federal laws, evaluating teachers' instruction, and providing leadership in curriculum in their school, their decisions about curriculum and instruction have the potential to wield great influence over the success or failure of NCLB. (Powell, Higgins, Aram, & Freed, 2009, p. 20)

For schools in need of improvement, scientifically based research provides a standard by which the principal and teachers can critically evaluate the many instructional strategies and programs that are available to them and choose those with the greatest likelihood of producing positive results.

Statewide System of Support

The Program Monitoring and Support Division and the District and School Transformation Division of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction have combined a variety of services offered to schools in Corrective Action or beyond including regional roundtables-comprehensive support meetings with regional leads who meet monthly to coordinate resources for LEA's federal program directors. The LEA's assist schools in completing a comprehensive needs assessment. Each LEA attends regional meetings sponsored by the state to help the LEA's understand the requirements

to comply with parental notifications about School Improvement status, Choice opportunities, and completing the processes for implementing and notifying parents about Supplemental Educational Services (free after-school tutoring).

The state provides specific technical assistance to reserve and allocate Title I, Part A (PRC 142) funds for school improvement activities and to create and sustain a statewide system of support that provides technical assistance to schools identified for improvement. The SEA provides further assistance to LEAs through the application for additional funds such as the PRC 105-1003(a) and the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) funds. Through this application process, the LEA's submit a copy of their plan to implement public school choice or supplemental educational services. The LEA's receive a base amount determined by the total number of schools in School Improvement, Corrective Action, or Restructuring. In addition, each LEA will receive a per child amount based on schools in Corrective Action or Restructuring. The SEA will also establish provisions for the PRC 117-1003(g) fund. This fund is provided to LEA's with the lowest achieving schools that show the greatest need and a strong commitment to ensuring the funds will be used to meet progress goals detailed in their school improvement plan (North Carolina Department of Education, 2011a).

The statistical data provided on the North Carolina Department of Education website illustrate how difficult a task it is for schools to exit the school improvement cycle. Of the 547 Title I schools in the state of North Carolina that were in one of the listed phases of school improvement for the 2008-2009, only 50 were able to make AYP for two consecutive years and thus be able to exit school improvement in either reading

and/or math (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2010c). Of the other 497 schools that did not exit school improvement, the school administrators may or may not have the skills or practices in place to guide their schools toward an increase of student achievement. In the year 2009-2010, there were 332 Title I schools that were in school improvement (North Carolina Department of Public Education, 2010c). Of the 332 schools, only 61 were able to come out of school improvement in both reading and math. Of the remaining schools, another 136 were able to make AYP in only one subject area. The schools may or may not have had the kind of resources and support available to them from the LEA and SEA to encourage the complex organizational changes in order to be successful in both subjects.

In this concluding section I provide an overview of each chapter. It provides my literature review, my methodology, profiles and descriptive stories of the participants, the emerging themes and core practices derived from the research and my recommendations and conclusions.

Overview of the Chapters

Chapter II provides a literature review of the historical nature of the federal government's involvement in education from the turn of the twentieth century on culminating into the present day legislation of the NCLB Act of 2001. An additional review of the literature focuses on the principal as the instructional leader and the various educational reform measures that they spearhead in their schools.

Chapter III presents the case study methodology that is used in collecting the data for this study. In this chapter I discussed the importance of the transferability with case

studies. The research design is provided in this chapter as well with a description of the selection process, the participants, the school sites, the conceptual map, the questions of the interviews, and an explanation of how the interviews were collected.

Chapter IV presents a profile of each of the participants and my description of the four principals' transcribed interviews. I have selected particularly poignant and significant quotes from each principal to demonstrate the development of specific codes or themes that emerged as I analyzed my data. These are but snapshots of their words to provide rich, thick descriptions of their practices and procedures as they pertained to their work as a principal in a Title I school in school improvement.

Chapter V identifies emerging themes derived from the transcripts and identifies five core practices of principals. In Chapter VI, I have provided my recommendations and conclusions regarding my research study. The final portion of the chapter deals with the implications and further research to be carried out in this area of examining school leadership in Title I schools.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the past 10 years, school administrators, teachers, and school boards have worked to meet the federal regulations and deal with implications of the NCLB (2002) legislation. This piece of legislation focused on providing all students with equal opportunities for learning. In order to do so, many state governments have turned to rigid curriculum content standards, the use of data to drive instruction, and the increased use of achievement tests (Center on Education Policy, 2007). Achievement testing has been a primary instrument in educational reform and has led to the examination of "specific information on curriculum, teacher practices and leadership practices" (Reeves, 2004, p. 6). The atmosphere of high stakes accountability and testing has created significant political pressure on the standards movement's promise of improved student achievement and the notion that schools with effective measures can be turned around and brought back from the brink of closing. Accountability rests heavily on the shoulders of many, but the question for the principal is what leadership practices by school administrators enhance and improve the instructional work of their school, thereby yielding positive change in student achievement.

According to Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004), "the school principal has been cited as the most influential person in promoting school reform, change and innovation" (p. 375). Time and time again the principal is looked to for the promotion and

implementation of school reform that is necessary for initiating changes. How the principal responds and is committed to the needs for change and how effectively they go about completing these tasks will be observed by staff. Fullan (2002) says the principal has to be able to see the "big picture" (p. 17). Knowing what kinds of changes yield the highest results for improving student achievement are essential as many principals understand that this is the success by which their school is measured and therefore are concerned, according to Daly (2009) about the accountability targets (as cited in Farkas, Johnson, & Duffett, 2003). A literature review by Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) determined that the "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among the school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 3). With the pressure mounting for schools to continue to meet the standards for NCLB it becomes apparent that student achievement is at the center of the principal's work and their "highest priority" (King, 2002, p. 62). A synopsis of the literature produced in the past decade leads to the conclusion that beyond their managerial tasks, the new description includes that of the "instructional leader" far exceeding the responsibilities of the school leader 10 years ago and leading the reform movement on the close examination of student achievement to drive instruction.

<div align="center">**School Reform Approaches**</div>

The Reform Movement

"American culture and history demonstrate a strong bias in favor of the individual . . . and it is the dramatic action of the individual that makes a difference" (Brubaker & Coble, 2005, p. xvii). Prior to NCLB, the significance of individualism was rampant in

schools. Teachers had been in the habit of closing their doors when the day began and

were isolated from each other and from the practice of sharing. Principals ran their

schools much like that of a manager rather than an instructional leader with little or no

state or federal controls being administered to otherwise interfere in their daily operations

or decision making. The principal's ability to step out of the traditional authoritarian role

(DuFour, 1999) and create a context of change by which there is a shared vision has

become essential. In poor performing schools the principal must demonstrate "strong

leadership and a sense of direction, incentives and resources for change, and a more

sophisticated theory of how reforms work than the one offered by NCLB" (Sunderman,

Orfield, & Kim, 2006, p. 23). They have to be able to articulate the reform measures in

such a manner as to make the changes in practice and culture relevant to what the staff

can understand within the realm of their own day-to-day responsibilities. Achieving this

level of school reform takes more than just understanding what needs to be accomplished

but requires the principal possess high emotional intelligence (Ginsberg, 2008; Moore,

2009) to be effective in leading change and initiating school reform. According to Hall

and Simeral (2008),

> we must step beyond merely welcoming the notion of change and accepting its
> presence as a constant reality; we must become active agents of change, creating
> it and nurturing the rate at which our context changes. We must mold the changes
> to create new, better, more positive realities. If we want better schools, we must
> act accordingly. (p. 6)

Acting accordingly includes the transformation of a school culture (Fullan, 2002) to that of an atmosphere of learning in order to accomplish and sustain school reform even after the leader departs.

The reform of public education has been a major policy issue dating back more than 30 years but gained momentum with the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*. The frenzy that followed created reform efforts in which the primary goal was to create the development of higher standards or high expectations for students and the use of assessment instruments to gauge whether students and schools were meeting these standards. Today there is even a greater demand for teaching and learning methods by placing in the hands of students and teachers' technological devices such as laptops, netbooks, and iPads, to allow for integrating technology into the classroom in order to create technological capacity for learning outside of the traditional classroom setting (Perez & Uline, 2003). The information highway has changed the way that classrooms in secondary and higher education have begun to do business and has been viewed as the turning point in allowing an even greater forum for system-wide reform to exist. Technology will be a key factor in reform movements in the next decade as President Obama's Blueprint of Reform begins to take shape and the Common Core Standards, seeking to ensure "that states have a progression of K-12 standards in place that ensure that students have the knowledge and skills in mathematics and English Language Arts to graduate from high school ready for college and careers" (Achieve, 2010, p. 1) are adopted nationally.

A large body of research has been made available regarding school reform efforts and their impact on schools and student achievement as a result of the legislative mandates of the NCLB Act of 2002. It has been hailed as a piece of legislation that had a far reaching impact on student achievement by holding educators accountable. It included Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) measures considered "tangible and accessible support for school change rooted in research" (Borman, Hewes, & Brown, 2002, p. 1). Given the complexity of implementing these recommended reform measures across the U.S. consistently and with conformity, it is no wonder that some "states find their standards receive positive marks from one organization and are criticized by another" (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008, p. 3). No matter what side of the fence people choose to support in their criticism or praise of this legislation, the fact remains that school reform is rooted in the federal government's efforts to change the infrastructure of how schools are organized to offer educational programs. Furthermore it places accountability squarely on the shoulders of educators, making funding sources available to those schools that implement educational reforms with fidelity.

Standards-based Assessments and Data Analysis

One school-wide comprehensive reform approach that has incited national debates amongst educational organizations and its leaders and has had parents across the nation discussing its effects upon their children is the high stakes of *standards-based assessments.* Data provided from the statewide tests can provide an array of information regarding students such as gender, race, where their score on a given test falls on the scale determined by the state, how they compare to other students, lexile scores for

assisting their teachers in matching their reading level to the correct text and determines

their mastery of the state's standard course of study (North Carolina Department of

Public Instruction, 2007).

> With the current emphasis on statewide, district-wide, and school-wide testing
> and assessment, there is no shortage of data out there. A growing field of
> consultants, vendors and advisors are helping districts and schools determine what
> data to collect, how to provide confidential access to it, and how to make
> meaningful inferences from data that will ultimately bring results. (Petrides, 2006,
> p. 38)

Boundless number of books and research articles have been written in which the

positive and negative effects of high stakes testing were examined and whether the use of

data rich information has been useful to teachers and administrators in their effort to

increase student achievement through the use of content-specific or externally imposed

tests (Popham, 2003). Given the sanctions that accompany NCLB when a school or

district consistently under performs, educators have tried to become effective in their use

of test results to improve the quality of the teaching in schools. The information derived

from tests has changed the culture of schools and the attitudes of teachers by demanding

that equitable services be provided to all students including those that are most at-risk

such as economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities (Elliott &

Thurlow, 2006). As a result, beyond the statewide assessments administered as a

summative assessment to determine what students have learned and if academic growth

has occurred, school districts across the country have developed their own *benchmarks*,

to provide information to school leaders and teachers about how students are making

intermittent progress.

Benchmarks or other formative assessments that can be administered intermittently can be broken down into even more specific detail and analyzed to determine where areas of the curriculum should be re-taught and can be quickly utilized in educators' efforts to meet the needs of struggling students. According to an empirical study conducted by Shute (2008), when teachers can give students feedback from formative assessments that is on "target (valid), objective, focused and clear" (p. 181) the increase in student learning occurs. These benchmarks tests are used to create a culture of collaboration (Love, Stiles, Mundry, & DiRanna, 2008) amongst teachers in identifying what instructional practices within the classroom have been the most effective.

Many teachers have used Popham's (2003) notably common evaluative model in which the teacher uses pre- and post-tests to consider the effectiveness of the instructional strategies and adjusts their teaching according to the results. These tests and the use of the results (data) to drive instruction in classrooms is part of the high stakes accountability of NCLB. "Testing is viewed as both a system of *monitoring* student performance and a *vehicle of change* driving what is taught, how it is taught, what is learned and how it is learned" (Madaus, Russell, & Higgins, 2009, p. 8). The results of these tests indicate the success of the school by their ability to meet the AYP target goal determined for the subjects of reading and math in certain grade levels. At least once every three years, the achievement levels must be raised until, by 2014, all students in the state are succeeding at the proficient level.

Critical to meeting these achievement levels is the consideration that "the data, both cultural and cognitive, is as central to learning as the standards are to the

accountability perspective" (Brunner et al., 2009, p. 261). Hence, each state's test is compared against the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The "NAEP comparability," according to Thomas (2005), ensures that each state is not setting standards that are unacceptably low. This nationwide measure holds accountable school districts grappling with how to meet the needs of diverse student populations—in language, culture, prior education, home situations, attitudes about education, and parental involvement in order to decrease the achievement gap and to ensure services and a quality education are being provided equitably (Thomas, 2005).

The instructional leader must possess an understanding of how to examine, interpret and use data to determine if students are making incremental progress and "while principals cannot improve student growth or achievement alone, they do provide the leadership and the support that translates into an environment that result in increased productivity" (Karpicke & Murphy, 1996, p. 27). Building a school wide data-based inquiry team can take shape in many forms but often are school leadership teams, consisting of the principal and various stakeholders. These teams examine the data derived from quarterly benchmarks and summative assessments administered to students in schools as a means to provide ongoing communication with students and parents about students taking ownership of their own learning (Brookhart, Moss, & Long, 2008).

To organize, analyze, and integrate data, teachers and administrators must have received adequate training in becoming data literate, speaking the same language (Ford, 2008), and using the right kind of data (Hess, 2008). She noted schools like Johnsview Village Public School have made significant gains in reading, math, and science when

committed to examining students' needs through data analysis and changing classroom instruction. "Examining student data through the lens of pressing questions can mobilize staff, promote data literacy and help raise student achievement" (Ronka, Lachat, Slaughter, & Meltzer, 2008, p. 19). By putting together the essential components of inclusive assessment systems, even students with disabilities can benefit from standards-based reforms (Lehr & Thurlow, 2003).

With these skills teachers, school administrators, and district level leaders have utilized the standards-based assessments to determine what the students know and disaggregated data available to drive instruction for students and meet one of the major requirements of NCLB—to focus on individual students in all subgroups, particularly those that were previously overlooked. Thusly so, the principal creates a culture where data examination is a common practice and is used to promote positive changes in the instructional practices of teachers (Feldman, Lucey, Goodrich, & Frazee, 2003). It can be a "tool to connect achievement with curriculum, instruction, remediation, acceleration, and teacher professional development and the allocation of human and fiscal resources for school improvement" (Shen & Cooley, 2008, p. 320).

The success of using data from tests administered to students has rested in the hands of those with access to it. This reform measure of standards-based assessments has been determined to help "teachers and their supervisors to interpret and use student achievement data to set target goals for student improvement" (Strong & Grant, 2009, p. 4). Lachat and Smith (2005), found that several "key factors influence data use: the types of data available to staff; technology and data-system capacity; and school conditions and

practices that either promote or act as barriers to staff use of data" (p. 334). Their four-year study of the use of data in five urban high schools found that all of the high schools made progress and that the staff of each school was committed to the use of the data to drive their instruction. "Tests can enable teachers to get a more meaningful fix on what it really is that a curricular aim (a content standard, goal, objective, or intended outcome) seeks from students" (Strong & Grant, 2009, p. 18). Data use and analysis can play an integral role in making good decisions about student learning if the staff is committed to making sound decisions about instructional practices.

Ongoing data analysis from multiple sources provides a comprehensive picture to those involved in improving student achievement and changing the way schools go about educating and engaging students in learning. However, according to Wayman and Stringfield (2005), no one source of information tells the entire story so the principal uses "all pieces of information on the student, whether it be assessment data, demographic data, or teacher judgment . . . as a data point that describe the state of student learning" (p. 6). It results in a comprehensive picture as to how the student learns. Consequently, when the principal can provide leadership to the data team (Ronka et al., 2008) and focus shifts to "strategically aligning all of the elements to analyze what is and is not working to improve student learning" (p. 22) then informed rationale for differentiating instruction can take place and hopefully add meaning to the phrase "*no child left behind*".

Professional Development

A feature of the federal legislation NCLB Act of 2002, Title II, Part A exerted a strong influence on improving public school teaching. It provided State Educational

Agencies (SEA) the flexibility to use federal funds to address teacher quality, certification, retention, and professional development for teachers and school administrators (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). With the infusion of federal funds stipulated to improve teacher and principal quality and the pressure by the federal law to see students make improved academic gains through standards-based assessments this reform effort has gained momentum.

Prior to NCLB, teachers and administrators may have participated in professional development that was uninspired and of poor quality with little or no relevance to what they actually needed in the classroom to be effective. Teachers have often described it as a "one shot deal," meaning that teachers sat through a brief workshop where they rarely experienced follow up training and where little or no connection was offered (Reiman, 2004). However, in the most recent years, research has demonstrated that teacher effectiveness has a direct effect on student achievement and having a "highly qualified teacher" in each classroom (Darling-Hammond & Skyes, 2003) is one of the stipulations of NCLB. The purpose of professional development activities is to examine scientifically research based practices, shown to substantially increase the knowledge and teaching skills of the teachers and directly related to state academic content standards, student achievement standards and assessments. Thus, teacher professional development has been redesigned in many schools and districts to ensure that teacher learning opportunities were sustained, embedded and focused on student instructional needs (Camburn, 2010).

The need for comprehensive reform has influenced the need for schools to create collaborative cultures and shared expertise (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). According to Hirsch and Killion (2009), "Collective expertise exists when individuals in the same system share their knowledge" (p. 468) and when teachers share "every student benefits from the expertise of every teacher and no student relies on just the knowledge of a single teacher" (p. 469). Changing the instructional culture and quality of the instructional practices in classrooms has become a primary means by which the accountability of student learning and the increase of student achievement influence the role of site-based leadership and teacher professional development. Within any school district it is the responsibility of the leaders at all levels to ensure the instructional practices in each classroom are of high quality and research based. When conducting a longitudinal study, Sterbinsky, Ross, and Redfield (2006) examined the effects of comprehensive school reform on 12 urban and rural elementary schools. Those schools where the Comprehensive School Reform implementation occurred (encompassing desired climate and instructional changes which included direct instruction, ability grouping, and higher level questioning) had "significantly higher gain scores than the control group" (p. 389).

This reform approach has been instituted in low-performing schools to transform them into schools where student achievement is the focal point. "Schools are only as good as the quality of the faculty, the professional development that supports their learning, and the faculty's capacity to work together to improve instruction" (Byrk, 2010, p. 24). In 2006-2007, Steele and Boudett (2008) note that the eight schools studied in Boston created cultures of collaboration where even the newest team member had

something to contribute to the effectiveness of the whole team. When the focus on instructional change becomes the primary means to improve student achievement, school districts like that of the San Diego City Schools use site-based instructional leadership and teacher professional development as central strategies for moving the instructional practices of the district to sustaining reform efforts (O'Day & Quick, 2009).

Significant to the way that teachers change their instructional practices to increase student achievement is the professional development that they receive (Quick, Holtzman, & Chaney, 2009). Principals play a substantial role in how and what the professional development looks like for teachers and understand that it is "critical to maintaining teachers' effectiveness" (Miller, 2003, p. 4.) "A principal can foster coherent professional development by connecting professional learning activities to one another, or by linking professional development with larger school goals or the teacher's own professional goals" (Graczewski, Knudson, & Holtzman, 2009, p. 73). The principal needs to stay abreast of the best professional practices available to teachers (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003) and create the school conditions that foster teacher effectiveness and retention such as time for collaboration, curriculum alignment and a culture of continuous improvement. Being the "facilitator of growth" (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 374) is a major responsibility for the instructional leader as their job has moved away from monitoring and evaluating to providing opportunities of professional growth. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) note that the leader's involvement in teacher learning provides them with a deep understanding of the conditions required to enable staff to make and sustain the changes required for improved outcomes. The need to stay informed about current strategies and

research that relates to effective instruction is not new to education leaders, but they are now under increased pressure to ensure that professional development activities are worth the time they take and are meaningful to all staff members.

Teacher Leadership

NCLB created a focus on tackling the teacher-quality problem and through the use of data systems that link students' test scores with data about their teachers, this is related directly "to heightened teacher leadership in educational accountability" (Reeves, 2004, p. 11). Imposing accountability measures and high stakes testing may have occurred, but as Houston (2008) states, "you can not create a more intense competitive environment and expect the system to change without addressing issues of capacity" (p. 105). Teachers are assumed to be an essential ingredient (Cochran-Smith & Power, 2010) in student achievement and building the leadership capacity within the school community allows for the "betterment of culture, climate and student achievement" (Williams, 2009, p. 32). The need for professional development, teacher preparation, the qualification of teachers, the induction programs for teachers and working conditions for teachers became important because school environments are an array of complex and contextual needs. Consequently, the capacity for teachers and administrators to be provided professional development that both enhances their level of expertise and transforms the way they looked at their role as instructional leaders can begin to change (Reeves, 2008) both in the classroom and in the school setting began to take place.

The successful instructional leader creates an environment of collaboration and shared leadership. They understand the task is not theirs alone to carry. "Schools

successful in sustaining school improvement and positive impact on student learning, build capacity for leadership with the organization" (Williams, 2007, p. 37). Through the creation of professional learning communities a commitment to a shared vision provides coherence to programs and learning practices (Lambert, 2003). A good example of how the professional learning communities serve as the springboard into the enhancement and further development for individual growth as a leader is the state of North Carolina's evaluative instrument for teachers. The Teacher Evaluation Instrument used to observed and provide feedback to teachers for formal observation evaluations consists of five separate standards of performance that are evaluated. The instrument dedicates one entire standard to teacher leadership within the school and the classroom. Teachers are pronounced developing, proficient, accomplished or distinguished based on their final summative rating (North Carolina Department of Instruction, 2008b). It is no longer just talked about but a given that leadership should be developed and enhanced by leaders and that teachers should take a greater role in their own professional development. Leaders of school buildings come and go. Therefore, it is necessary through these professional learning communities, fostered and encouraged by the leader of the school, create the opportunity for school reforms to continue even when they or other key individuals leave the school setting.

One of the opportunities that principals have been able to provide teachers by means of professional development and considered to be one of the best practices for a school staff is the chance to collaborate with their peers in a professional learning community and the building of teacher capacity (Lambert, 2003). A Professional

Learning Community (PLC) is cycle of professional inquiry into research, reflection, discussion and experimentation. They are defined as "groups of individuals committed to continuous improvement through shared values and reflection" (Rasberry & Mahajan, 2008, p. 2). These PLCs are comprised of teachers and administrators alike where all are equal partners contributing to the body and expansion of knowledge of its members to deliver research-based instructional practices to increase student achievement (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006).

> Strong actions by the principal on behalf of community development are necessary, it appears, to "get the ball rolling" and, once the initiative is under way, it is also necessary for the principal to share leadership, power, authority, and decision making with the staff in a democratically participatory way. (Hord, 1997, p. 53)

Continuous improvement becomes embedded in the school's culture and functions as "the guiding force that keeps schools on target in an uncompromising quest for quality at every corner of the campus" (Abbott, as cited in Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004, p. 17). In many cases, Lambert (2000) suggests that many gains made under a change agent are hardly sustained after that person has left and that the school comes to rely on one person for decisions, changes, and improvements. This in itself is critical as school administrators do move on to other career opportunities. Thus the capacity for leadership within the entire school environment must be able to be sustained upon their departure. The administrator's task in creating this scenario is for them to ensure that the school's internal structure is in place where leadership lasts (Lambert, 2000). The essence of their leadership is to create that positive atmosphere beyond their own role in which

there is an avoidance of codependency. To successfully sustain change in schools, the instructional leader of the school must foster the organizational concept of a "broad-based, skillful participation . . . that leads to lasting school improvement" (Lambert, 2005, p. 38).

The principal must be interested in building teacher leader capacity in order to increase teachers' feelings of empowerment and the ability to share in some of the decision making all within the setting of collaboration. It is a way to persuade others to use the instructional practices in the classroom that increase student achievement. The effective leader helps create the excitement and channels the energy of students and teachers in a productive way. They use their indirect influence (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008) by motivating staff. A recent meta-analysis of 27 published studies of the impact of leadership on student outcomes showed that the impact of instructional leadership was between two and three times greater than that of transformational leadership (Robinson et al., 2008). However, Heck and Hallinger (2009) conducted a four-year longitudinal study examining the effect of distributed leadership on school improvement and growth in math achievement. Their findings suggest that school leadership and capacity building are mutually reinforcing in their effects on each other over time. This implies and reinforces that notion that the instructional leader must draw upon a variety of situational leadership styles in order to create the desired effect of school improvement, whereby people will perceive their strong leadership skills as better able to improve the academic capacity of students.

As focus has shifted to the adult learners in the building and the quality of instruction being delivered the principal plays a distinctive role by displaying a high level of trust and expecting a commitment to the process of learning by all of the members. Schools have increasingly begun to look to relationship-building professional development strategies to improve teacher performance such as that of the coaching model (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). Coaches in classrooms has become more common as school districts have created an array of coaching scenarios—instructional coach, literacy coach, technology coach and academic coach to name a few. No matter what the title, these individuals are teacher leaders whose role is "integral to whole-system reform" (Fullan & Knight, 2011, p. 53) and who partner in schools with administrators in their efforts to make poor teachers better and good teachers great. When this occurs the capacity for teachers as leaders becomes possible with the opportunity for them to contribute to the learning environment and influencing the practice of their colleagues. When instructional practices of teachers improve, according to Marzano (2003), an increase in student achievement occurs.

Embraced by administrators and teachers, these coaches can be the glue that brings it all together but that depends greatly on the leadership in the building. These supportive teacher- supervisors are in classrooms to "coach" other teachers along by appreciating the level of the each teacher's competency in their area and to begin to build a working relationship that will enhance the teacher's ability to communicate his or her needs. "By discovering and developing their strengths, teachers can transform their weaknesses without having to tackle them head on" (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-

Moran, 2011, p. 16). If the school principal has a clear understanding of the role and responsibilities of the coach and can clearly articulate their plan about the work of the coach, it can positively influence student achievement. However "without coaching, many comprehensive reform efforts will fall short of real improvement" (Fullan & Knight, 2011, p. 50).

Research-based Instructional Best Practices

Seeking to improve student achievement on the standards-based assessments in schools, the focus in education has turned to research-based best instructional practices and their legitimacy (Douglas, 2009). These best practices include the instructional practices referred to as school or district-level improvement strategies that have been implemented to increase student achievement in all schools and to assist the Title I schools facing sanctions for underperformance. These strategies include aligning curriculum with academic standards, incorporating research-based best practices, providing additional professional development and opportunities of collaboration to teachers, the use of data analysis to drive instruction, student engagement, and leadership training for new principals. Wolff, McClelland and Stewart (2010) conducted a quantitative study of 5,558 teachers in which they responded to a questionnaire about the significance of the professional development they received and their perception of it as it related to their AYP status. The results indicated that teachers at schools making AYP status perceived their professional development to be effective citing the significance of research based practices.

Research-based best practices vary from school to school and the degree to which any of the individual practices has proven to be the most effective has not been determined. However, in order to make a positive impact on student achievement "individual practices must add up to a coherent strategy to gain the traction needed to achieve sustainable improvement" (Christman et al., 2009, p. 51). Therefore, it is not one single strategy but the combination of practices which has occurred in classrooms that increase student achievement (Mitchell, 2007; Heller, Calderon, & Medrich, 2003; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Therefore, teachers and administrators have worked to address the challenge of students meeting the state standards. The alignment of what is tested with what is taught has been identified as a successful improvement effort (Billig, Jaime, Abrams, Fitzpatrick, & Kendrick, 2005). Alignment can best be achieved through sound standards and assessments development activities ranging from adjusting lesson plans at the local level to targeting the resources at the state level (English & Steffy, 2001). When teachers cover " a recursive cycle of instructional planning, teaching and evaluation of students' work—all focused on raising learning expectations for standards achievement" (O'Shea, 2005, p. 2) they are incorporating one of the strategies that many local districts have decreed as a best practice intended to improve alignment between state assessments and district and school curricula. Schools that have been successful in closing the achievement gap have stressed the local and state content standards and aligned those standards with the state and the district assessments (Billig et al., 2005).

Since the law of NCLB was enacted states have used academic content standards as the benchmark for determining if schools were meeting AYP. This element of accountability has held schools responsible for learning and has positively influenced teacher practices (U.S. Government of Accountability Office, 2009). Therefore, teachers and administrators have worked to address the challenge of students meeting the state standards. The alignment of what is tested with what is taught has been identified as a successful improvement effort (Billig et al., 2005). Alignment can best be achieved through sound standards and assessments development activities ranging from adjusting lesson plans at the local level to targeting the resources at the state level (English & Steffy, 2001). When teachers cover "a recursive cycle of instructional planning, teaching and evaluation of students' work—all focused on raising learning expectations for standards achievement" (O'Shea, 2005, p. 2) they are incorporating one of the strategies that many local districts have decreed as a best practice intended to improve alignment between state assessments and district and school curricula. Schools that have been successful in closing the achievement gap have stressed the local and state content standards and aligned those standards with the state and the district assessments (Billig et al., 2005).

Title I schools that have met the requirements of meeting the AYP target goal set forth by their state department of public instruction have consistently used strategies that represent the best practices occurring in classrooms. The National Center for Educational Achievement (2009) studied the successful implementation of best practices in five different school districts across the country. They found that "consistently higher

performing school systems employ a variety of techniques to create student-centered classrooms. District leaders encourage or mandate these instructional practices and school administrators and classroom teachers implement them" (p. 23) and "district administrators invest in professional development in order to ensure that teachers are well-prepared to use the new program in their classroom" (p. 22). The report goes on to discuss other key findings that corroborates and supports that significant to the schools being successful is a series of strategies implemented systemically and with clear defining goals of what can lead to academic success for all students. It is clear that the principal plays a significant role in how educational reform initiatives that can have a positive effect on student achievement. "Principals who are strong instructional leaders are a fundamental component in schools that embrace high levels of student engagement as the most effective medium to affect student achievement" (Quinn, 2002, p. 462) and constantly monitor best practices to drive school reform measures to meet the standards set forth by their state as a measure by which their schools are graded.

The Principal's Leadership Role

The federal mandates of NCLB forced district leaders to focus not only on the professional development of teachers but also to examine the efforts and capacity of school principals to lead schools in successful reform measures that transform schools with a history of consistently under performing on high stakes state tests. Thus, creating the context for rigorous learning environments for all students has reshaped the role of leaders in schools. District offices across the country have tried to help. The uniformity in instructional practices across individual school districts in which "best practices (e.g.,

cooperative learning, guided reading, technology use, methods of differentiating instruction) and/or on implementation of specific district, state, or commercial programs that prescribe teaching and learning activities and materials" (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010, p. 209) emerged as a major focus for leadership activity.

Many districts began to determine that the accountability of implementing these best practices would lie in the hands of the school leader and to make that happen, district leaders began to focus on opportunities for school administrators to "discover the many links in the chain connecting state, district and school leadership to learning" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, p. 496) through professional development that enhanced their abilities to lead schools in the age of educational reform. Nicholson, Harris-John, and Schimmel (2005) noted that each school is unique; therefore, the principal's effective development rests on the "fact that school improvement is situation-specific" (p. 34). Ensuring that teachers have meaningful choices does not mean that teachers are free to stop learning. Additionally, the ability of school leaders to transform their schools into environments of collaboration required districts to help leaders to discover their own leadership self-efficacy that, according to Leithwood and Jantzi (2008), "is likely the key cognitive variable regulating leader functioning in a dynamic environment" (p. 497).

Leadership in the age of accountability has required school administrators to take a close look at the instructional practices in the school by teachers and to provide opportunities of professional development that transformed the school culture into a "composite of collaboration, modeling, and motivation that influence others to commit to a shared vision" (Servais & Sanders, 2006, p. 5). A dynamic environment is created when

second hand order (Marzano et al., 2005) occurs in a school culture. Creating a culture of change for sustainable reform efforts is about creating second order change in which not only does the thinking about teaching and learning change but the behaviors linked to the teaching and learning in the building change as well. Szachowicz (2010) describes just such an example at a large urban high school, Brockton High School (MA), with more than 4,200 students. In 2001, they reported a 44% failure rate in English/Language Arts (ELA) and 75% failure in math on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Through the efforts of the principal and a restructuring committee the literacy initiative was implemented. The school culture was transformed by committing to high expectations for improving academic success for all students with a shared sense of responsibility among the staff members. By 2010 the school was selected as a National Model School by the International Center for Leadership in Education, two bronze medals on the *U.S. News and World Report's* America's Best High Schools rankings and acknowledgement by Harvard's University's Achievement Gap Institute for closing the achievement gap.

Central to leading learning for students and teachers is the principal's or school administrator's cultivation of their own learning. In order to model the process of "continuous growth" the school leader must model the practice of seeking out professional development that will enhance their abilities. "Everyone in school needs to be actively engaged in professional growth, with the principal being the first learner" (Knight, 2011, p. 20). To that end there are a variety of academies, institutes and programs offered through different venues in order to promote the leadership skills of

administrators in rural and urban schools. For example, in North Carolina, the Piedmont

Triad Education Consortium (Piedmont Triad Education Consortium, 2011) is a

collaboration of 15 K-12 school districts and seventeen higher education institutes in

Central North Carolina. The consortium offers a variety of educational leadership

workshops in order to provide school leaders an opportunity to enhance their knowledge

about a variety of school related topics.

      With the idea that students should be ready to meet the challenges of the twenty-

first century, states like North Carolina have begun to consider and outline for

administrators the goals and performance standards by which they should measure

themselves. To stay current, the state of North Carolina has recently rolled out the North

Carolina School Executive Evaluation Instrument (NC Department of Public Instruction,

2008a) designed to serve as a guide to principals in steering their own professional

growth through self-reflection and collaborative opportunities with immediate

supervisors. Principals are now rated on seven standards: Strategic Leadership,

Instructional Leadership, Cultural Leadership, Managerial Leadership, Human-Resource

Leadership, External Development Leadership and Micro-Political Leadership. This

instrument requires individuals to think about how they create school organizations and

improve performance, adept at changing systems and building relationships. It taps into

the knowledge and insight about a shared understanding for the purpose of the work of

their school staff. It requires the principal to take action and communicate the values and

directs action, commitment and ownership of a set of values and beliefs that everyone in

the school can focus on. It evaluates how principals build alliances within the community and shares leadership distribution amongst all of its stakeholders.

The Principal as Instructional Leader

The "instructional leader" is a metaphor used to describe the school administrator in the late 1990s. With the new challenges associated with national and state expectations, principals were to focus on teaching and learning. Part of that is having a vision, sharing the leadership with teachers, creating professional learning communities and influencing what happens in the classroom. To that end the instructional leader must "structure the learning and teaching environment for actual people and not for remote and disparate disciplines" (Glascock, 2003, p. 13). Prior to NCLB, Leithwood and Duke (1998) defined *instructional leadership* as a separate role orientation that typically focuses on the "behaviors of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students" (p. 34). However, a review of literature in the years after the implementation of NCLB has furthered defined the role as making "creative use of all resources—people, time and money—to support school improvement" (King, 2002, p. 63).As educators move through this constantly changing landscape and the contextual educational problems that exist in schools today, the instructional leader must possess a vast array of competencies and skills to meet the day-to-day challenges they face. They must have a diverse repertoire of skills and strategies which are theoretically-based, and must develop and maintain trusting, and noted by Hall and Simeral (2008), a positive and supportive relationship with much of their employees.

Since NCLB demands accountability for student achievement, it implicitly demands that principals become instructional leaders. As an instructional leader, principals help facilitate necessary teacher instructional practices to improve student achievement. Though some in education are advocates for the movement away from the accountability model, others (Reeves, 2004) argue the accountability system is not about humiliation or accusation, but the search for "underlying causes of poor achievement and the development of specific strategies for improvement" (p. 8). In order for specific strategies for improvement to occur, the instructional leader must make changes that help schools improve through the opportunities of learning and the creation of strong professional communities. Fullan (2002) noted that "The single factor common to successful change is that relationships improve" (p. 18). Relationships are the very fabric by which the quilt of cooperation and collaboration are sewn. However, to believe that all school administrators come equipped with the necessary knowledge and set of characteristics that will yield the high stakes testing results that all school districts require would be a mistake.

Effective leaders actively support curriculum development by "mobilizing school personnel and clients to notice, face, and take on tasks of changing instruction as well as harnessing and mobilizing resources needed to support the transformation of teaching and learning" (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004, p. 12) and are guided by a "distinctive set of beliefs about what is possible" (Krug, 1992, p. 441). As leaders with the most frequent and direct link to teachers, the new role of the principal as the instructional leader is an important, if not the most, important position in the school system (Schnur &

Gerson, 2005). To meet the districts vision, principals often serve as the middle manager and liaison (Heller, 2004), implementing top level down directives and district policies (Donmoyer & Wagstaff, 1990) and at the same time working in the school to build teacher capacity in order to increase student achievement.

Consequently, instructional leaders do their best to create conditions that enable their schools (Glickman, 2002) "to sustain promising reforms and attain their goal—unleashing the power of student achievement" (p. 44). At various levels of education and in this culture of testing and accountability, the school leader must know the demographics of his or her school, and adjust their style in order to accommodate its very unique cultural needs. They recognize that as Reeves (2007) noted, culture is "the gap between what leaders say that they value and what they actually do" (p. 93). School administrators must possess the understanding that "their traits, skills, behaviors, and various situational factors interacting together, along with a common vision and supportive learning community may ultimately determine a leader's effectiveness" (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004, p. 204). Effective instructional leaders help their schools to develop or endorse visions that embody the best thinking about teaching and learning therefore affecting the extent to which teachers use proven, research-based practices to improve student performance and teacher burnout is prevented (Embich, 2001). Because whatever else they do, leaders provide direction and exercise influence (Louis et al., 2010) on teachers. Furthermore, school administrators must "have a vision that others find compelling" (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994, p. 498) to influence team performance.

The examination between the contextual setting of the school and the actions of others within the school setting has many in the field of educational research conducting studies to determine what traits or characteristics of the instructional leader are actually the most effective. This indicates that there is some relationship between the contexts by which the principal functions within the school setting and the action of others that plays a part in student outcomes as well. Marzano et al. (2005) determined through a quantitative research study 21 responsibilities and a correlation between the action of each of these 21 responsibilities and student academic achievement. The authors found that monitoring and evaluating, knowledge of the curriculum, and involvement in the curriculum had a higher correlation to student achievement than the other 21 responsibilities but overall, the authors found that if the school leader could demonstrate improvement in all responsibilities named, a 10 percentile point increase would occur in pupil test scores. With 21 overall responsibilities listed, the instructional leader has to recognize what traits and characteristics displayed within certain settings or groups of people will yield the most benefit to the improvement of student achievement in their school.

Principals are instrumental to improving instructional practices and can be described as the "most influential variable in education today" (Hall & Simeral, 2008, p. 107). Teachers and instructional staff are valuable assets and thus principals spend a lion's share of their time focusing on the instructional practices in the classroom. The challenge facing many school leaders is the constant demand for academic improvement as the year 2014 looms ever closer. They must include a way to "create a fundamental

transformation in the learning cultures of schools and of the teaching profession" (Fullan, 2002, p. 17) in order to be successful with the many responsibilities and day-to-day activities dictating how they spend their time and what they attend to beyond their office door. Centering on the behaviors and practices that will yield the highest rate of academic success must be their number one priority. The instructional leader solves instructional problems, provides resources, facilitates collaboration and critical conversations around teaching and learning, identifies and provides staff development, uses data to drive instruction, and builds teacher leaders in order to provide optimum conditions for continuous improvement.

In order for a school leader to function as an instructional leader who fosters teacher leaders in a school, they must be clear on their own values and be confident of their own capacity to work well with others. They learn to elicit their staff's cooperation through shared leadership not necessarily through demanding it. Instead the instructional leader creates organizational climates of trust, information sharing, healthy risk-taking, and learning. People perform at higher levels when they are encouraged and short term accomplishments may be just that, unless sincerity and credit to others is provided in order to leave behind strong organizations once the leader has departed (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). There is a fine line between finding that balance of releasing leadership power to teachers and maintaining the appropriate building expectations for all staff members. Nevertheless the most recent six-year study of Louis et al. (2010) indicates that principals should not be concerned about losing their influence because their results indicated that the higher performing schools attribute their success to the greater

influence of stakeholders; yet at the same time the overall hierarchical structure did not change. Other than this study there is a lack of literature that speaks to the difficulty and anxiety that school administrators are experiencing in understanding where they fit in this new role and how to handle the shift of leadership roles.

With all of the pressure to increase student achievement, principals often lament about the difficulty in handling both the academic loads of being the instructional leader and the managerial functions of running a school building. Principals must choose wisely how they spend their time to ensure they are focusing on what is most important. Understanding how principals struggle with the responsibilities as the instructional leader requires an understanding of how NCLB impacts their school. Reitzug, West, and Angel (2008) conducted a qualitative research study with 20 principals to examine their understanding of the relationship between their daily work and the improvement of instruction in their schools and found one factor among several others was that for some principals

> leadership does not occur as a result of working directly with the instructional program but rather as a byproduct of relationship building-specifically, the principal's efforts to help students and faculty feel better about themselves and thus try harder and take more pride in their work. (p. 697)

For many other principals, however, improvement of instruction in the school was the result of instructionally-focused practices such as using data to align curriculum, teaching, benchmarking, and re-teaching. The leadership capacity over time is the most productive way to bring about improvements that can be sustained. Danielson (2007) implies that the administrator plays a crucial role in fostering the conditions that facilitate

leadership. When teachers are given an opportunity to become teacher leaders they experience a great sense of worth and thrive. They feel "respected for their knowledge and experience" (Lattimer, 2007, p. 70). According to Fullan (2002) it is a "sophisticated, conceptual thinker who transforms through people and teams" (p. 17). The instructional leadership role focuses on relationships as much or more than the daily instructional component. To that end, the study of 24 restructured schools—8 elementary, 8 middle, and 8 high schools by Marks and Printy (2003)—revealed that when instructional leadership is practiced along side of the transformational leadership style, student achievement is substantial. The research suggests that the contextual nature of each circumstance or situation assists the instructional leader build their repertoire of skills.

Instructional leaders understand that it is essential that changes be made that enhance the opportunities for themselves as well as teachers to promote and enhance student achievement through professional development and the building of professional relationships. School leaders need support and resources from other principals and opportunities to come together to dialogue about how to build capacity for instruction. Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) conducted a study of 96 principals and 2,764 teachers that indicated that a school leader's collective efficacy was an important correlate between district conditions and the conditions in their schools and was linked significantly to student achievement. Moreover, many school districts are now seeking outside consultants for leadership training such as Mid-continental Research for Educational Leadership (McREL), based in Colorado. These outside consultants are usually hired for a contract of at least a year or two to work closely with the district's leadership teams.

The training is commonly noted to be expensive and it does not happen overnight. Fullan

(2001) explains "The big problems of the day are complex, rife with paradoxes and

dilemmas. For these problems, there are no once-and-for-all answers" (p. 73).

Transformational Turnaround Leadership

Transformation implies that something is going to change in a dramatic or

significant way. Conversely, persistently low performing schools may be stymied by a

variety of factors that cannot be shifted without a change in leadership. "A failing school

will need a new principal with a skill set suited to rapid and effective turnaround and a

spirit of strong leadership and urgency to ignite the school's effort" (Educational

Resource Strategies, 2010, p. 50) thus creating a transformation. Given the federal

sanctions of NCLB that dictates a change in leadership when a school persistently

performs poorly, it is no wonder that a district often decides that the quickest way to

turnaround a school is to take the "best principals in the district and move them to the

highest-needs schools" (Educational Resource Strategies, 2010, p. 50). With this

replacement the hope is that the new principal can reverse the downward spiral of the

school and provide some new and dramatic changes that will jumpstart it into "the

Promised Land of high achievement and full accreditation" (Duke, 2004, p. 14).

Once appointed to a low performing school, Turnaround principals set about to

transform the culture of the school (Pappano, 2010). The Turnaround principal examines

the competing approaches and different strategies to recast expectations. "You need to

change the culture from low expectations and mediocrity, a culture of disrespect into a

culture of urgency high expectations, no excuses" (Pappano, 2010, p. 145). Turnaround

principal raises the expectations to the next level for student achievement. They are

champions of change. Smith (2008, p. 255, as cited in Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee,

2002) states,

> Leaders need to be relational, with a strong and accurate emotional self-
> awareness; emotional self-control; social awareness, involving empathy and the
> ability to read the currents of one's organization; and relationship management,
> that is, understanding how to inspire, influence, develop others, resolve conflicts,
> and encourage people to work in teams. (p. 39)

Their job is not about "preserving but about dismantling failed patterns and practices-and

doing it in a way that doesn't feel disruptive but affirmative" (Pappano, 2010, p. 78) in

nature.

Turnaround principals are about the job at hand and getting it done. "A

turnaround principal must identify and accomplish those things that must be done right

—100%, the first time, no exceptions" (Salmonwicz, 2009, p. 21). They are not

necessarily rule breakers but understand that they need some autonomy bend the rules

when needed. They recognize and articulate those non-negotiables—their values about

teaching, learning and the work that is needed in changing a school culture. They initiate

conversations that challenge the status quo in regards to daily practices and procedures

and convey to the teachers that their values need to align with that of their own or they

(teachers) need to move on (Hollar, 2004). Their vision of what "could be" is

communicated in everything they do and is demonstrated in their "can do" attitude.

The Turnaround principal has to forsake the normal academic recipe (Duke,

2004). "Like teachers, they diagnose their school's conditions , including the strengths

and weaknesses of their staffs, and figure out what actions are needed to move toward their goals" (David & Cuban, 2010, p. 115) They also concentrate refining their teachers' skills, increase their instructional time within an orderly learning environment and use data sources to continually monitor student progress. The problem for many districts is the pool of potential Turnaround principals is meager at best. Often districts work to grow their own. "A common approach is to understand and clearly define the intuitional culture, find individuals who are like-minded, and over time, develop school-level leaders" (Pappano, 2010, p. 86). No wonder then that they also make sure that the professional development and growth of the principals is tailored to enhance and improve special skills that a Turnaround principal must possess. Furthermore, it is important that the principals understand and align their goals with that of the district so that the right resources and options are available and no miscommunication occurs regarding programmatic decisions (Salmonwicz, 2009).

Research around the principals job as school leader includes many responsibilities but "research does not point to specific surefire actions that instructional leaders can take to change teacher behavior and student learning" (David & Cuban, 2010, p. 114). This requires asking the staff to take a deep look within and examine the factors playing against them. The literature suggests that the turnaround principal not only possess core knowledge of the curriculum and technical skills, but also have the ability to quickly build relationships and trust (Daly, 2009).

Summary

In summary, the research shows that with the implementation of NCLB legislation guidelines which called for dramatic educational reform, the role of the school level administrator has evolved into a position that can greatly affect the academic achievement of students and the professional growth and development of teachers in schools. Thus Marzano et al.'s (2001) statement that principals in schools can make a difference in the academic performance and continuous growth towards meeting these guidelines is not rhetoric but substantiated through recent research.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

There is little research available about how schools that were once in school improvement were successful in exiting school improvement. There is even less available about what systematic changes were made in order to do so. What research does exist is based on the comprehensive reform programs put in place within the school but these studies have not focused on the principal's contribution to the success of the school. I wanted to answer the question of what were the instructional leadership practices and behaviors of principals in schools that were either in Year 2 (Supplemental Educational Services) of School Improvement or Year 3 (Corrective Action) of School Improvement and that had successfully met adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years in the subject areas of math and reading and thus were able to exit school improvement. This was a qualitative research case study in which the instructional practices and behaviors of four principals of North Carolina Title I elementary schools that successfully exited school improvement were examined and studied. The reality of the participants' practices cannot be quantified, but I sought to capture the experiences of these four principals to determine commonalities in their leadership and to provide other elementary schools principals in comparable penalty phases of school improvement with information to assist them in achieving a similar successful outcome.

This chapter includes my rationale for conducting this qualitative research case study, the site selection process, a description of the principals, a summary of the data collection, and the analysis process.

Introduction: Myself as a Researcher

Although I did not become a school administrator until later in my career, I am genuinely interested in the intricacies of the principalship--but not just any principalship. Specifically, I am interested in the work of principals who are challenged by making AYP each year in a Title I school. In my mind it takes drawing on a specific set of skills to work with teachers to produce significant academic growth for students who are identified by their economic status. In my ten years of experience as a school level administrator I felt a constant need to apply the necessary guidance to direct school improvement efforts. I knew that top-down pressure could produce clarity about practices that benefit student learning. According to Many (2009) "without significant top-down pressure and bottom up support from a savvy principal" (p. 8) a culture change cannot occur that focuses on teaching and learning in a school.

Having been assigned to a school struggling in school improvement, I was thrust into a situation where staff morale was at an all-time low, the school's scores in both reading and math were some of the lowest, if not the lowest in the district, and the community had lost faith in the school as evidenced by the flight of all of the academically gifted students living within our school zone to a nearby elementary school. Coupled with what I could visually see were underlying feelings and attitudes from the staff that, because we worked with "poor" children and that parent involvement was

almost obsolete, the prospects of our students' actually making growth and progress each year were dismissal, at best.

In the meantime, while developing a sense of which direction to commence on this journey, I was beginning to get a sense of how NCLB's sanctions effected the way that school and district level administrators, teachers, and community leaders viewed the a school when it consistently underperformed. The law's stipulations about making Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years and the fact that one or both subject areas of reading and math could thrust a school into the school improvement cycle seemed like a hole that was difficult to crawl out of especially when long time traditions and practices were firmly in place with little or no evidence that people were willing to change. It appeared to be an insurmountable task.

Meanwhile, I had just finished my Ed.S. degree at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina and as such was constantly reading relevant articles regarding school improvement and school reform measures. When I was appointed to the school in 2007, I was simultaneously applying to graduate school for entrance into the Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations doctoral program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro for the 2008 spring semester. I wanted more opportunities to increase my skills and felt the program would continue to provide a focus of what the school leader's work as the instructional leader looked like for continuous school improvement to happen.

For the next three years I worked on meeting the needs of all learners in my school and changing the culture and the thinking of the all of the adults associated with

the school, including the parents. I also continued to attend graduate classes. I felt like I was constantly assessing and reassessing every school improvement goal or decision we made because I wanted that school to be successful. It became a mission, a personal *and* a professional goal. Over that time, I became keenly aware of other school level administrators in my school district and other districts who felt that same pressure and concern about what could be done. I began to question exactly why it was that some schools were able to effectively implement successful reform measures that improved student achievement and why others appeared to be in a continual spiral downward further into the school improvement sanctions. Metaphorically it appeared as though some schools were on the right bus going in the right direction and that other schools were spinning their wheels, but not moving forward. What was it exactly that was happening in the successful schools and not happening in the other schools?

As I talked with other administrators and continued my education in the doctoral program, I was constantly reassessing my own personal philosophy about why education for our students was so important .What practices and beliefs about learning did a leader need to display and carry out that would ultimately bring about second order change to the instructional programs and implement best practices? What had to be done to create that "reciprocal accountability" Richard Elmore (2002) described as necessary for principals and teachers to work together effectively? How could I help other administrators struggling with the same dilemma regarding the right recipe for continuous school improvement so that their school could exit school improvement and possess a healthy culture?

Thus my interest in the topic of this dissertation began to formulate as I worked

with my staff over the course of those three years to improve the daily practices and

procedures, worked to create professional learning communities that used data to drive

our instruction, increased efforts to hold and maintain high expectations of the staff,

students and parents, and provided the right resources for teachers to demonstrate support

and motivation. I realized after our school met AYP for two years in a row in both

reading and math and exited school improvement that there had to be a way to assist

other principals in doing the same thing and that there had to be other principals who had

been able to help their schools exit as well. I began to research the number of schools

exiting school improvement and if there was any literature addressing the topic. I found

there was very little that specifically addressed the practices of the instructional leaders of

Title I schools that successfully assisted their school in exiting school improvement.

Design of the Study

A research design is the logic that links the data to be collected (and the
conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of the study. Every empirical
study has an implicit, if not an explicit research design. (Yin, 1989, p. 27)

The case study approach is a type of qualitative research approach which can

involve one individual, several individuals, or a group or an entire program or an activity.

It can be multiple cases, but always requires in-depth data collection. Merriam (2009)

notes that there is no true or right way to view reality and there is no absolute truth.

Creswell (2007) describes case study as a methodology, "a type of design in qualitative

research, or an object of study, as well as a product of inquiry" (p. 73). "Case studies are

of value for refining theory and suggesting complexities for further investigation, as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 156). In this study the use of a multiple case study design was implemented (Creswell, 2005). Furthermore, a qualitative case such as this one is highly personal research. Persons studied are studied in depth. Researchers are encouraged to include their own personal perspectives in the interpretation (Stake, 1995). Case studies are used when the "how" or "why" question is being "asked about a contemporary set of events which the researcher has 'little or no control'" (Yin, 1994, p. 9). This type of design allows for the researcher to select more than one site to study in order to show different perspectives on the issue as balance and variety are important (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Creswell (2007) cites Yin (2003), who suggests that the multiple case study approach uses the logic of replication, in which the inquirer replicates the procedures for each case.

In this study, four principals of Title I elementary schools, including myself, were each interviewed three times. The decision to interview only three other school principals had to do with the selection process discussed in the next section; However, I was also interested in the richness and history of their stories and wanted to reach into their story in such a way as to have it become meaningful and insightful. The qualitative researcher uses the lengthier inquiry process to get to a deeper understanding of the individual attributes of the participants of the study. As in the case of multiple experiments, similar results (Yin, 2009) are usually expected in the hope of replication in the future. I felt the transferability of the study would help the reader determine whether and to what extent this particular phenomenon could transfer to another particular context. I attempted to

demonstrate transferability through the depth, richness and the detail of the descriptions in order to provide relevance in a broader context (Schram, 2003). My hope was that through the use of three extended interviews with each of the principals involved, and my own three interviews, the findings would provide context rich understanding of the socio-cultural-political milieu and the behaviors and actions of these principals.

It was my hope that these descriptions would assist other school principals in their efforts to exit school improvement. Included in this chapter is the conceptual map that was my "tool for developing theory and making the theory explicit" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 55). The boxes in the model represent the components and the organization structure for the analysis, interpretation and synthesis of my findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). I remained very cognizant of this "working tool" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 61) during the research as it reflected the prior factors that I believed to have been important in my own leadership of a school. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), an "illustration as to how a phenomenon occurs in the circumstances of several exemplars can provide valuable and trustworthy knowledge" (p. 149). See Figure 1 for the concept which provides the framework for the concepts and relationships that I investigated in this study and assisted in providing the basis for the coding schemes to be discussed in Chapter V.
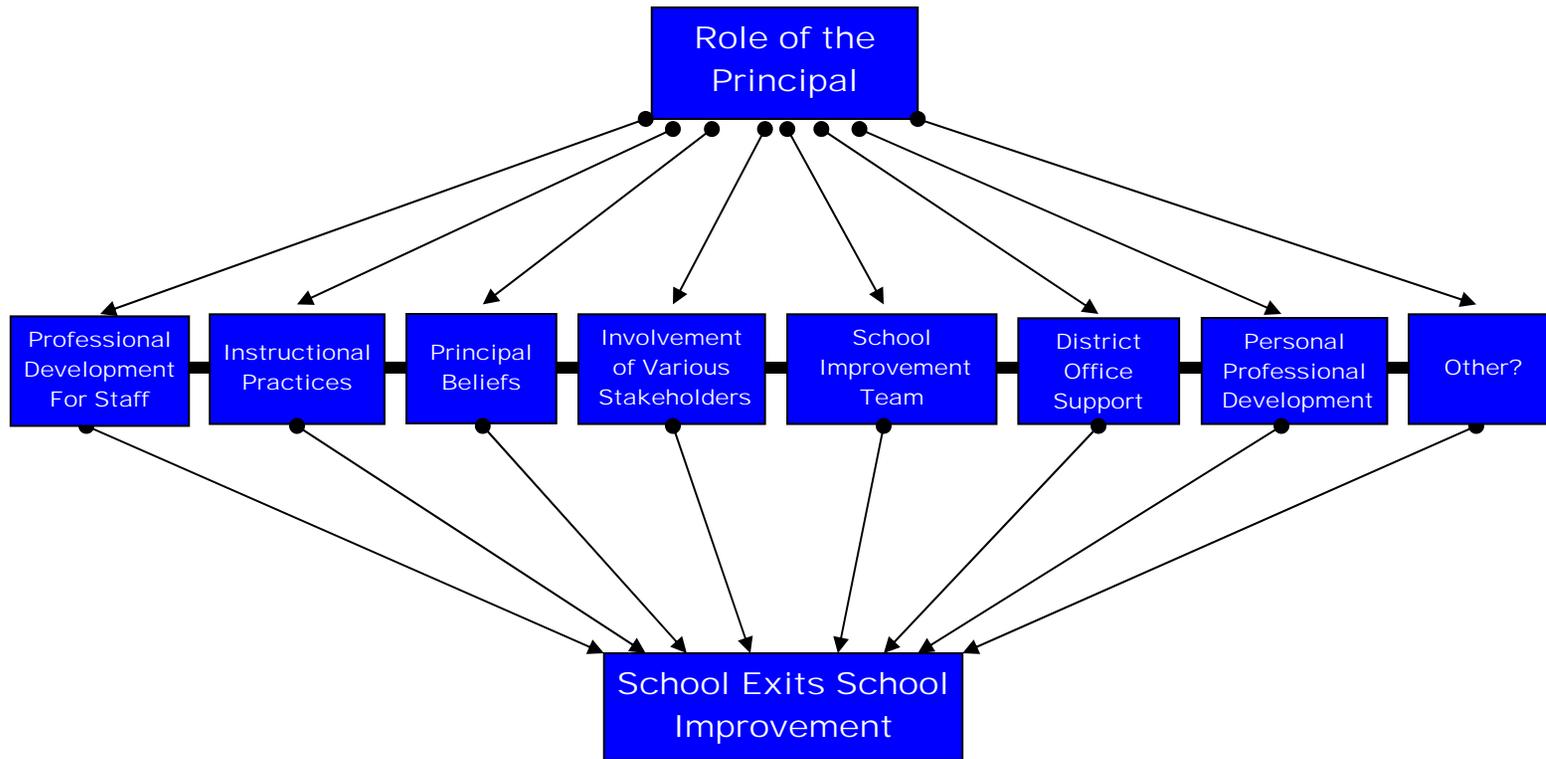
Figure 1. Conceptual Model 1.A

Site Selection

As a present day school administrator in the era of high stakes accountability, it is a struggle to identify where to focus attention and how to determine the most beneficial and productive practices and programs that will yield the needed increase in student achievement. With the rigorous requirements and pressure placed on schools to meet AYP with each NCLB identified subgroup, it is difficult for schools to make the kinds of improvement needed for increased student achievement for the two consecutive years necessary in order to exit the "School Improvement" category. This became clear when I examined the 547 schools who were listed on the 2008-2009 Title I School Improvement list and the 50 schools that actually were able to exit school improvement based on the academic performance of their students on the North Carolina End of Grade tests in 2009 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2009).

Initially to determine the criteria by which the sites would be chosen, the list of 521 schools that were in school improvement for the 2009-2010 school year was obtained from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's website. This list provided the name of every school in the state that was in school improvement, historical information regarding the subject area(s) for which the school was in school improvement, and the level of the sanctions. Schools in school improvement status level Year One of sanctions offer Choice only, indicating only two years of not meeting AYP in one subject or both. Schools in improvement status level Year 2 of sanctions offer Choice and Supplemental Educational Services (SES), indicating three years of not meeting AYP in one subject or both. Schools in improvement status level Year 3 offer

Choice, Supplemental Educational Services and go into Corrective Action, indicating

four years of not meeting AYP. Schools in improvement status level Year 4 offer Choice,

Supplemental Educational Services, Corrective Action and begin planning for

Restructuring in the fifth year.

For a school to exit school improvement it must meet AYP for two consecutive

years in the same subject area. The deeper the level of sanctions the more difficult it

becomes to exit school improvement status and the more severe the penalties for each

level. When a school is in school improvement for one subject area it is difficult for each

subgroup to meet the AYP target goal for two consecutive years but even rarer is a school

in school improvement for both subjects that meets the AYP target goal for both subjects

simultaneously.

In order to provide a scenario where the skills and practices of a turnaround

principal could be highlighted to demonstrate the significance of their leadership, I

decided to examine the schools that were in either sanction Level 2 (Choice & SES),

Level 3 (Choice, SES & Corrective Action) or Level 4 (Choice, SES, Corrective Action

and Restructuring Plan) of school improvement in both subject areas. Once identified, the

list of the schools that had exited school improvement in the spring of 2010 and those that

met the criteria for exiting it in both subject areas, were obtained from the Program

Monitoring Department of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The

Program Monitoring section ensures that the federal education funds allotted to each

school district based on their percentage of economically disadvantaged students is

administered and used in each Title I school in such a manner as to meet state and federal guidelines.

The number of schools that met the criteria was identified by examining the list of schools that had met AYP in 2010. The list provided each of the schools' names, their previous level of sanctions and the subject area(s) that they exited. Of the 197 schools that made AYP for two consecutive years in 2010, approximately 61 schools were selected by me for the study from the list. These 61 schools had successfully exited school improvement. Further defining the selection process was the determination of which schools of the 61 had actually exited school improvement status in both reading and math. Additionally, the decision as to which principal of the 61 schools would be identified as a possible research participants was determined. The following factors were taken into consideration:

1. The identification of the school districts and the location of each of the 61 schools that had exited school improvement in the year 2009-2010.

2. The ability to contact district level administrators for consent to conduct the research study and who would provide a letter indicating so for the IRB application.

3. The identification of potential participants who were principals of one of these 61 schools during the two consecutive years 2008-2010.

4. The consent of principals willing to participate in the study.

5. The narrowing of the selection process by identifying principals willing to
   participate and based on location of their school within a 200 mile radius of
   my home.

6. The consideration of various school settings such as grade span, a different
   school calendar and rural vs. urban schools.

7. The inclusion of my own story based solely on meeting the aforementioned
   criteria. With my own experience of leading a school in school improvement
   and successfully exiting school improvement in the areas of math and reading
   in the same year, I felt my story could also add to the research.

Essentially, the time frame for collecting all of the data was a three and a half
month period of time, starting in late July, 2011, and ending in October, 2011. The
interviews began in August, 2011, as opposed to more advantageous time closer to the
announcement of the 2009-2010 AYP results by the North Carolina Department of Public
Instruction. A limitation of the study was the gathering of raw data and the recalling of
events by the participants through the interview process after they had occurred.
Participant's recollection of events, facts, procedures, and practices would likely have
been fresher in their mind rather than asking the participants to recall information a year
later.

Research Participants

Once the list of the 61 schools that had exited school improvement was obtained
in the early spring of 2011, written permission was sought by district level personnel to
contact principals of the eligible schools to seek their participation in the research study.

A phone call was made to the central office to obtain the name of individuals who I needed to contact to inquire about permission to make contact with potential participants. Having received the official name, I contacted them by phone and email to provide a brief description of the study. Unexpectedly there were some obstacles to obtaining permission to make contact with potential participants. First, several district level administrators did not respond to multiple phone calls or email attempts to contact them. Secondly, to obtain permission from those that did respond back proved to be difficult due to their unwillingness to ask their principals to participate. They voiced their concerns in regards to the already various and sundry commitments and responsibilities of the principals and felt that the initial start date of data collection was untimely due to most school districts beginning school in early August.

When written permission was granted, the principals were then contacted by phone and email to inquire about their willingness to participate. I visited each principal's school to provide a description of the length and time of their commitment and the nature of the study was provided. One principal was chosen because her school was an urban city school and the school's largest subgroup was African American students. One of the principals was chosen based on the fact that her school was a rural, county school on a year round calendar and served a unique subgroup of American Indians. Another principal was chosen due to her accomplishments at such a young age and the grade span of her rural county school was K-6. I added my own story about my school that was located in a residential area, within the city limits. In the next section, a profile of the

schools that each principal led is described, afterwards the profile of each principal is provided.

School Profiles

In order to have a clearer understanding of the context that each principal worked within their school setting, it is also important to have a description of the county in which the school existed. The economic and demographic information that influenced the families of the students that attended of the schools was considered in order to begin to formulate a profile of each school. The demographics of the school, the number of economically disadvantaged students that attended there, as well as the history of how the school had fallen into school improvement status, is important in order to understand the factors that influenced the depth of each school's academic difficulties. Each of the four schools' history can be found on the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction website (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011). In Chapter IV, the aforementioned information is provided for each school profile and other pertinent information is provided along with a detailed description of each individual principal's story.

Data Collection

The statistical probability of achieving success in exiting school improvement in essence deems these four principals as unique and successful. The data for this case study were collected through interviews. The interviews with the principals were transcribed. Each principal was interviewed three times with each interview focusing on a specific topic (see Appendix). The interview is a special form of communication and

conversation. It can vary from highly structured and formal, semi-informal, to verbal exchanges between people that are very loose in nature. The first interview was conducted to allow the participant to tell their story and that of their school. The second and third interviews focused on Year 1 and Year 2, respectively, of their tenure in the school as they moved towards meeting AYP. Specific questions related to various topics were asked during these interviews. The intent was to specifically determine what factors played a part in the success of the school.

Each interview was conducted on the school grounds preferably when it was most convenient for the participants. The individual interviews were audio recorded. The participants were assigned pseudonyms as Principal A, B, C, and D to provide confidentiality and anonymity. As the other three principals were interviewed a minimum of three times each, I was also interviewed three separate times by another graduate student in the Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations' academic program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The audio-taped interviews were transcribed and stored in a password protected computer. For the purpose of analysis of the research, hard copies were made to review but have been placed in an office cabinet to ensure security. The transcriptions were provided to each applicant for review. Using the member check approach, each participant was provided with an opportunity to have any information removed from the data collected through the interview process. None of the participants requested any raw data be removed from the transcribed interviews and each participant signed a release agreeing to the contents. Additionally, the participants were

assured that once the research was complete and approved, the hard copies would be shredded.

Field notes were made about the interviews so as to recall impressions, side comments, and before or after comments in order to reflect on the larger thoughts presented in the data. Initial categories were formulated. The field notes assisted with the missed impressions and extra remarks said before or after the interview.

> Field notes can provide any study with a personal log that helps the researcher to keep track of the development of the project, to visualize how the research plan has been affected by the data collected, and to remain aware of how he or she has been influenced by the data. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 111)

The conclusions can significantly contribute to the knowledge base of other elementary school Title I principals across the state looking to emulate the practices, procedures and resources that were most beneficial to their schools successfully exiting school improvement. Creswell (2005) visualized "data collection as a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions" (p. 118) while Bogdan and Biklen (2003) see it as "both the evidence and the clues (p. 109). Questions that I presented to the participants were open ended questions designed to encourage extensive feedback regarding their work. They were related to issues that were created to understand the language and the common disciplines of knowledge as it relates to the principal as an instructional leader and their ability to turn a school a round when in school improvement. Discussions were allowed to deviate from the topic when the researcher felt the data being retrieved was pertinent to the research. Interview protocols for the principal interviews can be located in the Appendix.

Data Analysis

Each interview transcript was read through several times and marginal notes added that were short phrases or key concepts. In order to analyze the data I gathered through the interviews, I examined the transcripts, looking for recurring themes or patterns. I examined the transcripts using color codes to represent themes that began to emerge from each principal. I then searched for a pattern from each case in order to determine the reliability of the framework. According to Chi (1997) "codes must be developed to a formalism which will be used to represent the knowledge . . . what codes and formalism are chosen depends entire on the researcher's theoretical orientation" (p. 289).

Trustworthiness

Prior to conducting the study, I considered Merriam's (2009) idea that the transferability of research is based on the extent that one finding can be applied to other situations. Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993, p. 32), as cited in Creswell (2007, p. 209) express thick description:

> Rich thick description allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability because the writer describes in detail the participants or setting under study. With such detailed description, the researcher enables readers to transform information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred because of shared characteristics.

According to Schram (2003), depth, richness, and detailed description provides for a qualitative account's claim to relevance in a broader sense. From the descriptions of the

interviews I wanted to enable readers to make comparisons and be able to make connections about the transference of knowledge to their own school.

Scholarly qualitative research should center on credibility, transferability, and triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Each participant was interviewed on three separate occasions, including myself, which equates to prolonged engagement in order to establish an adequate understanding of the principal and their school environment and to assist in establishing a relationship of trust. I subscribed to Glesne's (2005) idea who maintained that the awareness of subjectivity contributes to trustworthy research and a deeper understanding of me. Therefore I employed reflective thought to develop an understanding about my own possible subjectivity in the data analysis process. First, the review of the literature revealed that school leaders are not framed by one particular character trait or competency but by a multitude of skills and abilities. Second, I was aware that the context of each school setting is different therefore the end result may be similar but the path taken to achieve that goal may look very different. Third, I understood that each principal's educational philosophy is different and is created by individual experiences. Fourth, though my selection process was not a random one, only those that met the aforementioned selection criteria were eligible to participate and only those consenting to be participants actually were interviewed. Based on the range of the four principals, I hoped to paint a rich picture of attitudes, behaviors and practices.

Using more than one site assisted me in providing triangulation. Interviews with "a range of people in different organizations may be employed to provide the diversity" for "the necessity of obtaining a variety of perspectives in order to get a better, more

stable view of 'reality'" (Shenton, 2004, p. 66). According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), the qualitative researcher must "continue to seek to control for potential biases that might be present throughout the design, implementation and analysis of the study" (p. 85).

The perspective of another graduate research student to challenge my assumptions about the project was utilized to help me to develop a greater explanation of the research design. Through this process I used their feedback to strengthen my theories. According to Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman, and Martaeu (1997), who conducted an empirical study regarding the inter-rater's place in qualitative research, the use of the inter-rater did provide a "concordance at a level of situating themes within a wider framework" (p. 6). Working to demonstrate the trustworthiness of my research I worked with a colleague who is a graduate student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She is pursuing her Educational Specialist Degree. She is a knowledgeable educator has served in the role as a teacher, an Assistant Principal, a trainer in Foundations and Wilson Reading, worked with and evaluated Pre-School and More and Four Programs and has served as the Exceptional Children's Coordinator for her school district for the past 28 years. She agreed to read selected quotes extracted from each of the interviews for all four principals and based on those readings she determined her own coding schemes. Prior to her examining the data she agreed to provide documentation that she and I did not discuss my thoughts about particular codes that had appeared in the data, nor who each of the other three principals were. However, she was aware that I was a part of the research study.

She signed a statement agreeing to maintain confidentiality regarding the transcriptions.

Once she had read each of the transcriptions and determined her own coding schemes,

she and I met to compare our codes for agreement. There was a degree of consensus in

the identification of themes between the different analyses. I subsequently addressed and

investigated her interpretations and findings to determine and check the significance of

my own interpretations.

In Chapter IV, I have added additional information about each school site,

examined the three separate interviews by each of the participants, and provided a

thorough and detailed description of the practices and perceptions of each principal. The

nature of this description has been provided in chronological order to ensure a better

representation of their tenure as it played out in the context of each school setting.

CHAPTER IV

DESCRIPTIONS

This chapter provides a description of each of the elementary school principals who were selected and interviewed for this study. The purpose of this study was to discover, identify, and detail the instructional practices and behaviors of principals who were able to turn around their schools in order to successfully exit school improvement. The intent was essentially to examine closely the practices of principals in order to portray to other educators and state leaders the implications of the study as it pertained to other school level administrators in their own practices, procedures and perceptions in order to replicate their success.

The following paragraphs provide information about each county the schools were located in, a profile of each school's historical data and a biographical description of each principal. Finally, provided is an in-depth description of each principal based on the three interviews of each principal and their responses to the questions from the interview protocol. While examining each transcription and in order to create a comprehensible description of the principals' experiences, the superfluous speech patterns were removed so as not to distract from the content. While doing so, the importance and substance of their interviews were not diminished. Below is the account of each individual's experiences as they relate to their work with quotes extracted from

each of the three interviews to provide thick, rich descriptions of their work within their individual schools.

School A

School A is located in a small, rural county in the southeastern part of the state. According to the U.S. Census (2010), in that county, the median income in 2009 was $40,838 compared to the state of North Carolina at $43,754. The percentage of persons below the poverty level was 21.3% compared to the state's 16.2%. The population of the county was 46,952. The demographics were 45% White, 33% African American, and 12% Hispanic.

School A is a PK-5 Title I elementary school on a year round calendar. The school is located in a rural section of the county. It is one of seven elementary schools in the county with two middle schools, one high school and one alternative school. Subgroups for the school in 2009-2010 were All, American Indian, Hispanic, Black, White, and Economically Disadvantaged. In the year of 2008-09 the school population was 626 and in 2009-10 the school population was 586 with 63% of the students identified as receiving free and reduced lunch. Below is an historical account of their academic performance and efforts to meet AYP:

- 2005-2006: Fall – No Sanctions
  Spring – Did not make AYP in reading. The school met 19 out of 25 target goals.
- 2006-2007: Fall – Watch list – reading
  Spring – Did not make AYP in reading and math. The school met 19 out of 21 target goals.
- 2007-2008: Fall – Sanction Level – Year One – reading – Choice; Watch list for math

Spring - Did not make AYP in reading and math. The school met 17 out of 21 target goals.

- 2008-2009: Fall – Sanction Level – Year Two – reading – Choice and SES; math – Year One – Choice
  Spring – Made AYP for the first year. The school met 21 our of 21 target goals.
- 2009-2010: Fall – Sanction Level – Year Two - Continued with Choice and SES
  Spring - Made AYP for the second consecutive year. The school met 21 out of 21 target goals
- 2010-2011 – Fall – No Sanctions: Exited School Improvement

Principal A—Coach and Mentor

Principal A, a white female, graduated from Fayette State University in 1994 with a Bachelor's in Elementary Education K-6. From 1994 until 2000 she worked as a first, second, third and fourth grade teacher. In 2000 she became a teacher at the school that she is now the principal. She left that school in 2004 to become an assistant principal at another county elementary school. In 2005 she graduated from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke with a Masters of Arts in Elementary Education. The following year she graduated with a Masters of Arts in School Administration. In the summer of 2008, she came back to School A as the principal. Principal A has presented as the state and national level for her work with Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS).

Beginning year one. Prior to becoming the principal of School A, Principal A had at one time been a teacher at this school. She stated that she felt like she was "coming back home." She knew what the school was "capable of" because when she had been a teacher there the school had moved seventeen points and had received recognition as a School of Distinction. In the spring of 2008 Principal A was the assistant principal at

another school but was able to interview for the position as principal of School A and felt

she "had a connection to the school already." When asked to describe how she perceived

the atmosphere and culture of the school upon her arrival, she described it as

> a relaxed atmosphere that instruction was not the priority. Other things had
> evolved in taking over which are social issues, those types of things. Which is all
> well and good but if we do not have those issues in place and behaviors in place,
> and good discipline, we can not therefore teach.

Instruction was not the priority. "The staff lacked morale. They lacked motivation. They

seemed like their drive was gone and that they had been working so hard but that they

really were not seeing the success." Principal A decided that interviewing each staff

member the summer of 2008 was going to be a priority.

> The first and foremost thing I did was I met with all of the faculty and about
> fifteen minutes each from custodians to secretaries to teachers, instructional
> assistants and I kind of got a bird's eye view of what their vision was here at
> School A and what they wanted. So after coming in and then basically just
> digesting, sitting back and looking at some of the things.

It being her first year at School A, Principal A did not want to make drastic changes.

"Basically, so to speak, I sat back and if it was not something we could live with we

changed it and with the support of the school improvement team." With the assistance of

her School Improvement Team, Principal A began to systematically make changes and

drew on her knowledge and understanding of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

to change the learning environment of School A.

The School Improvement Team. Principal A is a facilitative leadership trainer

and was trained on the school improvement process at the North Carolina Department of

Public Instruction during her time as an assistant principal. She was able to bring "all that

knowledge and information about what school improvement team is supposed to be, how

it is suppose to function and what it is suppose to look like" and decided that training her

school improvement team was necessary in order to assist her school staff in making

necessary changes that first year.

> We met a lot the first year and really listening, talking with them and . . .
> educating them. Okay, well if that's working why are we still in school
> improvement? And I ask that question a lot. And it really got them to reflect on,
> wow, we really haven't moved anywhere. We really haven't made the gains that
> we need to so why aren't we?

A team of eight teachers went the summer she arrived to Chapel Hill for School

Improvement training. She describes the team as being "gung ho" about the experience

and that they "knew they needed something and so they were excited about it." She

worked with this team to be "those wheels to go out and talk with everybody else to keep

the communication going between everybody." The team set priorities and "basically

collaborated and created a living document." She described the process as it "was not the

principal writing it. It was the actual school improvement team looking at it." She noted it

"was an education within itself to me to teach them on the language and why do we have

this piece here and why is this required and it goes along with the accreditation piece and

all of the different parts."

Positive Behavior Intervention System. Being a year round school, that same

summer her school improvement team visited a neighboring county during an

intercession to listen to a Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) initiative at one

of their schools. Twenty or so of her staff went over and she states that "the fire had been initiated when they came back. They already, without even talking to other colleagues had already starting implementing it in their classrooms." As Principal A worked closely with her School Improvement Team, describing it as the "driving force of the school," they decided to initiate PBIS. After being there for a "few months one of the biggest concerns here at School A was the concern of consistency in discipline and behavior." She had heard that throughout the building with the teachers. "I think that probably in every other interview that was a concern of how there was no consistency in the building with behavior." With these discussions about the discipline policy upon her arrival, she found out that indeed it was

> not to say that it was not handled but just maybe handled in a different way each time to where the teachers did not know what the procedures were. Should I send this to the office? Should I handle it myself? And to the point of hearing some of their stories of the behaviors become very grave concerns.

Safety issues. Additionally, safety was an issue. When discussing practices and procedures Principal A noted that there was an open door policy but "some of the procedures and policies were not consistent and maybe lacking." She stated, "Safety was our number one priority." Principal A described how parents would come into the building through all doors and wait in the hallways at dismissal time. This was a concern to her teachers and she had heard from them about how students were pulled out of line by parents at the end of the day. She determined that increasing instructional time would reduce the number of parental interruptions and she communicated to parents that they

would need to remain in the breezeway to ensure that students were returned to the parent

or guardian they belonged to:

> So enforcing and also changing the mindset of the parents. Hey, we are teaching bell to bell and that goes back also to ensuring them of this is our main hallway. This is where our parents will come in and out. All the other doors will be locked. We ask that you please protect our instructional time. Please support us in that.

Initially, this caused distress for parents and Principal A recalled when a father came to

her and stated that he wanted to know what she was doing. She stated,

> I sat down with that parent for ten minutes and talked to him. At the end of the conversation he said, 'You know what? I so appreciate you taking the time out to talk to me right now. At first I did not understand but thank you. Now I do understand. I did not think you'd sell me' and that was his exact words 'but you have sold me because I know you are here for my child.'

Principal A states "That is what we want. That is the image I want you to be able to drop

your child off and I want you to feel confident that they are in the best hands and that you

do not have to worry about your child."

Using data. When asked about her role in the first year at the school and how she

played a part in the school making AYP, she stated that her "role was basically to be the

glue that put everything together and to get them to understand how everything was going

to fit on this plate for them." She felt they needed to understand the "urgency in the

situation that we were presently in" and to understand the data in order for that to drive

instruction. She gave the faculty a pre-assessment.

> They did not know how many students made a subgroup or what possibilities of subgroups could be at this school. They knew their demographics. They knew

their community, but in relationship to AYP and subgroups per se, no. They could not eloquently [speak on data], especially the K-2 because I really think that it was more, it was more data driven in grades 3-5 and not in K-2. It was not a whole school vision.

She understood they did not see the big picture. "We really did not understand the data. We really did not look at the strategies in place." She felt every classroom was doing their own thing and the school was in a "big mess."

District level support. Educating her staff about how to understand the data and use it effectively in their classroom was difficult, but Principal A called on the support and technical assistance of her school district. When questioned about the support she received from her central office, she felt she had unwavering support of her superintendent. "He was going to put the support that needed to be in action for me. I was not worried about that. I knew I was going to be able to call on the human resources, curriculum instruction, anybody that I needed to." She describes her superintendent as "hands on but very accessible" and that both the superintendent and the assistant superintendent "were very supportive in the decisions I was making at the school level." She felt that he listened to her and other school level administrators about instructional initiatives that needed to be improved up such as the Reading First program. She recalls that during that time the superintendent "listened to his principals saying that our Reading First Schools are providing the support for our K-3 teachers but we are lacking the support for our fourth and fifth teachers." All along she felt that her superintendent was aware. She described a conversation in where he conveyed to her that "he knows what is going on in the buildings and he can tell you. He knows the answer before you ask the

question. He was very intuitive to what was going on in my building, what was needed

and so he was a support to what needed to happen."

To support her he also provided her with a mentor. She saw that as a huge support

when discussing their relationship.

> It is nice because a principal can be on an island by themselves and if they do not
> have a colleague or if they do not have a friend that is in the same capacity or
> someone that they can basically bounce those ideas . . . Sometimes you question
> yourself and you need sometimes that acknowledgement or that recognition.

The Title I Director also provided support as the school lost ninety students to another

school by deciding to use their Choice option. She additionally assisted in the managing

the Supplemental Educational Services being offered at School A. The Title I Director

assisted in notifying parents, creating the SES Fairs and provided a lot of information in

newsletters and the local newspaper.

Professional Learning Communities. Providing an atmosphere of data

disaggregation and examination meant creating an atmosphere of collaboration. Principal

A took a team to see Richard and Rebecca DuFour who have done extensive work with

school districts across the country on creating Professional Learning Communities

(PLCs) in schools. Principal A used that opportunity to put in place the opportunity for

teachers to have uninterrupted PLCs

> One day a week we have worked it where our PLC's have ninety minutes of
> planning [and] the rest of the week they have forty-five minutes but it is non-
> negotiable. You meet as a PLC and you discuss data. You discuss students and
> you plan.

 Again, she was able to draw on assistance from the Central Office by requesting a variety of data support from the Director of Testing. Additionally, she and the Director worked to take Title I money and the school improvement money to hire a teacher to lower class size and to hire a few instructional assistants.

Changing the way the school operated that first year did not come without growing pains.

> We were very busy. I will tell you that it did come with tears. It came with sweat. It came with complaints. But with all of this the teachers knew it needed to be done and so they bought in. Even though they may have been overwhelmed at times, they knew it needed to be done because they wanted to exit school improvement just as much as I did and just as much as the parents wanted us to.

The staff began to examine benchmark assessments and other forms of data and the quality of classroom instruction began to change as well as adult conversations about learning. They discussed in depth their population of students. They knew they needed to do something extra for their students because

> our students were not actively engaged in reading because our students are not reading at home. They are not engaged in text and also looking at the vocabulary which students in poverty are lacking and just practice. They are not practicing at home.

As the staff began to examine that fall the results from the end of the grade test results they started seeing the information in literacy.

> Our students were not basically proficient. I will be honest. Reading was in isolation. It was a check off on a lesson plan and that is not what it is supposed to be. Reading and writing should be in every piece of the day.

What she observed in the classroom confirmed it as "there were no small groups, no guided groups, no level text, and no interaction with level text." She feels "reading is such a broad, broad topic and if you have got students, it is easier to try to get you caught up in a skill base for math than it is to try to grow you two or three years from a non-reader." Consequently, guided reading instruction had to become a focus as there was concern about the fourth and fifth grade teachers needing more support in understanding how to differentiate the instruction for the variety of learners in their classroom.

> So as a fifth grade teacher, how do I teach such a big variety of students in my classroom from kindergarten to fifth grade? When I am not used to teaching those types of skills and I am not really focused on that kind of training, where do I go? So that was one of the emphasis that we really had to put on in our classrooms was getting our teacher training and actually teaching those skills of how to teach a child to read.

Principal A determined some non-negotiables about what should be happening in classrooms each day and explained "research has shown that guided reading works, the five domains. We really need to work on those components and educating our teachers truly to what the five domains are. If you do not know the five domains are how are you going to teach them in your classroom?" Additionally, a time for intervention time called REACH (Reading Every Afternoon Changes History) was created, embedded and required in each grade level.

As for the area of math, that too, was another focus of the school even though the math scores in the school were higher than the reading. The district had adopted math investigations. The goal was to "allow the students to learn from each other, not a sit and get." She explained that the teachers had to increase the "cooperative learning piece and

really [teach] like math investigations says, investigate, really learn from doing." A trainer was provided to the staff from the Department of Public Instruction to meet with the PLCs. The trainer helped the staff understand the alignment with math investigations and how to incorporate that into guided math. In order to provide the much needed materials such as math kits and calculators that cost around $8,000 Principal A says that in raising the money she sold candy, used "Title I money, beg, borrow and steal. Anything, anyway." Principal A discussed pulling out the math materials in the classrooms that already existed to see what additional math materials the school already possessed. She was surprised to find materials in closets that had never been used. She was determined to make sure that if she provided the materials to her teachers that they were being utilized.

Master schedule. Principal A contributes the differences that first year to time on task. She stated that other people like parents and visitors could see the difference in the students and how actively engaged they were with a "high time on task." She described that sense of urgency she conveyed to her teachers that "we need to get those buses unloaded. We need to get to class and start instruction. So teaching bell to bell." She communicated that there was a lot of waiting going on "waiting to go the rest room or going out, we are waiting for lunch." When the master schedule called for classes to rotate she admits that she had

> opened the doors and said we are rotating because they were not used to teaching bell to bell, minute to minute. So it was a drastic change for them. Now I will tell you that I invested in a lot of Kleenex 'cause there was a lot of tears and stress but you know when you have kind of been relaxed for so long . . .

She also saw a need to change the mindset of the parents about early check outs with

> putting in the 2:00 pm rule that we are not checking children out after 2:00 pm because even at 2:00 pm it is still important. We are getting homework done. We are doing some of those behaviors that we need to do at the end of the day for our students so that we ensure that they have everything they need.

As parents began to take notice of the changes taking place, Principal A states,

> I got a lot of positive feedback of parents telling me that their students were coming home and they had seen an increase in the academic piece. So the instructional, the time on task, they were noticing the rigor increasing. They saw the change in the quality of homework, the quality of communication and also us wanting to make the connection in educating our parents.

The changes in the students after the first year were encouraging to Principal A. "I think it is very important that when I ask a student what are you doing? They are able to verbalize to me or tell me what they are doing. That was not happening. They could not tell me." As the year progressed students began to verbalize what they were doing.

> Before when I would ask a student what they made on the benchmark. I do not know, what is that? A lot of them did not even know what it was. But now when I go down the hallway, Principal A, did you know that I went up 19 points on my benchmark. Those are the types of conversations that just give you joy because if you want a child to succeed they have got to know where they are and they have got to know where they need to go.

In describing the difference she observed in the instructional strategies of the teachers and her role in that change, Principal A stated that she was always about "the mentor and coaching aspect." She stated that she wanted her team to see:

I am behind them and I will support them 100% and that in turns builds respects, builds that relationship piece. I go in and model lessons. I provide professional development for my teachers so they can see that I am learning as I go and that I am still always going to be a teacher at heart.

She feels they

have changed in essence of listening to students, how they interact with parents. Whereas before you would not even, when I got here I would not have even had heard of a teacher going on a home visit. Now it is, I am going on a home visit Principal A, can you get me some coverage?

Teachers are "more motivated, which in turn spins into their classroom. They are more excited. They are more confident in their teaching abilities and their teaching empowerment." However, she has also had to hold very serious conversations when needed and it was a challenge as 13 teachers opted to leave or received a non-renewal of their license in the first year. "One of the things I pride myself on is being still a teacher at heart and a coach and I want to grow teachers. That is what I want to do but if this is not the job for you then you know we have to have those tough conversations." Principal A stated,

You know there are many times that you know, I questioned it. At the end of the day this was for the kids and I am not here to win a popularity contest. I am here for the children. But it is hard; it is hard to be on an island by yourself. Even though you have all this support, it is very hard.

See Table 1 for actions taken by Principal A in Year One.

Table 1

Actions Taken in Year One by Principal A

Principal A - Year One
• Interviewed the entire staff for a better understanding of the school culture
• Trained and informed her School Improvement Team about their role in the school improvement process and their ability to implement needed changes
• Implemented Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) for a higher level of accountability of positive student behavior
• Made safety the number one priority by communicating safety procedures and systems to all stakeholders
• Communicated to teachers the expectation that the master schedule was to be strictly adhered to during the school day
• Trained the staff on the use and interpretation of data to drive instruction
• Provide professional staff development in reading and math
• Implemented the use of Professional Learning Communities
• Tapped into the technical support assistance offered by district level personnel
• Communicated high expectations to students
• Exhibited her desire to continue to mentor and support teachers

Year two. When discussing year two of Principal A's tenure, she felt an urgency to keep pushing and "getting my teachers to realize we have got to do this. There's no ifs or ands. We have got to do it. We have got to do it now." She describes it as "we were over the mountain, to another mountain to climb but this one is going to be difficult because going into that second year. We had talked about it before. A lot of schools do not make it that second year." She also strategically hung a picture of Albert Einstein

outside of her door that says "If we continue to do the same thing, we are going to get the same results which is organized insanity." When asked about how what challenges she faced, she noted that she was not sure if she was able to keep up all of the energy that it was taking to sustain the momentum.

> I think it was questioning myself. Am I really going to be able to do this? You know, I see some changes but are they enough? I was motivating everyone else but in the end sometimes I was lacking the motivation for myself.

Hiring new teachers. Beginning that next year in 2009, there were the thirteen teaching positions to fill due to the teacher turnover. Knowing that she could not discuss personnel issues, she was unable to address any rumors regarding their leaving. However, she did have to fill the positions and so she put together an interview team

> I never interview a teacher by myself. I will get little chuckles when I get teachers to interview with me 'cause they will say, 'Wow, you know I did not expect that many people.' I say, 'Well, you are shopping for a place to work. We are also shopping you know, to see if you fit our team.'

Principal A felt that "if you have teachers involved in the interview process they are going to select the person they feel the most confident and comfortable with and they are not going to select people that are not going to do the job." After hiring the new teachers, Principal A and her School Improvement Team created an Anchor Team. The Anchor Team consists of any teacher that volunteers to mentor and assist new teachers whether they are beginning teachers or just new to the school.

Professional Learning Communities. Continuing in the second year to grow her PLCs and to sustain their efforts in PBIS, the emphasis was on creating a culture of

growth and personal empowerment. Principal A wanted to make sure that everyone felt

they had a voice. "I want to empower everybody to play their part and I think that they

had buy in" so they could be an effective team. The PLCs continued to flourish as each

PLC had a notebook that Principal A communicated with them through each week. She

used that to communicate to them about student attendance, teacher attendance, student

data, and in addition, she attended their weekly planning meeting. In addition, it was

Principal A's opinion that PBIS assisted the school into coming out of school

improvement as it changed the culture of the school.

> The discipline rate went down 50 percent. If they are in the classroom they are
> being taught. I mean if we are suspending kids up here in my office, they are of
> course, not learning. A lot of time the research links behavior and discipline with
> student proficiency and academic success.

Professional staff development. When questioning her about the second year's

opportunities for professional growth for teachers, she recognized that additional support

outside of the school system may be more palatable for her staff so she hired Educational

Resource Group (ERG) to come in and provided embedded staff development in the area

of guided reading and the Stephanie Harvey Comprehension Tool Kit within the literacy

framework. The ERG was able to observe teachers and provide her and her teachers with

immediate feedback.

Parent involvement continued to be a focus and surveys were utilized to

determine what parents needed most.

> We increased our parental involvement the second year I was here. We started
> doing our PASS nights, which is a grade level specific night which is Preparing

> All Students for Success and that is why we call it PASS. We then started a literacy night and along with our required Title I - Parent University. We listened to our parent surveys where parents were saying they want more. They want more information. They want more resources.

The school began to partner with other agencies outside of the school system like a nearby North Carolina University to allow students to visit a campus and to possibly entertain the idea that college could be in the future. Principal A stated,

> Some of our students had never even been on a campus and now they see it as tangible, that this is in our community, we can actually attain it. So educating our students and our parents in making that bridge between the school and the community.

Celebrations. All along the way there have been opportunities to celebrate and motivate the staff with various incentives. When asked what kinds of things she did to sustain morale, she talked about celebrating everything. "We celebrate everything around here because that is what keeps them going. . . . I send reflections through quotes; I have marble jars over there that when they turn in something on time or they do something great." She also continued on her road to mentoring and assisting teachers. She described a time when she took a new teacher to Wal-Mart and bought tubs and helped the teacher organize her room on a Saturday morning. For her it was a question of "What do I need to do? And being that coach and being persistent." She also worked on fostering relationships with and between staff members by hosting retreats each summer. She felt these provided "those opportunities for those PLC's to really bond, to come together, to really form those relationships and doing some of the things like our Falcon's (pseudonym) night out when we went to the rodeo."

When it all came together and the staff was able to successfully make Adequate Yearly Progress for the second consecutive year and exit school improvement, Principal A stated the staff already had an idea that it was going to happen.

> It was after we got our second benchmarks and we had seen jumps. I think that motivated them and gave them [teachers] a bit of a pep to keep on pushing. I will never forget it because I told them 'Guys, we are in a marathon, you know? I know as we get cramps, we get stressed, we get tired, and you have a headache.' I said, 'take an Advil and let's keep on going' and they laughed and you know it was just a sense of we are going to get it done.

In 2010 when AYP was achieved for the second consecutive year, the staff had a reason to celebrate. They had exited school improvement! Principal A organized a celebratory dance at a country club nearby with food, a DJ and Karaoke. As for this new year, 2011-2012 and what lies ahead for the staff, Principal A has a science learning lab being created. Focus is being placed on creating more growth opportunities for Academically Intellectually Gifted (AIG) students. To continue to motivate teachers, she has opened up the gym for Zumba after school. As she says "We are kind of stagnant this year and we have turned up the heat again." See Table 2 for actions taken in year two by Principal A.

School B

School B is located in a small, rural county in the northwestern part of the state. According to the U.S. Census (2010), in that county, the median household income in 2009 was $40,939 compared to the state of North Carolina at $43,754. The percentage of persons below the poverty level was 13.4 compared to the state's 16.2%. The population of the county was 38,406. The demographics were 88% White, 3% African American, and 9% Hispanic.

Table 2

Actions Taken in Year Two by Principal A

Principal A - Year Two
• Sought the assistance of teachers for interview committees to hire 13 new teachers
• Created Anchor Teams – Teachers on each grade level that acted as mentors to new teachers at the school
• Sustained efforts with the development of Professional Learning Communities
• Hired the educational consultant group Educational Resource Group (ERG) to provide embedded staff development in guided reading
• Purchased and incorporated Stephanie Harvey's Comprehension Tool Kit
• Sought to increase parent involvement through PASS (Preparing All Students for Success) Nights
• Formed collaborative relationships with the local university to increase students' awareness of their future educational choices
• Offered personal assistance and time outside of regular school hours to support and mentor teachers
• Celebrated the school's success with fun activities for staff

School B is a PK-6 Title I elementary school on a traditional school calendar. The school is located in a rural section of the county. It is one of eight elementary schools in the county, two middle schools, two high schools, one early college high school and one alternative school. In the year of 2008-09 the school population was 398 and in 2009-10 the population was 298 with 50% of the student population receiving free or reduced lunch. The subgroups existing in 2009-2010 were All, White, and Economically Disadvantaged. Below is historical account of their academic performance and efforts to meet AYP:

- 2004-2005: Fall – Watch List – reading
  Spring – Made AYP in reading and math. The school met 17 out of 17 target goals.
- 2005-2006: Fall – No Sanctions.
  Spring – Did not make AYP in reading. The school met 16 out of 17 target goals.
- 2006-2007: Fall – Watch List – reading
  Spring – Did not make AYP in reading and math. The school met 14 out of 17 target goals.
- 2007-2008: Fall – Sanction Level – Year One for reading - Choice; Watch List for math
  Spring – Did not make AYP in reading and math. The school met 12 out of 17 target goals.
- 2008-2009: Fall - Sanction Level – Year Two for reading- Choice and SES; Year One for math - Choice
  Spring - Made AYP for the first time. The school met 13 out of 13 target goals.
- 2009-2010: Fall – Sanction Level – Year Two - Continued with Choice and
- SES.
  Spring - Made AYP for the second consecutive year. The school met 21 out of 21 target goals.
- 2010-2011: Fall - No Sanctions: Exited School Improvement.

Principal B—Data Queen

Principal B, a white female, holds a teaching licensure in Elementary Education K-8, 6-9 language arts, 6-9 social studies, 6-9 science and school administration. She graduated from college in 1999 and began working for a North Carolina school district. There she was a second- and fourth-grade teacher and caught the attention of district level administrators for her "model classroom" with the Inquiry-Based Science Initiative through a partnership with Duke University. She became involved in multiple middle school programs and worked with at-risk students in grade 8. She has served as judge for both regional and state science fairs and has presented at state and national level conferences. She received her Master's Degree in School Administration from Gardner

Webb University and was named the principal of School B in 2008-2009. In 2009-2010, not only did the school exit school improvement but also was a School of Distinction and made High Growth, meaning that over 75% of the students taking the End of Grade Tests in her school met expected growth. She was named Principal of the Year for her district in 2010-2011.

Beginning year one. Principal B's appointment to School B occurred in the spring of 2008. She had been serving as the assistant principal of a K-8 school in the same district. The position had come open and she had been asked by central office to apply. "I applied for here and was excited to get it. I knew I had some challenges ahead of me." As for her superintendent's initial thoughts she says that he told her "I have faith in you. Do what you do with the numbers [data]." She explained that her background was much of the driving force behind her efforts for students. Growing up in humble beginnings, Principal B recalled the years that her family truly went without and those childhood experiences provided her with the resolution "that absolutely has a love for students that can break the cycle of poverty." She being a first generation college graduate exemplifies the idea about how education can truly, in her words, "ignite a fire." Her core beliefs are strong. "I really, to my core, believe every child can learn and every child can learn at high levels."

Fountas and Pinnell. When asked about changes that were implemented to assist the school in exiting school improvement, Principal B did a great deal of homework. The school did not have a K-2 comprehensive reading assessment in place for gathering data. It would be impossible to have a conversation with a team about data if the data was not

consistent. "I knew I had to set a system. I really thought long and hard about what system to pick." She needed something that parents would understand and buy into. While consulting with several people, she determined that the use of Fountas and Pinnell Assessment, a one-on-one comprehensive assessment to determine independent and instructional reading levels for placing students on the Fountas and Pinnell A-Z Text Gradient was needed. The program is designed for children to read books that are written expressly for the purposes of literacy assessment along the Fountas and Pinnell text gradient of A-Z and as they master the book they move through the leveled alphabet. She felt that teachers in all grade levels needed to be able to talk the same language and understand the data in order to provide quality instruction. As she puts it, they "drew a line in the sand" and determined where students should be at different times of the year.

School culture. Principal B describes the school's status upon arrival. "I just took a pretty deep look at where we were at. We were pretty heavy in school improvement and we had some pretty difficult apathy things going on and we had to hit the ground running." The staff explained the perception was "they were working as hard as they could but the kids were coming to them so far behind." The culture of School B was "a culture of excuses. It was okay for a student not to be there because bless his heart you know where he comes from do not you? Did you see his trailer?" Principal B was shocked by the culture.

> That piece of culture that just absolutely hit me from the word go. I think another was a lack of pride. I do not know how I say that in a better way, but just a lack of pride of well, we have been in school improvement so long. Good luck getting us out. I mean that was one of the things that was said to me you know. Good luck with that trying to get us out.

Principal B described it as "There are schools that kind of bounce in and out of AYP but you still see the heartbeat. You still see the growth. But this one kind of laid into AYP trouble." Principal B did not accept negative answers. As a matter of fact, she stated that she had never raised her voice in any way or any time. She has always tried to put a positive spin on things. No matter the circumstance or the conversation, when listening to what could not be done, Principal B noted that she thought "I just was not going to take that [negative] answer [or excuse], honey, so let's try again." Her plan was to offer as much help as they needed but excuses were not to be accepted.

Principal B had found a way to get K-2 teachers on board with the Fountas and Pinnell but grades 3-6 classrooms still did not have any formal or consistent way to assess students. In grade 3-6 there was "no pulse check whatsoever" so they borrowed quarterly assessments from a neighboring school district. The grades 3-6 grade teachers were the last to get on board. They were more resistant and a very tight-knit group. She felt she needed to praise them and often asked them to share their information at faculty meetings. She recognized that "they had the power." She would tease them and say things like "my main hall mafia had it going on today girls." She stated, "I do not want to say it was a game but quite frankly it was a little bit of a game of they hold this power so I would be nervous about it but if it works, it works." Principal B described it as knowing how to read the group. "I would never engage them in a conversation that I was not sure of their answer in front of people." Still there were pockets of resistance. Principal B describes how she had teachers that she would have one-on-one conversations with them when they still wanted to shut their door. "I would say honey, you can not do that. Your

information is too valuable. You cannot shut the door. They [other teachers] need to know what you know." However, there were still days where she thought "Are you kidding me? Please play along."

Professional Learning Communities. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and vertical team were also initiated.

> They just did not get the concept that albeit basic at kindergarten; it [math] really goes all the way through. So in math we implemented quarterly assessments at the K-2 level. We really began digging into what our K-2 math assessments were telling us. So it was, let's dig into this strand.

Through weekly PLC meetings with each grade level, Principal B was able to sit down with a specific grade level and talk about what was going on in the classroom and what resources they needed. She also visited rooms every day and multiple times a day.

> It was nothing for me to be in and out of your room for a first grade teacher three, four times a day. I do not want to walk in and they be able to put on a five minute dog and pony show and then they go back to what? We will not get anywhere but if I am in and out all of the time then they could not do that.

Principal B hoped the small group conversations would eventually break down their [teachers'] defenses and help them to be able to open up to discussions about the instruction in their classrooms. She wanted teachers to have honest conversations with her. "I wanted them to finally open up and admit, admit where you are strong, admit where you need help and let's go from there." When asked when she began to see changes in behavior she said that she recalled that she had begun to post in the teacher's lounge information about best practices that she was seeing in classrooms. As she did so

she began to hear teachers make comments like "I was doing that in my room but I do not think you are talking about me because of this part right here. Have you seen me do that?" The defensiveness was begin to break down and "so their attitudes, kind of a positive change by the end of the year were taking place." The teachers began to show signs of wanting to come out of school improvement. She recalls a time when they were examining some formative assessment data and one teacher saying to her "I am so sick of being at the bottom of our county. I am so excited of the possibilities. I am so excited of the possibility of finally not being the joke."

With the vision that Principal B had in mind, sometimes there were those that perhaps were not going to be able to see themselves as part of the vision or did not understand what their role was to be. Principal B felt those tough conversations with teachers were difficult but necessary. She recalls having to move teachers from one grade to the next and even letting some people go.

> I had to move some folks because I could tell they just could not teach the content. It just was not mean. I never moved a person because I did not like them or I will show you. It was, I think your content is better here.

She recalled a time when she let someone go. The teacher was lacking a work ethic that Principal B expected. "She was lacking the one thing a teacher should have and that is definitely strong passion and a work ethic. You can not teach that." Word got around fast but Principal B was solid in her resolve.

> There are just some non-negotiables. I did not intentionally come in and say well if I fire one or two, I will get their attention. It was just there were some folks, I

could tell, that they are not going to play with me. They do not have the content totally or they just were not willing to put in the effort, period.

When discussing what her role was in the changes that took place in the school that resulted in school improvement, Principal B recalls the work during the first year when the end of grade retest was to be given and the remediation plan was devised in order to try and increase the number of students who could pass the retest.

> We devised a pretty hefty little plan at that point of how we were going to remediate. What strategic like strategies we were going to use, not some workbook, not Buckle Down, not Iconic mess. I think then they saw it was let me move mountains. We did everything to center around learning.

Principal B knew that it had to be about what the students were missing. She knew that the learning window was small and instruction had to be purposeful. "It was hard for them to wrap their head around. I will move whatever mountain it is so that kids learn. I am not going to sacrifice a kid for an adult's convenience. Oh my gosh did that ruffled some feathers." However, interestingly enough the school was able to meet AYP in both reading and math. That was "shot in the arm" and it certainly gave the teachers a boost going into year two. See Table 3 for actions taken by Principal B in year one.

Table 3

Actions Taken in Year One by Principal B

Principal B - Year One
• Interviewed the entire staff for a better understanding of the school culture
• Determined that a "culture of excuses" and "negativity" was not acceptable

Table 3 (cont.)

Principal B - Year One
• Provided professional development by implementing the use of Fountas and Pinnell, a K-2 Comprehensive Reading Assessment
• Implemented the use of quarterly benchmarks for grades 3-6 in reading
• Implemented the use of Professional Learning Communities
• Trained the staff on the use and interpretation of data to drive instruction
• Communicated expectations regarding student achievement in one-on-one conversations
• Created a remedial program specifically designed to support those students that had not successfully passed the End of Grade tests in reading or math
• Created a communication wall in the teacher's lounge for exciting news and best practices

Year two. When asked to discuss the professional development provided to staff, Principal B began to educate her staff about how to interpret and utilize data to drive instruction. With the implementation of Fountas and Pinnell and the use of the quarterly benchmarks, the staff now had to learn how that data could serve them and the purpose of it in driving instruction. Principal B met with teams weekly and as the students were assessed she worked with all of her resources to make sure the optimal environment for learning was created. The first thing the staff did was set the bar as high as they could reach. Principal B said that she "specifically remembers a veteran saying to me, 'Well, I have always been told if you get 80% you are doing good.' I almost fell out of my chair. I said 'Well what about the other 20%' and she said, 'Well they are probably not got going to get it anyway.'" Knowing that the teachers did not understand how to interpret data, she began to teach them how to track student progress. "I had them tracking the students

that they had. They turned in a monthly report to me. I keep up with each individual kid

of you know, where they were and how much they had grown." Keeping track of each

student's progress allowed Principal B to personalize her comments to teachers.

> I would go to Title I and say are you kidding me. Johnny grew three levels. Tell
> me about it. So they knew not only am I asking tough questions but I am also able
> to say "way to go!" We had be to strategic about celebrating 'cause they see
> through the junk.

Available resources. In year two and all too aware of how big a job this task was,

Principal B went about strategically examining the human resources that were available

to her and she found that two individuals in her school could greatly increase her own

flexibility when and if she could figure out how to use their skills and talents—her

assistant principal and her instructional coach. Principal B admits to really disliking the

managerial side of the job. She enjoys the rich, interesting curriculum discussions and

being in the classroom. She describes how she literally felt guilty if she was in her office

so her assistant principal took on many of those managerial types of jobs. This freed her

up so that she could go into the classrooms, observe students, observe teachers'

instructional practices and pour over the data in order to make sound decisions about

where the focus of the school was and what areas it needed to improve. Her instructional

coach was utilized to assess students, work with teachers, create groups and examine data

but not necessarily for professional development.

> I am very careful not to use the same person over and over. I have to be very
> careful how much I use her as a leader 'cause I do not want to ostracize her.
> Regular teachers are so funny about if you pull a specialist too much they are

going to see them as she [the principal] thinks she [the instructional coach] has all of the answers.

Tapping into the expertise of the teacher leaders in the school was a strategy that Principal B utilized in order to elicit more buy in from the staff. She asked teachers to present to the staff in pairs. From attending the team meetings, Principal B could anticipate the questions that would be posed. She would prep the team ahead of time. Afterwards she would assist them in reflecting on the presentation and how to improve it. As those predicted questions would pop up, she realized that her credibility was improving and the staff was growing professionally. When teachers starting "stepping up to the plate with colleagues I knew we were getting there."

School Improvement Team. When asked what local or state support she received she called on her Director of Testing to assist in examining data and the school improvement plan. "We divided into two groups, the PLC leadership group and the SIT team. It was a total vertical slice of the whole school. We got pretty real about the school plan." The SIT team meetings were "the most toxic meetings I was in" as they turned into whine sessions. Principal B felt that team members should not "bring a problem without a solution. There's no point in sitting and talking about something if we do not find ways to make it better. We got to the business of these are some things that need to happen and here's some agenda items." She knew the plan had to be specific and they began to address cohorts of students. "Our school improvement plan literally addressed cohorts. I can tell you cohorts that are weak that we are trying to improve." They tracked each group from the end of the first year going into the second year. The school improvement

team also worked on creating a mission and vision statement. "SIT is really where rubber meets the road." They strategically determined that the schedule needed to include a longer block of time for reading. Principal B even brought in a consultant to use as a sounding board to them how to improve the plan. She described the experience as a growth opportunity for the team and that the team had taken "ownership" of the plan as the consultant questioned them. "That is really what changed adult learning as we went from a sit and get to this is our plan." Principal B felt the team was valuable to her decision making. "They took care of keeping my feet to the ground of, Principal B; we do not know how to do that yet. You need to bring somebody in. We do not know how to do that yet."

Parent involvement. In discussing other stakeholders such as parents and the changes in what was happening within the school, Principal B describes how sitting down for one-on-one conversations with parents was beginning to happen. Her staff incorporated student led conferences. Her directive was to have less conversations about how great little Johnny sits in his seat. "It needs to be about the content that is going on. Do not tell them he's a good kid. They know that. Tell them what he's doing instructionally and how they can help and where we are." She felt that when meeting with parents that teachers "needed to know what we are talking about before we talk to them. We do not look at a parent in the face and say, I do not know how to help your child. You would not go back to a doctor that says, I do not know how to help you." In addition, the conversations began to take place with parents about their child's reading level where perhaps the technical side was still unclear but the staff had designed a color coding dot

system to provide a visual of a student's progress. She recalled a conversation with a parent.

> Johnny is doing good and Principal B did you know he's two dots ahead of where he's supposed to be at this stage? I mean that is neat. She's not quite sure where that is in second grade, but he's two dots ahead . . . She understood that two dots meant he's above.

While many parents understood their child was moving through the different levels, the need for students to increase their fluency was something parents had a difficult time understanding. Principal B had to explain to parents why fluency was so important. "Teachers were still uncomfortable so I would come in with them and we would literally talk about brain research and while the brain is decoding it cannot comprehend as well. That was probably my roughest pocket [of parents]."

When inquiring how Principal B maintains a high level of productivity and morale she admits that when she is told that "they [teachers] are wore out" that she consciously stops. "When I begin to hear a little bit of rumbling I stop and do something fun. You know I'd send out an email and say next Wednesday we are going to do just fun. I promise no work." She used her intuition to gauge her staff. She states "I am always conscious of even their emotions and how they are in the hall. If I see them getting overwhelmed, it is time to back down." However, her own morale would suffer at times.

> There were times I was just wore out. I mean I was at the point of tears. I was at that point of frustration. I was at the point of simply angry. I told a colleague that we should be sued for malpractice.

Principal B was not going to allow that staff to see or be aware of her frustration. She

describes times when she would walk down the hallway and see three out of sixteen

teachers carrying out things that she thought they had committed to and being frustrated.

"So I had to back up and punt." However, even when knowing what she was facing, she

would not give up or let them know her stress or worry. She says she thought that she

would

> never let them see me raise my voice in a faculty meeting. I am going to be
> bouncy, perky, we can do this guys. But so help me when I closed my door there
> were days when I thought, I do not know that I can. I do not really know that we
> can.

Being a big fan of Stephen Covey and Jim Collins, Principal B would ask herself what a

good leader does. "What would Jim Collins do in this situation? How do I bring passion

back to this?"

All of the work that the staff put into the second year in order to exit school

improvement paid off. Principal B said she knew they were on track to do well. The

school had a good plan for the retest. She recalls that she knew that they were going to

clear the bar. She had a veteran teacher clear the bar at 100%. "So when she cleared the

bar after retest with 100%, we just absolutely celebrated." One day after school when the

EOGs were over, the same veteran teacher came down to Principal B and told her there

was a problem and to come quick. Upon arrival in the veteran's room the entire staff was

there. "They were officially dubbing me the Queen of Data." The staff gave her flowers,

a sash and a crown. They sang a song to her about being the Queen of Data and thanked

her for helping them. The school did so well, making a 17-point gain, that it was named a

School of Distinction and met high growth. They used sidewalk chalk and wrote it all

over their sidewalks and hung banners. While being a School of Distinction was a

wonderful recognition, Principal B holds true to her nature, to be one that continues to

push her staff to reach higher so that every child is successful. "We can not be a one hit

wonder. That is our joke. We can not be a one hit wonder." Her next goal: to be a School

of Excellence.

> Every day, every day, my number one priority is, are we learning? Are we
> learning at high levels? Every day, I can promise you my highlighted kids [non-
> proficient students]; I am talking to the folks that are touching those students on a
> daily basis. What are we doing? Where are we going? What is going on? On any
> given day I can tell you how many are below at the point based on whatever
> [assessment] we have just done.

Principal B's drive and determination coupled with her intense observation and

evaluation of teachers' instructional practices have moved her well toward her goal of

every child being proficient. See Table 4 for actions taken by Principal B in year two.

Table 4

Actions Taken in Year Two by Principal B

Principal B - Year Two
• Provided professional staff development in the use and interpretation of data to drive instruction
• Tapped into all available human resources in the school
• Further defined the role and responsibilities of the schools instructional coach
• Created opportunities of empowerment and teacher leadership by asking teachers to lead in-house professional development

Table 4 (cont.)

Principal B - Year Two
• Communicated to teachers the expectation that the master schedule was to be strictly adhered to during the school day
• Tapped into the technical support assistance offered by district level personnel
• Trained and informed her School Improvement Team about their role in the school improvement process and their ability to implement needed changes
• Invited more involvement by all stakeholders through parent/teacher/student conferences by allowing students to lead the conferences and present their work
• Created opportunities to celebrate and sustain morale
• Modeled a positive and cheerful attitude by following the models of change from Stephen Covey and Jim Collins
• Provided opportunities for students, parents and staff to celebrate their success with meeting AYP for two consecutive years and exiting school improvement

School C

This school is located in a county situated in the northern part of the state of North Carolina. According to the U.S. Census (2009), in that county, the median household income in 2009 was $36,104 as compared to the state of North Carolina at $43,754.The percentage of persons below the poverty level was 14.9% compared to the state's 16.2%. The population of the county as of 2010 was 93,643. The demographics were 75% White, 19% African American, and 6% Hispanic.

School C is a K-5 city school that had 228 students in 2008-09 and 220 students in 2009-2010 with 92% receiving free and reduced lunch. It is one of sixteen elementary schools, four middle schools, four high schools, one early college high school and one alternative school. The subgroups for the school in the year of 2009-2010 were All, Black

and Economically Disadvantaged. Below is historical account of their academic

performance and efforts to meet AYP:

- 2004-2005: Fall – No Sanctions
  Spring – Did not make AYP in reading and math. The school met 13 out of 17 target goals.
- 2005-2006: Fall – Watch list for reading and math
  Spring – Did not make AYP in reading and math. The school met 12 out of 17 target goals.
- 2006-2007: Fall – Sanction Level – Year One – reading and math - Choice.
  Spring – Did not make AYP in reading and math. The school met 14 out of 17 target goals.
- 2007-2008: Fall – Sanction Level – Year Two – reading and math – Choice and SES.
  Spring: Did not meet AYP in reading and math. The school met 7 out of 13 target goals.
- 2008-2009: Fall – Sanction Level – Year Three – reading and math – Choice, SES, and Corrective Action.
  Spring – Made AYP for the first year. The school met 13 out of 13 target goals.
- 2009-2010: Fall – Sanction Level – Year Three - Continued with Choice, SES and Corrective Action
  Spring - Made AYP for the second consecutive year. The school met 13 out of 13 target goals.
- 2010-2011: Fall – No Sanctions – Exited School Improvement

Principal C—Enforcer

Principal C, a white female, did not begin her career in education until the age of

40. She graduated with a Bachelors of Science with middle school certification in Science

and English (6-9) from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 1993. Later in

1998 she received an additional certification in working with Academically and

Intellectually Gifted (AIG) students and in 1999 was named Teacher of the Year by the

local Jaycees. She received a Masters of School Administration in 2003 and was an

assistant principal at a middle school for eight years. She was named Assistant Principal of the Year in 2006 and was appointed as the principal of School C in 2007. In 2010-2011 she was named Principal of the Year, Wachovia Principal of the Year and Woman of the Year by the National Association of Professional Women. She has attended the North Carolina Principal's Executive Program–Leadership Program for Assistant Principals and the Leadership Program for New Principals. She has served as the President of the Principal's and Assistant Principals Association for her county and has presented at state level conferences.

Beginning year one. Principal C was appointed the principal of School C in the summer of 2008. This appointment was a bit of a surprise. Prior to her appointment, she had spent several years as an assistant principal in a middle school within the same district. When the opportunity to interview came she thought she was interviewing for a principalship in a middle school. The superintendent had something else in mind.

> He called me and his words were, Principal C, I just wanted to call and let you know that the board has approved you to be the principal of School C [not the middle school as she had thought but an elementary school]. Well, needless to say I was speechless.

The following day the superintendent and she spoke again and he said

> Principal C, you do not believe me now but you are a fit for School C. It is a lot of work to be done over there and I believe you are the person to do it. I am trusting that you can go over there and fix this school.

Principal C was apprehensive of the appointment because of her lack of experience in

elementary education. However, she felt that if he wanted her to go there and lead, then

she would meet the challenge.

  School beautification. Principal C recalls driving over to the school and by the

looks of the outside she stated,

> I pulled up and saw how this school looked outside alone. I knew that had to be
> taken care of because that said to me, we really do not care about this school. We
> really do not care about who is in this school. Then when I stepped through the
> door and the school was fifthly and it had no sign of who these people were.

In her mind there was

> no ownership. You did not even know who the mascot was or what colors the
> school were represented by. It was none of that. So my first priority was to get the
> school cleaned up, get the outside cleaned up and make it inviting to both the
> teachers, students and the community.

The maintenance department came over and cut down a tree, the contracted lawn service

mowed the grass, planted flowers and spread mulch. "A lot of the things I did out of my

own pocket because School C does not have a functioning PTO."

  Staff interviews. In discussing her first interaction with the staff, Principal C

invited each staff member to come in and she interviewed all of the teachers. "It was ten

questions that I asked and the very first one was 'What do you think about the students at

School C?' And that is when they told me that they hated it but they just did not think

that these kids could learn because they were extremely poor." Principal C went on to add

"They attributed it to their poverty and the lack of parental support because these children

have no parental support at home." Principal C made it clear to each person as they left that "once they left my office I was never to hear that again." She described their attitudes as "horrendous." She felt that the teachers were very resistant to change. "You know yourself, nobody likes change. These are old dogs in here. They at first let me know, hey, we have had everything done in this school and none of it has worked."

School Improvement Team. When questioned about the role of her school improvement team and how she worked with them, Principal C discovered that prior to her arrival the faculty had already elected new representatives. However, several of those individuals had served for more than two years and some as many as four years. Principal C in her own words determined "there was a new sheriff in town" and decided they needed to start over. An email was sent out to the staff requesting that each grade level and enhancements be represented and at least two parents. "I said we are going to clean this slate and we are going to start again. I told them to hold another election for the school improvement team and we got new people on there and we started over." Principal C had to educate them about how a school improvement team worked and functioned. She had recently attended a state level meeting for administrators in schools for school improvement Corrective Action and working with school improvement teams. At the first meeting they started talking to her about things such as lack of toilet paper in the bathroom. She explained the purpose of the team.

> The school improvement team is a team that helps run the school, helps decide hey; this is what our children made on EOG in math. What strategies or what things can we do to improve that? What can we put in place that is our mission?

The team also did not understand that other individuals outside of this committee could attend the meetings. She said they acted like it was a "big secret organization." She explained the meetings were an open forum.

> I said this is not a private affair. We are talking about this school which belongs to this community. We have to let anybody in here and we are talking about what we are going to do to help these kids get the education they need.

The school improvement team needed to be retrained about how to write and incorporate a school improvement plan. The faculty had to learn that the school improvement plan "is a living document. It is not just something you write and you throw it up on a shelf. That is what drives the school. That is what guides the school throughout the year." She also explained how she would be requesting their assistance with budgetary concerns.

> I said, 'I will bring my Title I budget before you and I will lay it out for you and then I will tell you how I think it needs to be spent and then if you have any suggestions then we will write those down.'

They had never seen a budget. They also learned how to develop and create a mission and vision statement. Principal C facilitated the process.

> We sat down and talked about it and the SIT team, we, drafted several . . . They were carried back to the staff and then each grade level would work on it and then it would be brought back and we worked on it some more.

She tried to instill two things when working with them.

> We are a team together. We work together as a team. We are also family. As a family we are going to look out for each other and that includes looking out after these children, but also looking out for each other. That is a concept they had never done.

The team began to function properly and recognized that everything had to be transparent about what they did so they decided to put the minutes on email and to make sure they informed parents about issues at different assemblies.

Stakeholder involvement. Discussing the involvement of other stakeholders, Principal reached out early on to groups in the community to bring them in. She worked with the Ministerial society. She felt that if she could get some of these groups here that would help the students.

> My population for the most part is African American children. So these groups were African American and these children do not have the family environment that most children have. [Some students] do not have the male presence in their household.

She explained to this group how the students in her school had the highest population of free and reduced lunch kids in her county. She explained that her students needed some support other than what they were getting at home.

> They came right to the call and came in, the Ministerial Society. They sent men in and they tutored with some of the male students. They purchased food for the food closet; of course we were the only school at the time to have a food closet to supply our kids with food every Friday.

She was referring to the Back-Pack Program where book bags were packed with food each Friday and sent home with children so as to ensure they did not go hungry over the weekend before they could return Monday for free meals.

District level support. At the staff's first faculty meeting that fall Principal C, drawing on support from the Central Office, had the Director of Testing and Accountability visit her school and present historical data from the previous three academic years. "These teachers had never seen any of the data and they had no idea how bad this school was. They said they were never told what kind of problem this school was in." The Director of Testing and Accountability laid it out on the line for them and showed the staff how close they were to a state team coming and taking over the school. Principal C explained that the superintendent had replaced the previous principal with her and that was the first step towards the turnaround process. Once the initial information had been delivered she says I was very matter of fact with them.

> I told them, I said, 'You know it is going to be a lot of work. You are going to have to teach bell to bell. You are going to have to do lesson plans. I am going to have to see them. If you do not want to do all of this.' Well, I had a folder with form resignation letters in it. I said, 'Here's a resignation. You can fill it out. I will send it to Central Office and you can be on your way. Because you are either going to play on my ball team or you can leave. You make the decision. But whatever we do in this building it is not going to be to the benefit you or me. It is going to be to benefit these children we serve in the building because they have not been served for the last three years.'

Principal C could tell that what she had said did not make people very happy but she says

> I really did not care because I was not here to make friends or be the life of the party. I had a job to do. I let them know right off that we were going to do it and we had a job and it was cut out.

With her teachers not having a clear understanding of the data, Principal C called

on her Director of Testing and Accountability once again to begin the process of

teacher's examining data in a more purposeful manner. "I had him explain to them how

they were to use the data and how with the data it could drive their instruction and make

it much more effective and higher quality of instruction." The school began a new

process called Collaboration Around Student Achievement (CASA). The faculty began to

examine benchmark assessments to go back and reteach skills that students were not

mastering and more importantly to begin to share and collaborate. When asked about

their classroom practices when she first came she said the teachers were in "private

practice." There were lots of good things that teachers could share but it was like there

was "a shingle hanging over their door." Principal C told them "Take your private

practice shingle down." She felt that CASA would be helpful in their understanding that

they were now a team. She explained to the faculty that

> You have got to realize we are not here for you. We are not here for me. You are
> here for these kids that walk in our front door every morning. They are parents
> believe in us enough to leave those kids with us on a daily basis to learn. So I
> expect you teach them but we are going to do it as team. If you run into a block
> somewhere and you do not know what to do you can either go to my instructional
> coach or you can come to me and between all of us we can figure it out.

High expectations. Principal C held everyone, including the students, to a very

high standard and articulated that to them every chance she had. She started having

academic assemblies. She told them at the first assembly

> You are as smart as any child in this county and if anybody tells you different
> they are lying to you. So Principal C and all of these teachers sitting here, we

> know you are as smart as the children at Barton (pseudonym), the kids at Conover (pseudonym) or at Linestone (pseudonym). I said that you are going to show them, right.

Principal C is steadfast in her beliefs and never allows students to tell her that they cannot do something.

> I do not allow these children within this school to tell me I can not learn this. Every child in my building can learn, will learn. They learn at a different pace and they will all get to a certain level. It might not be the highest of the high but it will be high because they know without a shadow of doubt that I believe in them and they know that their teachers believe in them.

> Principal C expected a lot out of her teachers and monitored their lesson plans and

their classrooms very closely the first year. When she first started, they were on a nine

weeks grading period so teachers turned in their lesson plans to her every two weeks. She

would examine them and

> if it was something I saw I did not like or I thought was wasteful then I would bring them in and I'd say, 'Now explain to me why did you have this? What is the purpose of that? What are you trying to get them to learn here?' But I did not have to do that too many times with them because they finally realized hey, she is not playing. She means business.

She also realized that some teachers were not teaching the standard course of study.

"They were teaching what they were comfortable with and what they thought was fun.

But it did not have anything to do with the curriculum of the grade level they were

teaching." The teachers did not think Principal C understood the culture at School C

because they were so poor. Principal C's reply was "God did not stamp poor on their

brain." She told the teachers they were the key to their success. But "it was obvious that it

was a lackadaisical attitude in here about academics that was not the forefront. The

forefront was making excuses of why we are not getting these kids where they need to

be." She also experienced some passive aggressive types of behavior. "We will act like

we are doing what you want us to do but the minute you leave we are going to do what

we want to do. " She realized she was going to have to set them straight. At a faculty

meeting she told them

> I know what you are doing but realize this folks, you either become a teammate,
> get on board with me or next year you'll come to work the first workday,
> padlocks will be on the front door [implying the state would shut the school
> down]. The state trooper will be here. You will have lost your job and you might
> not get paid. Now if that is what you want you go ahead and keep playing your
> game but I said, either you are going to play with me or stand a chance of never
> working in this county again. Now is that what you want?

Principal C pulled no punches when it came to shooting straight with the staff. She felt it

was absolutely necessary in order to change the school's culture.

> Principal C was concerned over these issues and several others.

> I had to address a lot of issues about staying on task, staying in your room,
> teaching, not walking around visiting. This was not a social day. Social hour
> began at 3:15 pm once their time was up with me. So I guess it was a lot of
> managing and a lot of instruction.

Principal C felt she had to stay on top of them and she expected them to do their job. For

the first one or two months she visited their classrooms several times every day. When

she would enter they would

stop teaching and say, 'Principal C is it something you need?' And I would say, 'no you need to teach. I am just here to observe.' And the kids would want to talk to me; they did not understand why I was there.

She conveyed her expectations to teachers. "I do not want to come in your room and see them working on a worksheet that is not productive to me." Principal C has a conviction.

> First off, you have got to get those kids to believe they can do whatever you ask of them. You have got to believe that they can do it and you have got to make them believe you believe in them. When you do, they will perform. But if you say hey, I know he can only go so far, he's EC or he's poor; they are not going to perform. So I expect these teachers in every classroom I have got, Exceptional Children (EC) to Academically Intellectually Gifted (AIG), I expect their goal for the classroom to be set high and I expect the teachers to push the kids to get that. Not all of them are going to make it but they are going to get where they can.

Beyond the need to change teacher behavior the students' behavior had to improve. Previously the teachers had been trained in a behavior program called Conscious Discipline. At the first faculty meeting Principal C indicated that Conscious Discipline would be incorporated into every classrooms PK through grade 5. "Conscious discipline does not believe in incentives. It is about intrinsic [rewards]. It is about good choices." She expected that same rules would apply to everywhere the students went in the building.

> The rules of how to move in the hallway are up in the hallway. They have rules that they have to follow in the bathrooms. They are up in the bathrooms. The teachers school the kids daily about when we move in the hallways this is how you are to do. They are either to have their hands in the pockets or locked behind their backs. And their mouths are to be closed. They are not to talk.

Principal C stated that it did not take the children long to catch on. "The kids knew, hey, Principal C expects us to do like we are supposed to do in the classroom, the hallway, the bathroom and the cafeteria." She made the children tuck their shirts and pull up their britches. She would not allow them to walk around with their shoelaces untied. Parents went to the superintendent about her cracking down on the dress code. He supported her and encouraged her to continue to enforce the school board's policy regarding the dress code. "So my first year here I fought the teachers. I fought the kids and the parents. In fact, I hold the record of being the only principal in the county that was turned over to the state superintendent of schools."

   Professional development. Along with the examination of data to drive instruction, Principal C understood that professional development was necessary to improve the teachers' instructional practices in the classroom. When discussing what she felt was needed, she knew that the school staff had worked with and had been trained the previous two years with Educational Research Group (ERG) in the area of guided reading. "They [teachers] did not believe in it, but they thought it was just another educational, how would you say, another method that had come down the pike." Principal C, not being familiar with elementary school curriculum looked into this guided reading practice and learned of its' importance.

> I learned the importance of ERG and I made it known to my teachers in a faculty meeting that I was aware that they had been trained in guided reading and that we were going to implement guided reading on a daily basis here at School C. And I expected them to do whatever it was they needed to do whether it was QRI's, running records, whatever to group their children appropriately to do the guided reading.

Reflecting on her own opportunities at that time and what she felt she had participated in that assisted her in leading the school she mentioned that she had attended the Principal's Executive Program for Assistant Principals in Chapel Hill while acting as an assistant principal and the spring before her appointment she and a colleague were sent by her superintendent to attend a session entitle *Aspiring Principals* through an Educational Consortium. "It showed us what the major roles of a principal are." During her first year at School C she felt she needed to continue to grow and attended the Principals Executive Program in Chapel Hill for New Principals. She also attended the School Administrators as Instructional Leaders (SAIL) there at Chapel Hill as well. Finally she attended the Todd Whittaker session: *What Great Principals Do Differently* which she felt was very helpful and inspirational. When explaining she said "We are supposed to be the cheerleaders, the ones who are inspiring everyone. So it is very difficult to feel inspired but you know, [being the cheerleader] that 's pretty much our role."

One change implemented was that Principal C worked with the master schedule to offer additional support in the classroom.

> I staggered the times when each grade level would have guided reading and by doing that I was able to send in my instructional coach, my intervention specialists, my Title I teachers, and my elective teacher, and my enhancement teachers. They all took part in the guided reading.

A time in the day also had to be put in the master schedule for remediation. "After lunch we have remediation and these same people work in the classes to do remediation in math and sometimes they will pull a reading group and do a reading group." Teachers also

began to tutor after school even with the Supplemental Educational Services providing
free tutoring. The school also capitalized on the time when they had the children in the
building first thing in the morning or late in the afternoon. If students were waiting for
anytime, math games were gathered up and teachers helped children play math games.
See Table 5 for actions taken in year one by Principal C.

Table 5

Actions Taken in Year One by Principal C

Principal C - Year One
• Improved the outside appearance of the school and determined to make sure it was clean
• Interviewed the entire staff for a better understanding of the school culture
• Trained and informed her School Improvement Team about their role in the school improvement process and their ability to implement needed changes
• Sought to increase the involvement in school activities of all stakeholders
• Tapped into the technical support assistance offered by district level personnel
• Trained the staff on the use and interpretation of data to drive instruction through CASA (Collaboration Around Student Achievement).
• Monitored lesson plans to ensure the accurate teaching of the Standard Course of Study
• Communicated high expectations to staff and students
• Implemented Conscious Discipline for a higher level of accountability of positive student behavior
• Continued the previous use of the educational consultant group Educational Resource Group (ERG) to provide embedded staff development in guided reading
• Communicated to teachers the expectation that the master schedule was to be strictly adhered to during the school day

Year two. With the many changes that had taken place in School C, the school

had met adequate yearly progress for the first time in four years. While the staff had

celebrated their success, when asked about the challenges going into the second year,

Principal C recalled

> The biggest challenge was to keep the steamroller moving from the year before. I had to well, the first of the year, my first faculty meeting, I cheered for the staff. I cheered for the kids. I made the staff understand that we could not drop the ball. We had to keep pushing forward. I played the video from the little guy in Texas that spoke to the Texas school board." [A popular video on YouTube in which a student speaks to over 20,000 Dallas teachers for their convocation in 2008].

Principal C asked her teachers, "Do you believe in the students that you serve? If you do,

are you going to show it? Then how are you going to make them believe in themselves?"

This mantra or theme stuck and when they held their first assembly Principal C took it to

the children and asked them

> 'Do you believe in me as your principal? And of course they all said yes, that they did. I said, 'Do you think that I believe in you?' Yeah, and I said, 'I do. I do believe in you. I believe that you are as smart as any kid in this county and I want you to show the rest of these people in this county.'

Every time Principal C held an assembly she would ask that same question and she noted

that children would see her in the cafeteria and asked if she still believed in them. In that

second year, she felt

> These kids need somebody that they trust and that they know is going to be there with them through thick or thin. Some kids may not have that at home so they look for it here and then when I started building them up academically they started taking pride in their own work, started doing the best that they could do.

Additionally she felt her teachers understood that "Principal C's not playing, she means business. She expects us to teach these kids."

Technology. During this time the school district had decided to increase the use of technology into all of their classrooms. All teachers had activboards. These activboards were interactive technological devices to ensure that technology could be integrated in all lessons. The school district had assigned an Instructional Technology Specialist to each school. Principal C used the expertise of the person assigned to her school. "She started doing trainings for them of how to make flip charts and how to go and find flip charts that have already been made by other teachers." Teachers began using the activboards more and creating flipcharts and by the second year that Principal C was there she saw big improvements. "I saw the activboard used more and the children were engaged more with the activboard." The teachers began to see how quickly the children caught on.

Using data. Principal C requested a repeat of the Director of Testing Accountability's presentation from the last year. "He showed them the data from the previous year and how we had done and what we needed to do based on his opinion looking at the data." He continued to offer suggestions and guidance as to how to address the data and how to help remediate the students at risk. The school also used Think Link, an online data base full of item banked questions to assist teachers to create common assessments. She noticed that the teachers were beginning to understand how to read the data they received from the common assessments. "The teacher would sit down with the kids and say, Okay, none of you did well on this objective. Let's go back and look and see why." He continued to monitor the CASA (Collaboration Around Student

Achievement) meetings. In CASA all data is considered. The teachers had the

benchmarks, the common assessments and the Fountas and Pinnell running records.

"Teachers sat down together as a team and they looked at their children as a whole."

Additionally, the Director of Elementary Education and the Director of Federal Programs

would walk through and provide feedback and the Director of Federal Programs would

occasionally offer to provide additional funds to pay for an additional resource. Students'

behavior began to change as well.

> The conversation between teacher and student was much different than it was the
> first year. It was more of kids saying to the teacher, I did not do good on this
> assignment. What can I do that will help me be better at what I am doing.

Students began to take a role in their own learning.

> It helped the kids to start to take ownership of their work and they realized it is
> not just the teacher. I have got to do my part. So I think that helped change the
> language that was taught and the relationship between the teacher and the student.

Principal C continued to be very direct about her expectations and after the first

year when they had been successful, she told them, "If you believe in them they will

produce and I am a firm believer that the teacher is the key to the success of the

children." She continued to offer in-house training with her instructional coach and

offered a lot of professional development in the support of literacy through the content

areas with reading comprehension strategies and guided math groups with Educational

Research Group (ERG). She felt that she could see the change in the culture as she

continued to hold people accountable. She noticed more "camaraderie. It is more of a

family feel." She also recognized that they began to take "down the private shingles."

They started working with their colleagues and asking for help from each other. "It was

like all the bulbs all of a sudden went boom and from that point on, Principal C we are

going to try this, we are going to do this." The staff was turning around in their thinking.

> They were open to anything I asked them to do. And I think that second year it was because they could see hey; she's going to stick with us. And they had continuity and they knew that whatever I asked them to do; I was going to do myself. I did not ask them, and still do not, to do anything that I will not do. I try to take part in anything that I ask them to do, any remediation. I will take a group whatever grade level they know all they got to do is say Principal C I need help.

Principal C took part in making sure things were happening in her school. She

taught her own guided reading group each day to ensure that her staff, the students and

the parents knew she was being honest about what she was willing to do for the students.

She also likes to go and team-teach when teachers are willing. She also decided to

conference with student in third-fifth grade to make sure they had goals set for

themselves.

> I conference with them and said okay, tell me what goal you have set for yourself? Tell me how you are going to work towards it and what do you plan to make on the EOG at the end? They could tell me. They all could tell me how they were going to work.

A promise. When discussing how she has been able to sustain morale and

celebrate their success, she mentioned things like Fruity Fridays when fruit and snack

bars are available. Principal C demonstrated that once she makes a promise, she will

follow through. "I said what do you want me to, do you want me to go on the roof and

stay overnight? They all started screaming shave your head." When the school had made AYP Principal C asked their "cheerleader" the Director of Testing and Accountability to help her shave her head. Several staff members from Central Office came over, including the superintendent and both the Directors from Elementary Education and Federal Programs to observe her fulfilling her promise. The local newspaper and TV channel covered the event and the children cheered.

As for future challenges, Principal C notes that this past year the school did not meet AYP in the area of reading and is now on the district's watch list. She is very concerned about how the staff will rally towards increasing student achievement in this area. She, herself, is participating in her own professional development. She and other administrators in the district are participating in learning groups in which they are focusing on the area of guided reading and a book study dealing with the topic. She feels the staff can do it. "Oh yes, School C can do it. There's no doubt in my mind. I just got to keep these teachers pushing on and you know, keeping their spirits up." As for the students, in the assemblies she says "I will keep stressing to the kids that you got to keep working hard." See Table 6 for actions taken by Principal C in year two.

Table 6

Actions Taken in Year Two by Principal C

Principal C - Year Two
• Sought to sustain momentum through an inspirational faculty meeting with a YouTube sensation by a young Texas student

Table 6 (cont.)

Principal C - Year Two
• Encouraged the integration of technology and provided professional development and technical support
• Sustained efforts with the development and use of data in CASA meetings
• Incorporated the use of Thinklink, an online data base of banked math questions
• Continued to seek out support from district level personnel with classroom walkthroughs and feedback
• Conferenced one-on-one with each student in grades 3-5 about their EOG goals
• Celebrated with the entire school and district level personnel in a school assembly. Followed through with a promise to shave her head

School D

This school is located in a county situated in the northern part of the state of North Carolina. According to the U.S. Census (2009), in that county, the median household income in 2009 was $36,104 as compared to the state of North Carolina at $43,754.The percentage of persons below the poverty level was 14.9% compared to the state's 16.2%. The population of the county as of 2010 was 93,643. The demographics were 75% White, 19% African American, and 6% Hispanic.

School D is a PK-5 city school that had 483 students in 2008-09 and 462 students in 2009-2010 with 80% receiving free and reduced lunch. It is one of sixteen elementary schools, four middle schools, four high schools, one early college high school, and one alternative high school. Subgroups in the school in 2009-2010 were All, White, Black and Economically Disadvantaged. Below is an historical account of their academic performance and efforts to meet AYP:

- 2002-2003 – Fall – No Sanctions
  Spring – Did not meet AYP in reading. The school met 19 out of 21 target goals.
- 2003-2004: Fall – Watch list - reading
  Spring - Did not meet AYP in reading. The school met 20 out of 21 target goals.
- 2004-2005: Fall – Sanction Level – Year One – reading - Choice
  Spring - Made AYP in reading and math. The school met 17 out of 17 target goals.
- 2005-2006: Fall – Sanction Level – Continued Year One – reading - Choice
  Spring - Did not make AYP in reading. The school met 14 out of 17 target goals.
- 2006-2007: Fall – Sanction Level – Year Two – reading – Choice and SES; Watch list - math
  Spring : Did not make AYP in math. The school met 16 out of 17 target goals.
- 2007-2008: Fall – Sanction Level – Year Two – reading – Choice and SES; math – Year One - Choice
  Spring : Did not meet AYP in reading and math. The school met 18 out of 21 target goals.
- 2008-2009: Fall – Sanction Level – Year Three – reading – Choice, SES and Corrective Action; math – Year Two – Choice and SES
  Spring - Made AYP for the first year. The school met 19 out of 19 target goals.
- 2009-2010: Fall – Sanction Level – Year Three – Continued with Choice, SES and Corrective Action.
  Spring – Made AYP for the second consecutive year. The school met 17 out of 17 target goals.
- 2010-2011: Fall – No Sanctions – Exited School Improvement

Principal D—Change Agent

Principal D, a white female and a graduate of Concord University, West Virginia

in 1984 with certification in Social Studies (6-12) and Physical Education/Health (K-12).

She immediately began working as a teacher in an elementary school and over the next

17 years she taught high school and middle school in the state of Virginia. In 1987

Principal D received her Masters in Special Education (K-12) with a licensure focusing

on Specific Learning Disabilities and Mental Retardation from Marshall University, West Virginia. In 2000, Principal D was named Teacher of Year for the middle school she worked in and was approached by the superintendent to become an administrator. She graduated with a Masters of Science in School Administration from Shenandoah University, Virginia. Principal D moved to North Carolina in 2001 and began working in an elementary school where she was named as the assistant principal for the following two school years of 2002-2004. Principal D was named as a principal in 2004 and spent three years as a principal. In 2007 she was appointed as the principal of School D. In 2007 Principal D graduated from Appalachian University in North Carolina with an Educational Specialist degree. She was appointed as the principal of a middle school in 2010 however; Principal D now serves as the district's Director of Elementary Education/Title I. She has attended several of the different programs offered by the North Carolina Principal's Executive Program in which she received the Jack McCall award. Principal D has presented at several state level conferences and served as the President of the Principal's and Assistant Principals Association.

Beginning year one. Principal D had been the principal of another Title I elementary school within the same district at the time of her appointment. The sitting principal of the school and Principal D were friends and colleagues and they had discussed the issues of the school many times as they often shared ideas or strategies for school improvement. She had actually been invited by the Director of Federal Programs to visit their school early that year. "When I think back on it now I think that was the beginning of why I ended up possibly at School D." In the spring of 2007 the

superintendent of her county called and asked if she would come over to meet with him.

Rumors of principals being moved had been swirling around all spring but when the

superintendent calls and says come to my office, you do not say no. He told Principal D

that he would like for her to go to School D as the principal and the sitting principal at the

time there would be going to her school. They simply switched schools. Of course

Principal D had to ask the question

> Why am I going to this school? And he said, 'I will just tell you that we, the
> Director of Elementary Education, and I have spoken and we have determined
> that we think that you are the best person for the job, for this school. My orders or
> my directive to you is to go over to that school and pull it out of school
> improvement.'

Principal D was not altogether unhappy about the thought, as it was closer to home, but

Principal D had been working with her present school and they had just received their

preliminary data about AYP. She was fairly confident that they had made AYP with high

growth.

> But you know, we are all very professional people and we know when our
> superintendent asks us to do something and he has faith in us and he says I know
> you can do it, and then you go okay, that is what I am going to do.

So Principal D and the sitting principal of School D changed schools that summer.

The reputation of School D being a tough place to work preceded it and Principal

D had heard by talking with the sitting principal the gossip was fairly accurate about its

complexity and unique environment. In talking with her colleague she had been told of

some staff members there who had been there a long time and who might not have had

the best test scores but who were well connected to the community.

> I think we all, as administrators and people that are aware of the politics that it takes to run a school or to run a district or to run even a department, is that there are those micro-political issues that pop up. They are not the places that you want to tread into and especially if you have a little bit of an intuition, you know, your gut will tell you something.

So Principal D knew that she would need to be able to work with those individuals that

the sitting principal had mentioned and yet her thoughts were

> In my mind I knew that if we kept doing the things that we had always been doing there, we were probably going to continue to get the same results. If I was really going to make a change at that school then I was going to have to go in there, I felt like, at least in that first year, and absolutely demand that they do what I need for them to do and yet at the same time, somehow appeal to them to get on board with me. I was not sure exactly how I was going to do that but I knew that we would have to be very purposeful all year long about what we did in our classroom. I knew that. I had heard the little cliché 'inspect what you expect,' so I knew that I had to go in there and show them I was going to be there with them and I was in the trenches with them.

Staff interviews. That summer Principal D interviewed everyone on staff. It was

tough as she was closing out one school and coming into another but she interviewed

custodians, cafeteria staff, teachers and teacher assistants. During the interviews Principal

D recognized they felt defeated.

> When I came on board they really had felt that they were sort of the red headed step child of the county for the elementary schools because they could not find their way out of school improvement. They felt very defeated by that because they were not only in school improvement for reading but they were also there for math.

They were in a pretty big hole when it came to exiting school improvement.

She also heard from staff about some practices that had been going on there that were a bit surprising. Teachers had been paying teacher assistants to do morning or after school duties so they would not have to do them and kindergarten teachers were having their lunches brought in every day and eating in the lounge while teacher assistants sat and monitored children. She thought

> This is not the kind of things we do in schools as we are paid to educate and work and supervise and be with students from the moment we get to that job site to the moment we leave. We cannot be derelict in our duties. We cannot, this is all about our students.

Principal D heard how the students at the school were very poor and needy children. The staff had come in one by one and each time she heard about how they could not make the scores or do well because of poverty or broken homes. Finally, she heard that School D had no critical mass of higher performing students. All of the Academically Intellectually Gifted (AIG) students had left School D when the Choice option was offered to parents and for those that could afford it, other average to high average students had left public school altogether and were attending a private school across the state line in Virginia. So Principal D decided that

> the challenge was to be positive. We have got to talk positive. We have got to smile. Fake it till you make it. I used to say that all the time. Fake it till you make it. Smile, just you know, put on a happy face because our kids deserve to see your happy face.

Building leadership capacity. Principal D began to collaborate with some people in the building who had been there that she felt could help her get a grip on what was going on. She brought in her assistant principal, instructional coach and Title I intervention specialists and together they began to determine what direction they were going to move. In talking with her assistant principal, she found out that her assistant principal had taken her first assistant principal's job there two years prior but was not very skilled. She had communicated that she felt left out of much of the decision making process and was unfamiliar with the curriculum. She had basically been assigned to discipline, buses and other managerial responsibilities but rarely was included in on the instructional decisions. The instructional coach and Title I teachers explained the scheduling of students and how they serviced the students for remediation. It was evident that many things had to change. Principal D first moved her assistant principal into her old office and took the large conference room next door so that they could communicate easier. Principal D told her "We do not keep things from each other. We are very much a team and we make decisions quite often together." She also moved the instructional coach into the assistant principal's office so she would have a place to work. Principal D also gave the school a face lift. Principal D began to save money and worked to enhance the aesthetic appeal of the school by purchasing items for landscaping. She had bushes and trees trimmed and planted flowers. She put in a focus piece in front of the building. Next she had the floors of the school tiled. "The floors were horrible and the building had the same carpet for over ten years." She worked with the Assistant Superintendent of Facilities and Maintenance to replace the carpet with tile that had a specific floor pattern

that added personality to the building. "The whole look of the building changed

dramatically."

Master schedule. When asked about what she thought her role was in the changes

at School D and their efforts to meet AYP, Principal D felt she had to be a change agent

in order to move the school out of school improvement. "I literally changed every

procedure that went on in that building." She realized that while the Title I teachers were

servicing the K-2 students through the reading program no students in grade 3-5 were

benefiting from their expertise. Every teacher in grade K-2 had their own personal

teacher assistant who was assigned to their classroom all day. "I am looking around at all

of these human resources that I have [and asking the question] why it is that all of the

human resources in the building were focused on K, 1 and 2 and not on 3-5." It did not

make sense that the school was in school improvement for the performance of the 3-5

students on the End of Grade state test but yet there was no support offered to these

students. The first thing she did was flip the schedule for enhancements during which the

teachers had common planning. They did not have a common planning for everyday of

the week before so this was a gift they appreciated. The teacher assistants were to

continue to assist the K-2 instructional program in the morning but at 12:30 pm each day

the teacher assistants were then to move to upper grades to offer additional instructional

support there until right before dismissal which was at 2:25 pm. Her expectation was that

teachers utilized them best to work with students and to create small groups. She had also

heard that the teacher assistants liked to chit-chat in the hallway, meet in the teacher's

lounge or hang out in the media center so she met with them early and laid out her

expectations about classroom responsibilities and morning and after school duties. She

recalled one time in the year when teachers assistants were suppose to be helping in the

classroom with small groups but instead were in the office copying papers. She recalls

the conversation with the teachers of a specific grade regarding the use of them [teacher

assistants].

> My directive to you was that these teacher assistants would stay in your room and
> be a part of the instructional program because this is one of our most valuable
> resources in our building and if we can not figure how to use these resources best,
> it is a process of futility as far as I am concerned.

Additionally, she decided that the five Title I intervention specialists would work mostly

in grades 3-5 supporting the reading and math learning blocks of each of the upper grades

with some support offered to K-2 during the day. She also found out which of the Title I

teachers had worked in what grade level and determined where they best fit in order to

serve the needs of teachers and students.

Supervision of students. Changing the pattern of student behavior and the way

they were being supervised became another issue that Principal D addressed.

> I looked at the discipline, all the discipline referrals and I noticed that they had
> 205 suspensions, not office referrals, suspensions in the 2006-2007 school year. I
> was just sort of taken aback by that. I mean truly taken aback. I thought what in
> the world is that all about because this is an elementary school.

One of the first things she did was at the first faculty meeting she laid out her expectation.

"No more than four students will walk alone in this building." Every group larger than

four was to be supervised by an adult. That meant to anywhere. In addition, there were

rules everywhere. "I put rules up in the bathrooms. I put rules up in the hallways. I put

rules up in the cafeteria. I put rules up in the gym. I made classroom teachers put up

rules." She made sure the children understood her expectations. On the first day of school

she went into every classroom and discussed all of the rules. She sent the rules home to

parents so they understood the expectation for students' behavior was the same

everywhere in the building. A breakdown of the discipline data showed that many

problems were occurring on the playground. The school had a large playground area that

was encircled by a nice walking track. There was also an open field, a hard top area and

Project Fit America equipment as well. There was enough for students to do during

recess that they could be in four different stations. Teachers' rooms were assigned to

stations for each day of the week and teachers were to rotate through the stations with

teachers monitoring the activity.

> Well you can imagine how that went over, but it was important in my mind that
> our students be safe. It was important in my mind that our teachers supervise our
> students in the appropriate manner and that they were diligent in their efforts to
> really be more preventative. If they are out there monitoring kids and know what
> is going on with just their class and not having to look at 110 kids on a
> playground, it much easier to supervise 25 kids than is 110.

Discipline referrals that resulted in suspensions dropped from 205 in 2006-2007 to 50 in

2007-2008.

Beyond that, other discipline issues were happening during dismissal time.

Principal D describes it as "chaos." She rearranged the way that students were dismissed

in the morning to go to classrooms and the way they were dismissed in the afternoon to

get to cars or buses. She asked the maintenance department to come over and paint a

yellow line indicating where students should stand in the pick-up line with the words

"Safety Zone" written on one side for students to be able to easily identify which side of

the line they stood on. She laid out that the expectation that everyone would be involved

in dismissal of students in the afternoon and some individuals would rotate

responsibilities for morning duties. No one would be paid to do another person's duty and

all students would be supervised.

> When you first start a practice you have to set the example. You can not let up on that. In my mind that first year is so critical in a building. It sort of sets the tone and if you do not go there and set your expectations up first thing with everything, it is not going to happen for you down the road.

As for how the staff and parents were receiving all the changes being implemented,

Principal D replied,

> I really did not give it much importance or I did not allow myself to dwell too much on that because I knew that there was going to be push back. I knew there was going to be some unhappy campers with the things that we were doing. The changes were so drastically being made because I mean, it was overhaul, an absolute overhaul. It was a real turnaround.

School Improvement Team. When asked about what role the school improvement

played in assisting the school in exiting school improvement, Principal D identified the

representatives as a decision-making group who represented their grade level or area of

expertise. She felt she really needed them to be on board to implement the reform

measures needed to improve student achievement. Early on Principal D tried to educate

the staff about the severity of the situation of where they were in school improvement. "I

do not know if they did not understand what school improvement meant or they just put

their heads in the sand and thought it might go away if they did not look at it face on."

Principal D felt she had to shape and mold the team. One of the things I think as a

principal going into a brand new building is you have to set yourself up for some success.

You have to set yourself up by making sure you are putting the right people on the right

bus. She asked the staff to think about whom they respected and could articulate their

needs. She asked them to "start with a new clean slate. Let's create our own school

improvement team." Principal D gives a lot of credit to her School Improvement Team

chair who worked with her so closely and who truly stepped up as a teacher leader.

Discussing the school improvement team's purpose and how they functioned,

Principal D explained that she had to establish with them early on that the school

improvement team was not going to moan and groan about little things. Principal D

explained that nuts and bolts, the little things "could be done in fifteen minutes and the

rest of the time was about instructional programs, practices and events." Principal D

described the team as the "driving force." She felt the representatives from each grade

level was selected to assist in creating and implementing the school improvement plan.

> You know they really revise your vision and mission about where you are and
> where you want to go. They have to be visionary and thinking about where you
> want to be in several years and what you should be planning for next year, this
> year.

Principal D stated,

> You know when you are in school improvement you are constantly kind of
> assessing. Am I looking at all of the components of my school wide Title I plan?
> Am I putting together these reform measures that are really going to change and
> impact my school? When you are in school improvement you really do have to

think about what are we doing that is going to be of high impact and really change what we are doing so it is not like other schools.

She observed their attitudes really begin to change over time.

I think that they really began to see that they were taking ownership. I think that was so critical. They were taking ownership of what was happening in the school and they wanted to see the school successful and they were willing to go back and have those hard conversations with their teammates and to defend the decisions we had made.

Technology. When discussing her resources, Principal D acknowledged that the school lacked the proper technological devices that Principal D felt the teachers needed to work more efficiently and to create engaging classrooms. Upon her arrival Principal D noticed that only three classrooms in the building had the coveted inter-activboards that the superintendent had been placing in classrooms across the district. These packages of technology in the school district included a laptop, lumens, an activslateboard and a document camera. "I could not wrap my head around the idea that this was a school that was in school improvement and technology was everywhere, but not in our building." Principal D sat down with the Director of Instructional Technology and asked what would be the one thing she could do that would assist her teachers in getting the activboards quicker in her building. It was decided that she would purchase laptops for all of her teachers. "I took $10,000 for 3 solid years in Title I money and I matched it to Instructional Technology funds and squeezed out every penny." Principal D knew that technology in her building was going to be essential to the future of student learning. She

ended up the next year with 7 activboards and laptop computers for her teachers in grades

3-5.

> I kept telling them this is where we are headed. This is where the district is
> headed. You all do not know that yet and neither does anybody else in this district
> but this is the way it is going to happen and I promise you this is my vision and
> we need technology in this building.

The K-2 teachers would receive their laptops the following year and by year 2 all

teachers had activboards in their classrooms as well. Principal D also felt that teachers

needed support to understand how to integrate the technology and use the activboards in

their classrooms successfully so at the end of the first year, she hired a Technology

Facilitator for her school. This allowed the teachers to have a "go-to person" that would

initially coach and model for them and provide them with the type of training that would

enhance their use of this instructional tool.

Throughout the year Principal D decided to work with the entire staff to create

norms of expectations and to revisit their mission and vision statements. She describes

this event as a significant turning point. The staff needed to come to a "consensus about

what we believed. We examined our values and beliefs as a large group of people

working with children." The staff was divided into eight different groups with questions

posed to them about curriculum practices, discipline practices, best instructional practices

and so on. Each group came up with expectations or norms of behavior that all adults in

the building would agree upon and determine to demonstrate on a regular basis. The

expectation was that

every single staff member was an instructional leader in the building. So if my cafeteria had free time they could work with a small group of kids, even if it was just to read a book. There was an expectation that everybody was going to be on board. It was these are all of our children at School D and all of these kids mean something to us.

Principal D felt that inspiration was important.

You have to give people hope that it can happen and you have to show them the way that it can happen. You have to have that mission. You have to have that vision. You have to articulate it every day and some way be there with them in the same boat and we are all rowing together. We all have our oars and my oar was not any bigger than their oar. We were all going to the same place.

See Table 7 for actions taken by Principal D in year one.

Table 7

Actions Taken in Year One by Principal D

Principal D - Year One
• Interviewed the entire staff for a better understanding of the school culture
• Communicated to staff that a positive attitude and positive comments about the school was needed in order to turnaround the public's opinion of the school's ability to educate children successfully
• Made some managerial changes for the staff in order to draw on the expertise of the staff
• Maximized the use of Teacher Assistants to provide small group instruction in grades 3-5
• Provided common planning for teachers every day of the week
• Made safety the number one priority by communicating safety procedures and systems to all stakeholders (playground and arrival/dismissal)
• Trained and informed her School Improvement Team about their role in the school improvement process and their ability to implement needed changes
• Worked with the staff to create norms of expectations that all staff could accept and agree upon.

Year two. Professional development and building capacity of the teachers became a number one priority for Principal D in year two. In School D faculty meetings were transformed from sit and get meetings to opportunities for staff development.

> I never had a faculty meeting from the moment I walked into the building. There was never a faculty meeting that was about a sit and get. We would do basically all of the housekeeping stuff in 15 minutes and the rest of the time that first year was about team building and capacity building.

The second year Principal D focused on Marzano's nine highly effective strategies by studying the book *Classroom Instruction That Works.* The focus was about improving classroom instruction. Additionally, because the school was in Year 3 of School Improvement – Corrective Action Principal D received additional funds. "One of the technical assistant pieces is you can find a group, an independent outside agency that might be able to come in assist you in monitoring and working with your staff." Principal D hired Educational Research Group (ERG) a professional educational consultant group out of Winston Salem to train the staff on Guided Reading. The teachers were provided embedded and extended opportunities for one-on-one conversations and critical constructive feedback with the two consultants who came to the school on a regular basis. Principal D saw this type of professional development as productive and not "a one shot deal" and "teachers were taught how to create independent centers or independent work stations while providing rigor and relevance."

Instructional support. Principal D and her assistant conducted a formal observation of every teacher in the school in year two to ensure that they were very cognizant of what was going on in each classroom. Additionally, Principal D received

weekly reports from ERG regarding individual teachers they had observed and the progress of the program and then provided her own feedback to teachers based on what she was provided so that teachers understood that she was going to follow through with what was important. Finally, Principal D was very interested in the staff understanding how to incorporate Project Based Learning (PBL) into their classrooms. She used her Technology Facilitator, her Media Specialist and her Instructional Technology Specialist from the county's instructional department to provide her teachers in-house technology training with three hours of extended planning each month to allow them time to plan together.

When discussing the technical support offered to her at both the state and local level, Principal D felt she was fortunate as she experienced opportunities at both levels. Prior to her arrival to School D, Principal D had completed her Ed.S. and was able to do her internship with the Director of Elementary Education and the Director of Federal Programs. This experience allowed her and better understanding of federal guidelines. After arriving at School D, she was able to continue to attend the state level meetings and often representing the district at those meetings when the Director of Federal Programs could not attend. She was able to meet other local and regional directors at these meetings and discuss issues similar to her own. "Some of the best ideas you ever get are those taken from other people and you just use those ideas to create and tweak them to meet your own needs in your own school." At the district level she also called on her Director of Testing and Accountability to provide data from quarterly benchmark tests. The data allowed the teachers to zero in on what skills students were lacking.

I knew that I could really jump into that and really learn about that. I could then go out there and talk to my teachers about it. I would have ammunition or evidence for them because I always tried to explain why we were doing something. I always came with a rationale.

When discussing the changes that Principal D saw in the school, Principal D discussed how that on her arrival she noticed that teachers sat at their desk a lot, lessons were not engaging and student center activities lacked rigor and relevance. Teachers spent a lot of time wasting time. As time went on Principal D began to see some changes. "They knew I was going to be in their classrooms everyday at least twice a day. They knew my expectation was that when I walked in the room that teaching was going on and that students were engaged. So I think instructionally a lot of things changed." Principal D began to see that

teachers were guarding their instructional time much more closely because I was monitoring their instructional time and making sure they were teaching bell to bell. Instructional practices and highly engaging lessons began to increase in the classrooms. I think you have to put your mind to it that you are going to plow through some of the junk. You have to set the bar very high. That first year is when the bar is set. You can not wait. Sometimes you have to say, that is not going to cut it and that is having tough, tough, tough conversations.

However, Principal D knew that her staff was working very hard.

My concern was always about morale and just how do you keep morale going? How do you keep people from burning out? I guess my concern was you know what other bag of tricks or what other things can I put into place in the daily schedule that will make a difference? And you know, when you are the administrator and you are trying to come up with all of these ideas you are just so concerned about whether or not you'll have buy-in but I think I knew I would have some buy-in because what I had done for the previous two years had continued to work. We were seeing growth incrementally each year so I kind of

felt like the staff would at least know that there was some credibility in what I was saying to them.

She understood she had asked her teachers to make changes in the instructional practices and in how they supervised students, in how they looked at data and much more.

> There are times when people do become overwhelmed and overloaded. There are critical times where people's minds kind of drift off to other things beyond the classroom that are impacting their lives. Those things just take a toll on people. So, it is incredibly important to kind of watch your staff and to kind of put your ear to the ground and constantly listen for the things that you know are kind of griping, the little gripes that come about. Yes, there's always a worry that you are going to overkill times in the school year like Christmas and Thanksgiving and Easter those kinds of times.

Principal D knew that whenever she introduced something new there had to be support.

> So whenever you put in a new a reform measure, whether that is a new program that you are putting in place, whether that is a coaching model or a group that comes in like ERG, you know you have to provide people with an understanding of why it is important. Then you have to give them the time to learn it and you have to give them the professional development in order for them to be successful. You just can not throw them out there and say here you go you got to do it and do it.

Stakeholders. Reaching out to her parents and the community was an important key in the school's success. Principal D recognized early on if she was going to bring any of the AIG students back to the school, she was going to have to make sure the parents in the community saw the worth of the school and gained more trust in what it could produce. "You have to bring parents in a lot. You have to show them all these good programs." She knew that at these assemblies there was a small amount of parents who were always present. "I always made a point to talk about things that we were doing that

were really great and beyond that I talked abut how smart and how successful our

students could be." Principal D talked to the students. She told them they were smart,

successful and constantly reminded them of her expectations. Principal D brought in

special programs and increased the number of parent involvement meetings after school.

"We started having assemblies like the A/B Honor Roll, attendance, Accelerated Reader

awards, anything that any little group of kids did in the school." After school activities

were increased with a jump team, chorus, dance team, and recorder groups.

Initially parents were not necessarily responsive to all of Principal D's changes.

At School D volunteer training was provided for parents. "We felt the volunteer training

was important because we had a set of expectations of how we wanted parents to behave

in our building." Parent volunteers could learn to do so much. With all of the changes, it

took some time for her to bring some parents around but she worked hard to establish

good relationships and increase involvement in the Parent-Teacher Organization.

> I think you know they, the parents, really began to see and began to really acknowledge all the work that was going on at School D. They were beginning to recognize that their kids were really making a lot of progress. They also recognized the fact that all of the safety measures that I had put into place that first year when I just changed the master schedule, the way they came in the building, the way they left the building, the way that the parents got to come in, just everything was paying off.

Principal D acknowledged that on some days she felt defeated and worried about

whether the school could exit school improvement. "The principal's job is a lonely job.

You do not have many people you can talk to." Principal D also acknowledged she did

not do everything right and made her mistakes on the way.

I think a good leader also recognizes the bad things. You acknowledge them. You acknowledge the elephant in the room. You acknowledge the thing you know, you did not do right and you say, hey we are going to pick ourselves up and we are going to move forward.

Celebration. When the school made AYP and met high growth for the first year, it was time to celebrate. They celebrated with a pool party for staff, family and friends of the school. Afterwards they went right back to business but morale was high and when the school made AYP for the second consecutive year and was able to exit school improvement there was a school-wide celebration the following fall involving recognizing not only the hard work of the staff but congratulating the students and parents for their efforts and partnership with the school. Principal D stated that the whole experience was "a great ride." See Table 8 for actions taken by Principal D in year two.

Table 8

Actions Taken in Year Two by Principal D

Principal D - Year Two
• Focused on professional development for all staff by focusing on Marzano's 9 Highly Effective Instructional practices
• Hired the educational consultant group Educational Resource Group (ERG) to provide embedded staff development in guided reading and math
• Conducted formal evaluations of all staff to ensure the implementation of effective instructional practices
• Hired a Technology Facilitator to provide support for the integration of technology in the classroom and provide technical support
• Continued to communicate high expectations to students during assemblies, morning announcements, newsletters
• Worked to maintain a high level of morale

Table 8 (cont.)

Principal D - Year Two
• Maintained high visibility in classrooms.
• Focused on involving all stakeholders through PTSO, business and church partners, student council
• Celebrated the school's success and acknowledge set backs

In Chapter V, I have provided a detailed analysis of each interviewee and my interpretation of the recurring themes as they applied to my research questions and conceptual framework.

CHAPTER V

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In order to analyze the data I examined the coded transcripts to discover the themes that emerged from the principals' answers to the interview questions. The following 12 themes emerged based on an inductive analysis of the data:

- Principals assess the school environment to determine immediate changes that will yield positive results for the school culture.

- Principals possess and articulate expectations and a core belief that all children deserve a quality education and can learn.

- Principals structure the learning environment in order to protect and provide the optimal amount of instructional time during the day.

- Principals foster positive and collaborative relationships with "internal" and "external" stakeholders.

- Principals support a culture of adult learning and collaboration that supports the most effective professional growth for teachers.

- Principals understand accountability for teachers must exist in order to see improvement in a variety of areas within the instructional setting.

- Principals utilize, examine, and interpret a variety of data to improve the quality of instruction by teachers.

- Principals focus on student learning by monitoring and evaluating the quality of the instructional delivery and programs in the school.

- Principals identify, use, and create additional resources to support classroom instruction.

- Principals recognize the continuous school improvement during year 2 requires continuing resolve, persistence, and additional strategies.

- Principals accept the stress and responsibilities of their job description yet find a way to maintain positive attitudes.

- Principals find ways to build morale by celebrating small and large successes.

From these twelve themes that have emerged from the transcripts, I conclude that they provide relevant information needed to answers to my research questions which are as follows: What were the instructional practices and program changes that occurred within the classrooms and the school that helped to increase school improvement in the previous two academic years? What were the perceptions about why the school was successful? What role did each of the following play in the success of the principal? The principal's professional growth opportunities? The school improvement team? The district office? Various other stakeholders?

Twelve Themes

Theme 1

Principals assess the school environment to determine immediate changes that will yield positive results for the school culture.

Principals who are appointed to a school in school improvement recognize the

need for immediate change in the design of the instructional practices and programs of

the school in order to begin the turnaround process. When a new principal is appointed,

whether it is in the middle or end of the academic school year, the new principal will

typically spend time fleshing out ideas for new strategies for improvement. One strategy

is to seek out information from staff regarding their perceptions about what is or is not

working and why.

During each interview the principals recalled meeting with staff and trying to

identify those changes that would need to take place in order to improve student

achievement. Principals offered their initial perceptions based on the interviews that were

conducted as to the culture of the school. Principal A stated:

> The first and foremost thing I did was meet with the entire faculty about fifteen
> minutes each from custodians to secretaries to teachers and instructional
> assistants. I kind of got a bird's eye view of what their vision was here at School
> A and what they wanted. So after coming in I basically was just digesting, sitting
> back and looking at some of the things.

Principal C recalled speaking to staff. "When I came in I interviewed all teachers on my

staff, I talked to them about what they thought about School C, what they thought that the

students here needed." As the principals met and listened to their staff and determined

their initial assessments, each school's individual cultural factors were identified.

Principal A described her staff as a staff that "lacked morale, they lacked motivation.

They seemed like the drive was gone and that they had been working so hard but they

were not seeing the success." Principal B identified the culture at School B as a school

that "had almost flat lined. There are schools that kind of bounce in and out of AYP but

you still see the heartbeat. You still see the growth. But this one kind of laid into AYP

trouble." Furthermore Principal B noted:

> So that was really a piece of culture that just absolutely hit me from the word go. I think another was a lack of pride. I do not know how I say that in a better way, but just a lack of pride of well, we have been in school improvement so long good luck getting us out. I mean that was one of things that was said to me you know, good luck with that trying to get us out.

Principal C noted, "And that is what they told me that they hated it but they just did not

think that these kids could learn because they were extremely poor." At School D,

Principal D noted how the staff felt:

> They really had felt that they were sort of the red headed step child of the county for the elementary schools because they could not find their way out of school improvement. They felt very defeated by that because they were not only in school improvement for reading but they were also there for math and they were on the same level. You know they just could not dig themselves out of the hole they were in and they were in a pretty big hole.

She felt the staff just did not have much faith in making real progress:

> I think they more or less felt our kids are just poor and they just can not do it. We are loving them, we are feeding them, we are clothing them, we are having parent nights for them, we are giving them free stuff and we are educating them the best we can but we are just not going to be able to do it.

Subsequent to gathering information and data from staff, principals determined

what reform measures could be implemented quickly that would likely yield positive

changes in the school culture. Principals understood that the measures taken must look

very different in order to change the momentum. Principal A mentioned a poster hanging

strategically outside of her door of Albert Einstein that states "If we continue to do the

same thing we are going to get the same results which is organized insanity." Early in the

first few months of their tenure, all the principals began determining what those positive

approaches and changes should be and look like for their school. Principal A felt that she

needed to foster relationships:

> One of the things the biggest thing that I saw when I came on at School A is everything was in isolation. Pre-K was over here, EC was over here, K-5 was over here, administrative team was over here and I said, 'No, we are a Falcon family, we are the Falcon's.' I will never forget I sent home letters when I first arrived and Pre-K came to me and said, 'We do not need to send these home' and I said 'Why?' and they said 'We are Pre-K' and I said, 'Yeah you are right. Are you a Falcon?' and they said 'Well yes.' Then I said, 'You are sending them home. You are part of this family you are going to be included.'

Sometimes principals had to assess how much the staff actually knew about their

situation. For example, Principal A noted:

> I gave a pre-assessment at a staff meeting and asked for questions. They did not know how many students made a subgroup or what possibilities of subgroups could be at this school. They knew their demographics. They knew the community, but in relation to AYP and subgroups and growth, per se, no.

Additionally, Principal A felt her role in the success of the school was being "the glue to

put everything together and get them to understand how everything was going to fit on

this plate for them." Principal B felt her role as an instructional leader was to assist the

staff in recognizing the need for and interpretation of useful data:

So, I knew going in I needed to have a needs assessment of where our students are. Where we are data wise? I guess that is the best way I would describe it is a comparative loss. I did not have a lot of good assessments. That is one of the first things I had to notice. We had some of the assessment stuff like EOG's, those sorts of things, but not a lot of formative assessments. Running records was awful. Our K-2 information was thrown out the window, useless. So first year things I needed to know clearly was what assessments were accurate so I could count on the data. Then I needed to sit down with each individual teacher and talk about strengths and weaknesses and where we need to go. What the formula assessments looks like and what do you need to get here? If we are expecting this as a bar what do you need to get here?

Principal C's changes came in attempting to ensure that the teachers were teaching the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. Additionally she monitored closely the use of instructional time:

The first year my role was making sure that my teachers were teaching the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, and that they were teaching from bell to bell and what that means is that when school opens or begins at ten minutes till eight or 8:00 am that they start teaching right then and they teach until 2:10 pm at least. I dismiss at 2:15 pm. So I expect them to teach from bell to bell.

Principal D had examined student discipline records and found that 205 out-of-school suspensions took place the previous year. Before anything else needed to happen, student behavior needed to improve and that this would happen with appropriate supervision by adults in the building. She felt her role was to secure the learning environment. Once that occurred the opportunity for learning by students and teaching by adults could become more consistent:

I put rules up in the bathrooms. I put rules up in the hallways. I put rules up in the cafeteria. I put rules up in the gym. I made classroom teachers put up rules. The rules were the same and the rules were the same everywhere. Basically what I did was I went in the very first day of school and I went through every set of rules

with every classroom in the whole school. I sent those rules home to parents so parents understood that the rules were the same everywhere and that our expectations for students' behavior were the same. The next thing that I did with behavior was that I realized that a lot was going on at the playground. I went outside and I looked at our playground and I noticed that we had like four different stations. I thought okay we have got Project Fit America equipment. We have got the blacktop equipment. We have got the playground equipment and we have got the track. I did have four classroom teachers [in each grade level] so I said we will make up a playground schedule and on Mondays Mrs. Teacher you will go to the playground. On Tuesday you will go to the Project Fit America equipment. None of you are to be seen on the playground together having a conversation. You are to be monitoring and supervising children. Well you can imagine how that went over, but it was important in my mind that our students be safe. It was important in my mind that our teachers supervise our students in the appropriate manner and that they were diligent in their efforts to really be more preventative. If they are out there monitoring kids and know what is going on with just their class and not having to look at 110 kids on a playground, it is much easier to supervise 25 kids than it is 110.

Rather than teachers dwelling on the negative, Principal D felt they needed to focus on the positives. Positive attitudes were a must:

But one of the things I had put there as a challenge to the staff was you know, we cannot in any way shape or form convince parents, the community our students or anyone that we believe our students can do it until we actually believe it, speak it and talk it every day. When we talk with each other or how we talk to children has to be in a positive manner. . . . They had the power to change and mold their environment the way they wanted and needed it to be and that they could do it but they just did not really think they could at first, I mean they just really did not and so the challenge was to be positive. We have got to talk positive. We have got to smile. Fake it till you make it. I used to say that all the time. Fake it till you make it. Smile, just you know, put on a happy face because our kids deserve to see your happy face.

Each principal's response to their school's unique, individual culture was to determine what components needed their immediate attention and to focus on creating opportunities that would renew the vigor and vitality of the staff and set the steps of change in motion.

Theme 2

Principals possess and articulate expectations and a core belief that all children deserve a quality education and can learn.

Newly-appointed principals of academically poor performing schools must recast and articulate their high expectations about student performance to all stakeholders. Furthermore, they articulate a core belief that all children deserve a quality education and can learn. Each of the principals was able to convey their conviction and strong beliefs to various stakeholders through different venues. Sometimes principals had to set very specific instructions about their expectations. Principals, when meeting with staff on a regular basis, like Principal B, work their expectations into everyday conversations:

> Every day, every day, my number one priority is, are we learning. Are we learning at high levels? Every day, I can promise you my highlighted kids [non-proficient students]; I am talking to the folks that are touching those students on a daily basis. What are we doing? Where are we going? What is going on? On any given day I can tell you how many are below at the point based on whatever [assessment] we have just done.

Principal A noted:

> We had to provide those non-negotiable with the master schedule enforcing them to say you have got to have small groups. You have got to have intervention and you have got to have that reading embedded not just an isolated subject. Reading has to be and writing has to be across the curriculum.

Often principals, like Principal A, working with School Improvement Teams can also work to begin the dialogue needed to convey high expectations:

> And then also my school improvement team was the heart, and having 20 of those representatives on my staff and really meeting with them. We met a lot the first year and really listening, talking with them and . . . educating them. Okay, well if that is working why are we still in school improvement? And I ask that question a lot. And it really got them to reflect on, wow, we really haven't moved anywhere. We really haven't made the gains that we need to so why aren't we? And just asking the right questions and transforming the school culture to have that open mindedness and allowing me to say okay, I do not think fifth grade really works for you let's try you in second grade.

Even when principals are hiring new people they must articulate their expectations.

Principal A described the interview process at her school:

> We set our expectations also at the beginning of the year and part of the process is that most of those players are part of my interviewing team. I never interview a teacher by myself. I will get little chuckles when I get teachers to interview with me 'cause they will say, 'Wow, you know I did not expect that many people.' I say, 'Well, you are shopping for a place to work. We are also shopping you know, to see if you fit our team.'

Principals have to be able to communicate those expectations effectively. Principal B helped her staff understand how the expectations translated into high quality instruction:

> We set benchmarks because I would say like first grade, ok students are coming in and expected by October to be a 7-8 and their expected to be at least a 15-16 at the end. How do you want to track these girls? Do you want to say a 7-8 at October and in January where do you want them to be? Knowing that by the end they have to be a 15-16 anyways. You make it where you want to make it you know. So we set our bars together and they had a lot of good conversation about that so there's a lot of, I would not say for lack of a better word, systemizing.

Additionally, communicating the belief that all children deserve a quality education and can learn, Principal B stated her belief about children's ability to learn:

I really to my core believe every child can learn and every child can learn at high levels, and a lot of people say that but do not really believe it.

When articulating their expectations, the passion they feel about their job is exhibited and support is provided, if necessary. Principal C spoke about her speech to her staff:

You have got to realize we are not here for you. We are not here for me. You are here for these kids that walk in our front door every morning. Their parents believe in us enough to leave those kids with us on a daily basis to learn so I expect you to teach them but we are going to do it as a team. If you run into a block somewhere and you do not know what to do you can either go to my instructional coach or you can come to me and between all of us we can figure it out.

When discussing expectations about student achievement and learning, principals do not just communicate those to adults but begin to encourage students to take ownership of their own education and their ability to learn. Principal C would not accept a less than a "can do" attitude from students:

I made it very clear to them that they were just as smart as any of the children in any part of this county but they had to work and prove to these other people. Hey School C's got smart kids. Because you are smart you are not using it but you are going to. They would get excited you know. I had a child come up to me; I guess it was like in December, my first year. He looked at me and said, 'Principal C you really believe that we are smart do not you?' I said, 'Yes honey I do believe it. I do not only believe it, I know it.' He said, 'Are you sure?' I said, 'Honey when I tell you something I am sure.' And so that was the feeling of the kids over all, that they were not as smart as all the other kids. So that is something that we have worked on and they have improved and they believe. First off, you have got to get those kids to believe they can do whatever you ask of them. You have got to believe that they can do it and you have got to make them believe you believe in them. When you do, they will perform. But if you say hey, I know he can only go so far, he is EC or he is poor; they are not going to perform. So I expect these teachers in every classroom I have got, Exceptional Children (EC) to Academically Intellectually Gifted (AIG), I expect their goal for the classroom to

be set high and I expect the teachers to push the kids to get that. Not all of them are going to make it but they are going to get where they can.

Discussing high expectations with staff doesn't necessarily translate into just the instructional programs but involves other specific duties as assigned by the principal. Principal D talked about her expectations with specific job responsibilities:

So, I met with the teacher assistants and I said these are your duties. These are my expectations. These are my expectations about morning duty, about afternoon duty and so forth and these are my expectations about where you will be. You will be in the classrooms. Now you and your teacher may determine a time where you can copy so if she says to you I am going to teach Social Studies at this time and I think I can do without you for this thirty minutes and you know, this is the time, then you determine that, but other than that you should always be [involved in small group instruction].

Principals are deliberate in their attempts to ensure that positive information is communicated to stakeholders in the community. Principals know that often the public may not have a real sense of what is going on inside the school on a daily basis. Furthermore, their only real thoughts about the school may come from teachers themselves. Principal D made it clear to teachers about her expectations regarding their conversations in the community:

I know that when there is negative force in your building you have got to figure out how to make that better and you have got to kind of minimize, minimize their influence on other people. You have got to reach out to those other individuals in your building who are positive people, who can be good ambassadors for your school. When you are going out to the community, and that was the other thing that I told the staff, I said, 'I do not want to ever hear ever again from anybody's lips in this school or outside of this school that you ever said that our kids can not learn, or that you ever said that School D kids can not be successful.'

Theme 3

Principals structure the learning environment in order to protect and provide the optimal

amount of instructional time during the day.

Good schools do not just happen. Principals wanting to turn a school around and

improve student achievement on standards-based year-end assessments must make

decisions in the best interest of children. The principals in this study understood one way

to do so is to determine how the instructional day is carried out. Principals figured out a

way to extract those things that were stalling the learning process. Principals understood

that a sense of urgency must be articulated and that the master schedule drives the

instructional day. Principal A spoke about that urgency,

> So there was this sense of urgency that we need to get our kids here at 7:15. We
> need to get those buses unloaded. We need to get in those classrooms and start
> instruction. So teaching bell to bell.

One thing that principals in low performing schools do is to express to all stakeholders

the need for instruction to be the focus. Other things can eat away at the instructional day

if not monitored consistently. Principal A noted how she had to change that mindset:

> We only have these children so many hours of the day. And there was not wasted
> time of being out in the hallway waiting in line to go to the restroom or going out
> or we are waiting for lunch. Why are you waiting for lunch? Let's keep them
> moving. There was a flow, a rhythm kind of like a rhythmic dance going on and it
> kind of happened with the master schedule 'cause if I have got five teachers
> teaching and we all got to rotate then they better be on time. I will tell you when it
> first started I was going over there in the hallways and I will be honest, I have
> opened up doors and said we are rotating because they were not used to teaching
> bell to bell, minute to minute. So it was a big drastic change for them. Now I will
> tell you I invested in a lot of Kleenex 'cause there was a lot of tears and stress but
> you know when you have kind of been relaxed for so long . . .

She also felt that that same expectation should be clear to other stakeholders such as

parents:

> And then also changing the mindset of our community that okay, no, it is not 1:00. You can not take your child, putting in the 2:00 rule that we are not checking children out after 2:00 pm because even at 2:00 it is still important. We are getting homework done. We are doing some of those behaviors that we need to do at the end of the day for our students so they can be insured that they have everything that they need. We are reviewing and doing some of those meetings at the end of the day to say hey guys how did we do today? So enforcing and also changing the mindset of the parents. Hey, we are teaching bell to bell and that goes back also to ensuring them of this is our main hallway. This is where our parents will come in and out. All the other doors will be locked. We ask that you please protect our instructional time. Please support us in that.

Principal's expectations about the master schedule and time on task often caused adults

some initial concern. However, principals, like Principal B, demonstrate a determination

to take care of the needs of students first:

> One of the big culture shifts for them was that it was hard for them to wrap their head around. I will move whatever mountain it is so that kids learn. I am not going to sacrifice a kid for an adult's convenience. Oh my gosh did that ruffled some feathers.

Principal B discussed how all teachers, including enhancement teachers, were

accountable for their time and contribution to the learning environment. She notes how

enhancement teachers need to be assigned additional assignments:

> [Enhancement teachers are] in classrooms or in charge of community relationships or in charge of resources. An example would be media. You know she has three days of six day rotation classes. She's in charge now of all of our level text. She's in charge of leveling new books that come in because I have got to keep something off of the regular teachers. I know from being a regular teacher asking 90 percent and higher is a feat. So I have got to take the time off [of them].

> They cannot be leveling their own books. They can not be scheduling all the PTA meetings and coming up with picture schedules and all that.

Principals were persistent in their desire to monitor the instructional time. Principal C was very determined that her teachers would spend their day teaching:

> I had to address a lot of issues about staying on task, staying in your room, teaching, not walking around visiting. This was not a social day; social hour began at 3:15 pm once their time was up with me. So I guess it was a lot of managing and a lot of instructional leadership for the most part. I made them understand that education was important and that is why they were here so I expected them to do their job. I stayed on top all the time pushing and demanding.

Creating a master schedule that enhances the learning environment and taps into human resources available was also important. It highlights the overarching idea that the driving force behind improving student achievement is figuring out how to utilize the talent and skills of the additional staff afforded to Title I schools through federal funds allotted because of school improvement. Principal D appraised the situation when she arrived and determined to create a different schedule for Title I Intervention Specialists:

> I could tell by talking with them that they knew what they needed to do but I also knew that they had been given free reign. I knew that they were you know, like maybe we'll take a 45 minute break here and then we are going to have lunch and then we are going to work with these small groups here and maybe we will have this block of time in the afternoon. I could not afford for them to have any more than what everybody else had and that meant I limited the amount of planning time they had to 45 minutes other than my lead Title 1 teacher. I gave them their 30 minutes of lunch like everybody else and then I said the rest of the day you are working with kids.

Principal D also felt that while the school day was in progress the role of teacher

assistants was to be in the classroom and part of the instructional program rather than

copying papers. She found several teacher assistants doing that one day and recalls her

conversation with the grade level teachers who sent them to the copying room:

> My directive to you was that these teacher assistants would stay in your room and
> be a part of the instructional program because this is one of our most valuable
> resources in our building. If we do not figure out how to use these resources best
> it is a process of futility as far as I am concerned.

Finally, principals took the existing schedule and created small group learning

opportunities for the optimal amount of instructional time for struggling students.

Principal A and D also built in special remedial or small group time into the master

schedule. Principal A created REACH:

> We have a reading time at the end of the day that is required for the entire school
> because we are trying to motivate our students to read. . It is called REACH -
> Reading Every Afternoon Changes History.

Principal D created SAIL:

> We started a program called SAIL and that was Students Actively Involved in
> Learning. It was at the end of the day from 1:30 until 2:15 every day. That is
> where I took all of my teacher assistants in my lower grades, of K, 1 and 2 and my
> Title 1 teachers, you know those individuals that we now call Intervention
> Specialist or Enrichment Specialist, and put them in the classroom in the
> afternoon. One of the focuses most of that time was to be able to provide some
> one-on-one, small group instruction with hands on activities that teachers would
> create as lesson plans with it in mind that we could also group according to ability
> so that we could better meet the needs of our students.

Table 9 indicates the strategies used by principals to protect instructional time.

Table 9

Strategies Principals Used to Protect Instructional Time

Strategies Principals Used to Protect Instructional Time
• Made sure that children went straight to classrooms first thing in the morning
• Made sure that teachers were prepared first thing in the morning to receive students
• Made sure that teachers decreased the amount of time spent on transitions
• Examined the master schedule to determine that time was being used productively
• Communicated to teachers the expectation that the master schedule was to be strictly adhered to during the school day
• Communicated to parents that early pick up of students on a regular basis was counterproductive for their academic progress and learning
• Examined the individual schedules of enhancement teachers to ensure their availability for creating additional small group opportunities for students
• Communicated the expectation that "socialization" time for staff should be avoided during the instructional day
• Created a specific schedule for Title I Specialist to ensure their time was spent productively with specific grade levels
• Readjusted the time that Teacher Assistants spent in specific grade levels
• Created within the master schedule an enrichment/intervention period to reach all students

Theme 4

Principals foster positive and collaborative relationships with "internal" and "external"

stakeholders.

New rules and new relationships is what a turnaround often looks like for all

stakeholders as the new principals begin their work. Principals worked to find a way to

make connections with all stakeholders and articulate the nature of a quality instructional

program should consist of is critical to the redesign of a school. Principals articulated that

vision to all stakeholders and created opportunities of "buy-in" through mutually

respectful conversations that were child-centered rather than adult centered. However, to

ensure that those conversations took place, principals enticed participation early on in

their tenure. These conversations took place in classrooms, team meetings, hallways,

offices, parking lots, grocery stores and a variety of other places. Principals found a way

to convey the need for change that promotes a positive school culture focusing on

classroom instruction and student achievement.

Principals knew that articulating what they value is important for others too. For

example, Principal A described her feelings about coming back to School A, "I felt that

the connection that I had with the community already, being a teacher here. I was coming

back home" and that when she opens herself to constructive criticism, she gains her

staffs' respect:

> I do staff surveys with my staff. I have done the 360 feedback for myself. I could
> go on forever telling you all the different little things that we have put in place
> that I feel is very important. Our teacher working condition survey was very
> important with our school improvement team and looking at that information, me
> as an instructional leader looking in that and practicing, but another piece too is
> just the communication piece. I send out a ConnectEd message to my parents
> once a week sometimes twice a week. I send out Falcon news, which is a two
> page newsletter every week to my staff so it is got a check-off list, reminders of
> the week and what is happening at School A and with that comes quotes. I tell
> you some of the books that I have implemented *Looking Forward to Monday
> Mornings, Transforming your Culture* by Anthony Mohammed which was also
> with the DeFour's. I mean the list goes on and on.

Principal A describes herself often as coach and mentor in her interview. She created

Professional Learning Communities so that teachers could begin to collaborate and

discuss students. She managed to monitor those even when she was not able to attend:

> We actually have quite a few model PLCs on our campus and so they have a PLC notebook that they turn into me every week, I note on that my feedback. I try to be in the PLC meetings, but I am only one person so I make sure I try to stay in good communication with my teachers.

Principal A provided support for beginning teachers from the beginning in order to

provide a smooth transition to School A:

> That is part of that relationship building. When we have those first few optional teacher workdays, right before the beginning of school, I cater lunch and I have anchor team with their buddy. And they come and we sit down and I tell my beginning teacher when we talk it is very informal and it is a safe environment no matter what we do. We take a tour of the school. We talk about procedures like the bus dismissal, car riders dismissal, fire drills, all of that stuff and then the anchor person takes their buddy back to their classroom so they can see a teacher's classroom and how it is set up. They talk about expectations. This is what Principal A would like to see in your lesson plans. You need to have a bulletin board for your positive behavior but then they take it a step further. I have asked them now go back to your buddies classroom and talk with them about how they are systematically putting their classroom together and what is their vision for their classroom so that you can kind of put in those friendly reminders like, do not forget to put your lesson plans on the door or do not forget to have your PBIS bulletin board.

Principal A received positive response from the changes being made at School A:

> I got a lot of positive feedback of parents telling me that their students were coming home and that they had seen an increase in the academic piece. So the instructional time on task they were noticing, and their rigor increasing. They saw the change in the quality of homework, the quality of communication, and also us wanting to make the connection in educating our parents. We increased our parental involvement the second year I was here. We started doing our PASS

nights, which is a grade level specific night called Paring All Students for Success. That is why we call it PASS. We then started a literacy night along with our required Title I—Parent University. We listened to our parent surveys where parents were saying they want more. They want more information. They want more resources.

Principals understand that providing opportunities for teachers to feel comfortable

enough to admit what they need and how an administrator can help is important.

Principal B discussed her role:

> I think my role was eventually breaking down those defenses and let's getting at really what do you need help with? I promise you I am not going to just put things on you. You do not know how to differentiate. You know just tell me what you know.

They [administrators] know that if they can build trust, barriers can be removed and

teachers will begin to be more receptive to adult learning opportunities. Principal B

recalled how she listened to what they [teachers] were telling her about their needs and

then trying to help meet them:

> It was literally step by step of what we needed, you know and based on individuals. We would almost take it on a week to week basis when I would meet with them. Once they kind of broke down some barriers they would say, I do not get how to set up all these groups if you want me to do this. So it might be somebody internally that would do a presentation [to help them].
>
> Because then they really open up and say, 'I can not, I can not do that because I can not manage all these groups.' Ok, fine, now the walls are coming down a little bit and we can talk about what is going on in your room.

When principals like Principal B are in classrooms on a regular basis showing teachers

they aren't providing "lip service" but are offering viable ideas, teachers also begin to

open up. She recalled meeting with a veteran teacher to offer assistance:

> The turning point with her was that she understood that I understood. I was not up
> here in the office saying, "fix this." I was in her room with her saying, 'Oh have
> you tried, and have you thought about, and let's do some expert reading.' You
> know what I mean, those kinds of things?

Finding a way to include parents in discussions about improving their child's

performance by expecting more from their school and forcing reform is something that

principals understand is needed. Principals understand that this is critical group of

stakeholders who can influence a number of factors such as student performance and

community support. Principal B recognized that by catching parents as they were coming

in or out of the building, she could provide them with information that would be of

assistance to their child in the classroom:

> We started having individual conversations of folks that were willing. I would sit
> down with any parent that wanted, as they were signing their son or daughter in or
> whatever. I will never forget a single mom and she really struggles herself but her
> daughter is struggling and she was signing her in late again one day. I said 'Ms.
> Parent do you have a couple of minutes?' We sat down and I literally went one-
> on-one with her about some of the things her daughter was struggling with and it
> was about how she did not know how to help her. I told her it would really help if
> you'd just let her read, 'cause were seeing struggling on a fluent level, or it would
> really help computation things in math. It would really help if you would just
> literally flash the flash cards. I would give her the material or whatever but a lot
> of that was one-on-one especially because by that point I had a good feel as to
> when parents came in as to that student's below, I need to grab a hold of that
> parent or that student's not but she has questions about the system that we are
> doing so I could talk individually with parents at that point.

Principals also sought out other stakeholders like community leaders. Partnerships

with the community can be innovative and provide much-needed help. Principals

recognized that turning a culture around also involved getting others to view the school in

a positive light and to provide much needed resources. Acknowledging her

demographics, Principal C made a point to find suitable role models.

> I wanted those people to come in and be a part of this school. My population here
> for the most part is African American children. So these groups were African
> American and these children do not have the family environment that most
> children have. [Some students] do not have the male presence in their household.
> So I knew that these kids needed that piece.

Building up student confidence and providing a caring environment where adults

articulate their expectations to students was one responsibility of the school administrator

and the staff. Principals knew that talking and listening to what children were saying and

what they understood about what is going on in the classroom helps students take

ownership of their own learning. All four principals provided information about how they

connected to students. Principal C recalls conversations by changing the mindset:

> I stayed on top all the time pushing and demanding and the kids knew hey,
> Principal C really wants us to learn this stuff. She believes in us. I think that was
> an integral piece was getting the kids to believe in themselves and to realize that
> Principal C as the administrator believes in me, my teacher believes in me, so
> therefore, I probably can do it. They had been told or led to believe that because
> they are poor children that come from extremely low socioeconomic homes that
> they can not learn. I had to change that mindset of not only the children, but of the
> teachers.

Articulating norms or levels of expectations may not always be enough to rally

the troops. The staff must also take ownership for their own behavior and begin to view

those expectations as something they *want* to do rather than something they *have* to do.

Inspiring people to *act* rather than *do* can take a certain level of charisma by the leader of

any school. Principal D discussed how she began to see changes:

> The other piece was because I was in their classroom every day and because we were meeting for CASA [Collaboration Around Student Achievement] meetings and team meetings that I met every week. I called it A and B week. On A week they did CASA on B week they did team meetings with me. I was carving out that time to make sure that I was monitoring what was going on in the classroom by having those critical conversations with all my teachers every week about what was going on in the classroom. They began to also articulate to me some of the things that, I think by that second year, they began to trust me a little bit and began to see that I was really there for them and so they began to collaborate more and work together more and share, which had not happened before.

People must find something that the principal is saying about the vision of what can be

for the school as compelling or inspiring in order to have behaviors change. Principal D

found that allowing her staff to create their own norms allowed them to work in small

teams where they began to bond or reconnect with people they had worked with for a

while and have a sense of what mattered to them would be valued:

> What we did was we decided that our staff really needed to come together as a cohesive group. We began to do a lot of team building activities where faculty meetings were solely devoted to team building and to coming to consensus about what we believed. We examined our values and beliefs as a large group of people working with children. We were deciding what we were going to do so that first year. What we did was we came together and it was a long process. It took us about five times throughout the school year as a faculty, but we came together and we decided to create some norms of expectations as adults and what we thought these things would look like if we were to say what does good instruction look like in a classroom? What would that look like to you as a teacher when you walked into a colleague's room? What does good behavior in the hallway look like? What does adult supervision look like in a building? Who does that supervision include? So, we would come together and we would kind of meet in small groups. We would begin to hash out what those things looked like. Then we

would hang those norms up around our media center or you know places where teachers could have access to that and they would add to that. Then we would come back together the next month and we would examine those norms and say what we all can agree on. Then we would agree on those standards and then we signed a contract. . . . There was an expectation that everybody was going to be on board.

Just like Principal C, Principal D made sure that she communicated to another

stakeholder group, parents, about the good things going on whenever she had the chance:

I knew I always had a little bit of an audience at every awards assembly with parents. You know there were always those few parents [in attendance]. I made a point to talk about things that we were doing that were really great and beyond that to talk about how smart and how successful our kids could be. I talked to our kids all the time about how smart they were and that they could do the work. We expected them to do the work. We expected them to have good behavior. So we were constantly reiterating our expectations of them. So, informing parents with choice and corrective action and explaining and making sure that they realize that you are being transparent. You are trying to be as transparent as possible about what situation you are in, but then, how are you going to make it better.

Table 10 indicates the strategies used by principals to build relationships with "internal"

and "external" stakeholders.

Table 10

Strategies Principals Used to Build Relationships

Strategies Principals Used to Build Relationships
• Asked teachers to provide 360 feedback as to the principal's performance
• Provided the School Improvement Team with the results from the North Carolina Teacher's Working Condition Survey to assist in improving teacher satisfaction and teacher retention

Table 10 (cont.)

Strategies Principals Used to Build Relationships
• Used automated phone message systems like ConnectEd to provide timely announcements about upcoming events
• Sent weekly newsletters to staff and parents
• Created and monitored Professional Learning Communities
• Selected mentors for beginning teachers and provided time for them to share
• Utilized programs like Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS) to increase students' responsibility for behavior and to communicate staff expectations of behavior
• Held Title I Parent Informational Nights such as Literacy Nights or EOG Informational Nights to keep parents informed and provide them with ways to assist their student at home
• Held one-on-one conversations with teachers when requested or needed to offer specific guidance or feedback
• Offered the staff a multitude of Professional Learning Opportunities to enhance teacher performance and improve instructional practices
• Were visible and accessible to staff on a daily basis
• Held one-on-one conversations with parents when needed or requested
• Conducted school-wide assemblies and other events in order to communicate with students and parents
• Worked with staff to create norms of expectations that all staff could agree to
• Sought out role models for students that mirrored the school demographics
• Created team data teams like Collaboration Around Student Achievement to discuss school and student progress on assessments
• Held regular faculty and team meetings

Theme 5

Principals support a culture of adult learning and collaboration that supports the most

effective professional growth for teachers.

Teachers are often in the spotlight when newly appointed principals come into a school that consistently performs poorly on state assessments. Principals survey their surroundings and spend a good amount of time observing teachers and evaluating programs. When struggling to meet AYP, the question in persistently low performing schools is how to approach learning gaps within specific subgroups Those gaps are closed by effective teachers who implement best instructional practices in their room utilizing effective instructional strategies. The teacher has to be able to understand their responsibility in the learning process for their students through the improvement of their own skills. Principals want teachers to approach adult learning opportunities with the enthusiasm.

All four of the research participants came in to a school that had consistently performed poorly and were in school improvement for not meeting the AYP target goals for reading and math for at least three consecutive years. These four principals began to create a collaborative environment where listening to the needs of their teachers was essential to increasing teachers' capacity for growth. Principal A wanted to include her teachers about what that looked like:

> Utilizing those surveys to find out exactly what they needed then going back to my school improvement team and saying, okay, let's look. Let's do a comprehensive need's assessment. What do you think we need? Go back to your PLCs and talk to your teachers, survey them, come back, let's talk about a plan of action. What are we going to do with this professional development money? Where do our needs lie? And really making some strategic decision making but not just me as a leader, because that was the buy-in piece. If I included them in the discussions, if I included them in the decision making process they were going to buy in because they knew they needed it. If I say to you I need this book and you buy it for me, hey, I am really going take ownership and read it. But if I just basically say okay here you need to do these chapters five through twelve and we

are going report on this on Monday you know it is not really, they may not value it as much as being truly reflective.

As I listened to the principals describe their school environments it was evident to me that all of them were looking to create professional learning communities where safe and trusting environments could exist and honest conversations about what was or was not happening in classrooms could take place. Once Principal A understood what was needed for the staff to grow professionally, she utilized technical support from the state level and district level to train teachers:

> She [the trainer] was from NCDPI and she was basically in the math department. We had the forefront of what was coming. She came out and met with all my PLCs. She also did some math investigations training with my staff and then she came out and discussed goals and objectives and alignment with math investigations. So if there were questions of well, I can not make this lesson work and here's the NCDPI objectives and I really do not understand how this is aligned, she could get them to understand the pacing guide, how we are supposed to use math investigations, the framework and what are we looking for. How are we supposed to use that with guided math? A lot of professional development went into that but formerly as well as informally. She was coming in modeling lessons. Also just like I said, that part of support during PLCs, the district training, and just being year round, we had our own training.

Critical to creating greater capacity for change in a school is to create opportunities for those that serve in leadership roles such as members of the School Improvement Team to contribute to the shared leadership decision making process. Principal B discussed her school improvement plan:

> What really grew for these teachers is they had a plan. They strategically came in and said this is where our data says we are weak. This is what we think we are going to do about it. Now let's bring in the consultant and show them our plan and let them shoot holes at it. Let them improve on what we have based on their

experience because they had ownership in it that way. It was not the veteran sitting in the corner going that is not going to work. I know that is not going to work. I am not doing that in my room. They had such ownership of it. They were already prepared for his questions. I mean during some of their meetings before he came, they were saying things like I think he's going to ask about this and this and this. We should tell him it is because of what these kids are doing. And that is really what changed adult learning as we went from "sit and get" to this is our plan.

Principals know that finding outside professional consultants is sometimes needed to jumpstart a new initiative. Principal C and D determine the areas of math or reading to be a weakness and found an outside group to come in and provide embedded and sustained staff development. In School C, Principal C decided to contract with a professional consultant for math:

I hired ERG [Educational Research Group] to send me a math person and one of their representatives came. She was coming two days a month working with my teachers showing them how to do guided math groups. And, of course, like anything new they did not like to do it but they hemmed and hawed a little bit but then they could see the kids really pick up math concepts really well through this grouping. And letting them do these games and things together and so that has helped, that has really helped. We do not go to the gym anymore in the morning because now they go straight to the classroom and the teacher will either work with them on either math or reading, whichever is their weakest.

Principal D felt that professional development for her school was a must as she and her staff completed a book study with Bob Marzano's *Classroom Instruction That Works* which outlines the 9 most highly effective instructional classroom strategies. The staff also had additional professional development in the area of comprehensive reading strategies. To assist her teachers in reading and math she hired professional consultants like Principal C:

We used a group called ERG (Educational Research Group) which is out of Winston-Salem and the premise behind this ERG was for them to provide embedded staff development so it was not a one shot deal where you get to come to a meeting hear a little bit and try to go back and implement it. They came very regularly each month. They observed, they gave positive feedback but also critical, critical feedback constructively to my teachers about their instructional practices in the area of guided reading. I received all the feedback every time. They provided feedback in written form to my teachers and I received a copy. I could look at that instructional feedback and then go back and speak with my teachers about those kinds of things. If I saw a pattern or a trend then I could address that as a grade level. So one of the things I saw was our reading instruction and the guided reading piece within our instructional practices in the classrooms was changing greatly. One key thing that that ERG taught my teachers was how to do, which was something they did not do previously, was teachers were taught how to create independent centers or independent work stations while providing rigor and relevance in the work but not necessarily someone standing over top them [children] monitoring them constantly.

Theme 6

Principals understand accountability must exist for teachers in order to see improvement in a variety of areas within the instructional setting.

Each principal was expected by their superintendent to their school had a responsibility to create a different environment to improve student achievement by focusing on the instructional practices and procedures of the school and determining what needed to be changed. Professional Learning Communities can exist, staff development can be provided and additional resources made available but what happens when individuals can not make the changes in their classroom along with the rest of the school staff? Principals then have open, frank conversations with teachers and staff members. Each of these principals recalled such times but more importantly, once a staff member is let go, then hiring new teachers who share the leader's vision is critical to implementing change. The principals discussed how it impacted the school environment but noted the

support they had from their district office. Principal A had thirteen teachers who she had

to replace her first year:

> Sometimes its shedding light on perhaps education might not be the avenue for
> you. Or let's put you in another capacity. We are all about trying to grow them
> and maybe math is not your area. Maybe fifth grade is not your area. But
> sometimes you know if I come to you and I say, well, fifth grade is not really your
> area, you may not want to hear that at that time. And so the Superintendent was
> very supportive and the Assistant Superintendent in saying you know instead of
> allowing teachers to make those decisions we need the urgency to happen. They
> were very supportive in the decisions I was making here in the school level. I did
> have some beginning teachers that I non-renewed but I had placed them on an
> improvement plan before trying to give them that support and resources those
> types of things. So then bringing in new staff and training them and that was a
> very difficult task because I really did not want to bring brand new teachers
> coming into such a stressful situation because I want to retain my teachers.
>
> Change sometimes comes with growing pains and some want to take the ride with
> you and some do not. And there are changes that are needed and there was an
> urgency that was basically we needed to do things now. And I am all about
> growing teachers but if you do not want to grow and do not want me to assist you
> then it was you know, our students were suffering and so we can not have
> educational malpractices.

Principals have certain characteristics they hope to find in their staff members. Principal

B had her own ideas about what she needed:

> If I have one characteristic I need in a faculty member, it is a strong work ethic
> because you can not train that. You can not build that, you know. Yeah, there's a
> few folks I had to let go and that was rough and I hated it for the culture because
> it did kind of make them spooked of me for a little while and I hated that. But you
> know it is not about All-Star teachers. It is about team player kind of teachers
> with a strong work ethic. I want to be able to build a system that when an All-Star
> leaves I can find a strong little ILT [beginning teacher] with that spark and that
> work ethic and plug them into my system. We are so strong that we will support
> her.

She noted her reaction to the rumors that circulate when staff members leave a school:

> I reacted even more positive, because I would have some of the veterans see I had to let several folks go. Actually you know it was in specialty areas that I knew I had young teachers that were weak in here. I had to have a strong person in here if they are already behind. I literally had regular teachers that I had to let go.

However, she was very steadfast her in resolve:

> I hate it that way. I really want them to you know, have a say and whatever, but there are just some non-negotiables. I did not intentionally come in and say well if I fire one or two, I will get their attention. It was just that some folks, I could tell, just they were not going to play with me. They did not have the content totally or they just were not willing to put in the effort, period.

Letting staff members go for a variety of reasons is stressful but the level of accountability for various stakeholders really is about the day-in and day-out activities and conversations that occur. Principal A not only laid out expectations for classroom teachers but also resource teachers:

> I was talking to my resource teachers and I expect a word wall in your room, I expect browsing boxes. I expect that when you are teaching about pottery you should go to the library, talk to the media specialist. You need to be checking out pottery books and when you have early finishers or you have students that want to research there it is. You have your computer ready available so that they can research on anything, because even as an artist you have different strands you also have different learners. I might be great and I love painting and I love to draw but there are some students that hate to go to art so how you going to touch those students. Well if they are a reader that is how you touch them and so that is how you get them energized and motivated to come into art class.

Principal C talked about how she felt she had to hold her teachers accountable for

teaching and learning in her school. She examined lesson plans and had follow up

conversations:

> They had to turn in a map of their plans to me. I went through them and if it was
> something I saw that I did not like or I thought was wasteful I would bring them
> in and I'd say, 'Now explain to me why did you have this? What is the purpose?
> What are trying to get them to learn here?' But I did not have to do that too many
> times with them because they finally realized, hey, she's not playing. She means
> business. I got them disciplined enough to know that hey, you have got to do this.
> You have got to do lesson plans. They've got to be aligned to the North Carolina
> Standard Course of Study. You have to teach bell to bell. No lapse time. I do not
> want to come in your room and see them working on a worksheet. That is not
> productive to me.

Training teachers to have those same kinds of conversations with students was also

important. Principal C noticed a change in teachers holding students accountable for their

work:

> The conversation between teacher and student was much different than it was the
> first year. It was more kids saying to the teacher, 'I did not do good on this
> assessment. What can I do that will help me be better at what I am doing?' The
> teacher would sit down with the kids and say 'Okay, none of you did well on this
> objective so let's go back and look and see why.' So they would go back and
> readdress various questions on benchmark. I know a fifth grade teacher did that
> several times and the kids could explain to him how they made the mistakes they
> made. One or two times the fifth grade teacher would come to me and he'd say
> 'You know, I can see why they made this mistake. I would have made it.'

Principal D's felt that much of the accountability would fall to the leadership team of the

school to understand the complexity of the situation and the importance of their work as a

decision-making team for the school as a whole:

But I really saw them as a decision-making group of people who were there to represent their grade level or their area of expertise. I really needed them to be on board with working with me and through me to help make these reform measures work. I will say that what I did with them very early on was explain to them the severity of where we were at in school improvement. They really needed to have a clear understanding of what school improvement meant because I do not know if they did not understand what school improvement meant or they just put their heads in the sand and thought it might go away if they just did not look at it face on.

We really had to revamp the way we worked as a school improvement team because you can get caught up really quickly in all the nuts and bolts of things and that is not really about what a school improvement team is. They are the driving force. They are the group that is looking at that school improvement plan and they are helping you as a representative of their team, bringing your ideas and thoughts and results from things you have done in that particular grade level. They are helping you revise every year your vision and mission about where you want to go. I will say that you have got to be, as a school improvement team, visionary in where you think you are headed in the next several years and you should be planning for next year, this year.

She also realized that holding even specific teams or teachers accountable for their behavior was important to the morale of the whole staff:

You had to constantly stay on top of things and when people came to you and said so and so is not pulling their weight or this team teacher is causing dissention or the three of us are fighting with teacher D then I had to go in and try to fix that the best I could. I remember in the second year, one of my grade level teams, same team, same team as it always was, I remember that I went in to talk to them about something. I remember at one point I said, 'Guys for two years now we have been having this conversation. I do not know what else to say to all of you all except that if not one or all of you all can not figure out how, if all our of you can not figure out how to make this work, I am going to put all four of you on an action plan. I do not know what else to do to make you be better teammates. You have to learn to get along.'

Principal D felt that monitoring the instructional programs and practices was determined from the principal's first impression with the staff in the first year:

You know everybody leads differently and certainly everybody talks differently. Everybody sort of has different expectations. I think here-in lies the issue. You really have to put your mind to it that you are going to plow through some of the junk. You have to set the bar very high. That first year is when the bar is set, you can not wait. So, if you do not set the bar high and then call people on it when you see it you are not going to have it.

Table 11 indicates the strategies used by principals to hold teachers accountable for improved instruction.

Table 11

Strategies Principals Used to Hold Teachers Accountable for Improved Instruction

Strategies Principals Used to Hold Teachers Accountable for Improved Instruction
• Provided Professional Development opportunities to enhance teacher's knowledge of research-based strategies to improve instruction
• Created Professional Learning Communities with the expectation of collaboration and planning
• Held meaningful one-on-one conversations with teachers regarding instruction
• Communicated with central office personnel regarding staff issues or concerns
• Used the school improvement team and plan to provide vision and mission
• Used the school improvement team and plan to communicate expectations at grade levels
• Articulated expectations of a strong work ethic
• Held candid and more direct conversations with staff members when needed
• Collected and examination of lesson plans
• Visited classrooms regularly and held a visibility in the school
• Examined student data from benchmarks and EOGs
• Assisted the staff in creating norms of expectations that all staff members could agree upon

Table 11 (cont.)

Strategies Principals Used to Hold Teachers Accountable for Improved Instruction
• Lead by example and model strong beliefs and positive attitudes about the school's possibility for success
• Placed teachers on action plans or dismissed teachers when necessary

Theme 7

Principals utilize, examine and interpret a variety of data to improve the instructional practices of teachers.

Examining a variety of data that can provide insight as to how and why students are not being successful is critical in school reform. In reviewing the responses to the interview questions by the research participants, it is important to note that all four principals felt that their school, upon their arrival, needed to be educated in how to read, interpret and use data. These principals recognized that teachers needed not only to access and interpret the data but then use the data to make decisions about how instruction in the classroom needed to move. Through their responses, the principals indicated a need to initiate conversations that centered on student learning with data as the focal point to provide the proper intervention or enrichment strategies.

Principal A discussed how she began to question her teachers. "Okay, well I can give you all the data you want. What do you do with it after that?" She knew it could not just be about student achievement but how that students began to work in the classroom. What did that engagement look like? She took a hands-on approach and began helping the teachers see connections:

Just educating them on some of the details of seeing how things aligned. For example, benchmark scores to report cards. We had students making 20% on benchmarks but making straight A's in math and reading. They did not understand the connection where the assessment was happening in the classroom versus the benchmark assessment or common assessments. They truly did not sit down and really reflect on well, this student really did not master the goals and objectives and yet they are on the A honor roll in the classroom. So some of those things really told me a big picture of, we really did not understand our data. We really did not look at the strategies that were in place. It was kind of like we were taking all of those points of data and everything that we were doing and we were just in a big mess. It was not really aligned and going in the same direction. We are all doing our own thing in each classroom.

Principal B took a different approach. She noted through her interviews that for data

analysis, "First thing I had to do what put a system in place that we were talking the same

language." She really had to assess what the data she could count on to be valid:

We had some of the assessment stuff like EOGs and those sorts of things but not a lot of formative assessments. Running records was awful. Our K-2 information was thrown out of the window, useless. So first year things I needed to know was clearly, what assessments were accurate so I could count on the data. And then I need to sit down with each individual teacher and talk about strengths and weaknesses and where we need to go. What the formula assessments look like? What do we need to get here? If we are expecting this as a bar [of expectations] what do we need to do to get there?

She determined that the use of a one-on-one, comprehensive assessment to determine

instructional and independent reading levels was needed and selected Fountas and Pinnell

as the tool. Her district had not selected a common assessment tool. She felt that she

could not worry about other schools in the district at that point:

I do not want to sound like the teacher who shuts her door and says I did it all by myself. That is not true. There is no way you can do it by yourself. . . . We would sit down and talk about data [at the district level]. However, I know this is going to sound selfish but I mean I am not out there trying to save everybody. If I am a

lifeguard of this pool I want to make sure all the kids in here [her school] are swimming. I do not want to look after your pool while you are on a lunch break.

With this in mind, Principal B moved forward with the implementation of the assessment tool for staff and training them to complete the assessments. She also worried about what was available for her grade 3-6 teachers. "We had no pulse check whatsoever so we borrowed from a neighboring county their assessment." She also initiated conversations about math:

> We implemented quarterly assessments and in math they really just did not get the concept that albeit basic at kindergarten it goes all the way through you know. So math we implemented quarterly assessments at the K-2 level. We really began digging into what is our K-2 math assessment telling us? Let's dig into this strand because it was like they just do not get the word problems about one of the things. The words are tripping them. No it is really the concept. What concept is that question after? In upper grades, we literally sat down very strategically and said okay fourth grade teacher, list me every child that right now you are concerned that is not going to be on grade level and not only tell me who they are, tell me what strands you are worried about. Then tell me sitting down with your partner what the plan is and then lastly tell me what you need from me.

Principal C's teachers received support with data interpretation all year from the Director of Testing and Accountability:

> He came to every CASA meeting that we had and he offered suggestions and guidance as to how to address the children at risk, various goals and objectives from the benchmarks. Think Link [an on-line assessment tool with a large test item bank] played a big part the first and second year of us being successful on the EOG. He explained to them how to come up with their test from Think Link to be more effective to help them.

Principal C realized that her task was more about educating her staff to the present level

data and how that impacted their school's status. As a common practice, this school had

not examined data:

> Because this staff had never ever seen any of the data that was produced by their children taking various test whether it benchmarks or EOG. So they really did not understand when I told them how much trouble this school was in. It was hard for them to believe me so, of course, we know that data should drive instruction but these teachers did not have that part. So I had him come in and show them the data from the past three years up to this time to the beginning of that new school year. I had him explain to them how they were to use that data and how with that data it could drive their instruction and make it much more effective and a higher quality of instruction because it would have to be to deal with the different areas of the children's weaknesses. So we started doing that, well he did that and, of course, we started CASA and of course that is Collaboration of Our Student Achievement. So they knew that when they did an assessment on a child they had to look at that assessment and what other strategies other than what they used at the beginning could they go back now and use to re-teach these kids that were weak.

Principal D felt that having data to provide to teachers as a rationale about why the school

was taking a certain direction was important:

> We were beginning to take those baby steps towards looking at data and to say you can break this down into subgroups. You can really see what your kids are doing. I personally just felt like if I could jump into that and really learn that, I could then go out there and talk to my teachers about it. I would have more, I do not want to call it ammunition, but I would have more evidence for them because I will say this about me. Whenever I have worked with a staff I have tried to explain why we were going to do something. I always came with a rationale

Table 12 indicates the strategies used by principals to utilize, examine and interpret a

variety of data.

Table 12

Strategies Principals Used to Utilize, Examine, and Interpret a Variety of Data to Improve Instructional Practices

Strategies Principals Used to Utilized, Examine and Interpret a Variety of Data to Improve Instructional Practices
• Provided technical assistance to staff in the way of professional development with the use of district level personnel to train staff on the use and understanding of data to improve instruction
• Examined and compared report card grades to benchmark or EOG results for a clear picture of a student's progress with teachers
• Created and attended Professional Learning Communities or Data Teams to examine data in a collaborative setting
• Selected and used an evaluative tool such as Fountas & Pinnell to provide common and valid data to proficiently evaluate student individual student progress and to create a classroom overall profile of progress
• Created of data walls or data notebooks with a variety of data displayed for teacher use and examination
• Held one-on-one conversations with teachers about individual or classroom data
• Used and provided the resources for web based data banks that teachers could access to create common assessments such as the use of ThinkLink
• Created within the master schedule blocks of time for enrichment or intervention to meet the needs of specific groups based on data analysis and results
• Aligned the school improvement goals with areas of strengths and weaknesses within the school's instructional programs
• Monitored and evaluated the full implementation and success of the instructional programs in the school as they related to the current school improvement plan
• Facilitated the use of data as a communication tool with parents at parent nights, newsletters, and automated phone messaging

Theme 8

Principals focus on student learning by monitoring and evaluating the quality of the school programs and instructional delivery.

When the data have been examined, the plans have been created, and the instruction is going on in each classroom, the rubber meets the road when, the principal examines and evaluates the delivery of instruction. Nothing is more important to student achievement than the quality of the instruction by the classroom teacher. Good principals closely monitor the instructional practices in their classrooms. If that does not happen, teachers and students may not understand the expectations and the vision of the school.

As I examined the interview responses, it was clear that the study's principals understood that monitoring and constantly evaluating the instructional practices would aid the school in turning their low performance on state based assessments around to improve student achievement. Principal A emphasized differentiated instruction and watched it develop in her school:

> I had to force them and the only way I saw forcing them into differentiating in the way they needed to was to put it in the master schedule. So some of my teachers teach reading and they master their craft. Some of them teach math but they also understand that there's that cross curriculum too. Even though I am teaching reading today I am integrating science, social studies and math and spelling and writing all at the same gamut and the same time. That is what helped me also in picking out my 13 teachers. I knew strategically where I was putting my staff because I watched them for a year and I know exactly where their craft is because all of us have talents. I may be a reading teacher but I may not be a math teacher. You know what? I do not want those teachers teaching my children math so to speak. I want my strong reading teachers teaching reading and I want my strong math teachers teaching math. And then we are going to basically as a PLC help each other to master our craft while learning the other.

Principal B evaluated the instructional practices of teachers by careful consideration of all

factors:

> I took extensive notes from April to June, I sat down in the summer and I looked at that person's data of that year, I looked at the person's data of the year before. I am trying to get a comprehensive per teacher just like you would per student in your room. I wanted to look at strengths and weaknesses. Is she strong in content? Is she strong in delivery? Do managerial things trip her up, you know? I mean all those pieces that go into being a good teacher. Yes I overlaid it with some evaluation pieces and that sort of thing but at that point I could almost kick that out if you are saying she's great and we are getting 38 literally, 38% in her room. No. No.

Principal B was determined that evaluating the progress of the school meant not

forgetting what the job was really about:

> One of the things I say to the faculty when we come back is, we did a wonderful job guys but we let 31 kids walk out that door below grade level last year. Thirty one kids are going to come back to us below grade level in reading. I know the number, you know. I mean literally, I have a little sign that I am going to post for me this year that way when I walk in that door I see that number in my face every day because it better come down the next year or I am going to have failed.

Teacher leaders, who are energetic and ready to step up to additional responsibilities can

assist a principal in many areas. Principal C understood that monitoring instruction can

not be done alone but with the cooperation and participation of teacher leaders. She used

members of her School Improvement Team to monitor classroom instruction as well:

> They [School Improvement Team] would check on with the teachers. Okay, our plan says that we are going to use guided math to try to up our math scores. What are you doing? What are you doing in guided math? So they would you know, check in on the teacher every so often and then we would meet and the representative would come back and say okay, they are doing the part of the plan that is for their grade level. They are carrying out these strategies.

Principal D felt that monitoring meant constantly assessing a variety of things:

> You are constantly kind of assessing you know, am I looking at all of the components of my school wide Title 1 plan? Am I putting together these reform measures that are really going to change and impact my school? When you are in school improvement you really do have to think about what are we doing that is going to be of high impact and really change what we are doing so it is not like other schools.

Principals must have a handle of what the big picture is for their school. Principal D discussed her need to keep an eye on what was going on at all times:

> There was a lot going on in that building but it takes all those programs going and I do want to say this. If you do not have a pretty clear idea of what the whole picture is in your school and if you as an administrator can not reach out and touch everything when you need to and kind of have a feel for it, you do not have to be an expert on everything but you have got to have a pretty good understanding of what is going on in that building on any given day. You could have lots of things going on but it would not be very effective. So you really as an administrator, you really got to keep a handle on things.

Theme 9

Principals identify, use and create additional resources to support classroom instruction.

Often in elementary schools a problem can occur when there are fewer people or resources to do what needs to be done. Principals are constantly seeking ways to remove some of the burdens of paperwork for classroom teachers so that they can get to the job of teaching class. Through the interviews I determined that the principals sought to hire additional staff, when possible, to create small group opportunities or to provide other needed services. When meeting with the teachers, these principals responded to teacher's requests by tapping into the technical assistance offered by the district office or finding

the means to pay for staff development. Finally, they seemed to understand that resources

could be found outside of the school through organizations like the PTO or through

community or business partners.

Principal A recognized that materials for the classroom where needed and found

funds to purchase what was needed. When the school needed calculators for $15,000 and

the Math Kits for $8,000, she went to the PTO and they did candy sales. She stated that

she used, "Title I money, begged, borrowed and steal. Anything, anyway." She also used

Title I funds for classroom libraries. "I told them [teachers] that it needed to be either

aligned with math or science in some capacity in the third, fourth and fifth grade." She

examined the existing materials and made sure they were being used.

> I do not think they realize what they have because in our science closet we pulled
> out a bunch of science stuff. We pulled out some math things that haven't been
> used and I am thinking, what are they sitting in a closet for? Do they realize that
> they have it? No, they do not. So making sure they know where to get it and you
> know what? We are taking it on a cart and I am delivering it to you and I want to
> see it utilized.

Principal A sought to build relationships with business partners:

> For our fifth grade we actually had our college foundations to come in and our
> universities to come in and start setting up tables and talking about saving for
> college, college annuities those types of things. We also started with our fifth
> grade when I got here is every year now they go to visit the University of North
> Carolina at Pembroke. Some of our students have never even been on a campus
> and now they see it tangible, that this is in our community and we can actually
> attain it. So educating our students and our parents in making that bridge between
> the school and the community. Also, using our Fort Bragg liaison because we do
> have a military population here and bringing them on campus.

Principal A tapped into fund sources that could provide the resources needed:

> All of the above to include also spending my own money. You know I am looking some months I spend $200. I bought doughnuts for everybody this morning you know but then also fund raising, asking business partners and it comes down not only to teachers but students and providing resources and incentives for them. I had an insurance company to cut me a check last year to buy glasses for a child. Just using any type of resource that you can, free giveaways, going into businesses and saying you know we are having this program can you help us out? Anything and everything and sometimes it doesn't always work out. You may not be able to get everything that you want but we most of the time find a way; most of the time find a way. Our PTO has been very supportive too. I could not ask for a better support system. They were the prime reason we were able to put our side slab together because they raised $4000 for our side slab tables and chairs. So it takes a village to raise a child. It takes everybody.

Principal A mentioned several people from the district office that she worked with to assist her in School A. She used these human resources to enhance various programs or services. Through her interviews with me she mentioned calling on the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Testing, the Public Relations Director, the Pre-K Director, the Instructional Coach, outside agencies and business partners.

Principal B made a huge contribution to her school when she realized that her teachers needed the Fountas and Pinnell assessment tool to improve the reading program. She purchased all of the level books and kits. Principal B brought in Solution Tree for development of Professional Learning Communities and Educational Research Group to provide staff development for guided reading. Principal B had no problem bringing in expert groups from the outside to provide much needed staff development:

> So it was not enough to give and understand the data of quarterly assessments. Now I thought they were at the point that, okay guys you need to begin learning how to write these so you can give them with the novel you are doing not just

backfilling in October and whatever. So we really got into Betty White (pseudonym) and her husband. We really started pulling in some heavy hitters because I felt like they were willing to listen and I did not feel like spending that kind of money you know [unless they would see the benefit].

Principal C, like Principal A, tapped into district level resources and support.

Upon arrival Principal C recognized that the facility outside needed to be given a face lift.

Out maintenance department over and cut down a tree for me in the very front of the school. I had our guy that mows, he came in and fixed the flower beds and put mulch in them. They hadn't had mulch in them. All the flowers had been killed out of the flower beds. I purchased flowers. A lot of the things I did out of my own pocket because School C does not have a functioning PTO.

Principal C called on the technical assistance by the district office and utilized the effort

of the Director of Testing and Accountability:

The Director has been a cheerleader for School C since the day I walked in here. I guess the day I walked in here he walked in here with me. I told him I said, 'You are going to have to help me." and he said "I will be right there, whatever you want.' I will have to say that he has been here any time I needed him all I have got to do is email or call and he's right here. With his help we have finally got the teachers to realize hey, this, we can do it.

Principal D saw that there was an array of untapped human resources available:

I looked at what was happening with those Title 1 teachers and where the teacher assistants were. At that time the school was rich in teacher assistants. It had a teacher assistant for every K, 1 and 2 classroom and it had an office assistant and a media assistant. So I am thinking in my head as I am looking around at all of these human resources that I have [and asking the question], why it is that all of the human resources in the building were focused on K, 1 and 2 and not on 3, 4 and 5. I just could not figure that out when here we are in school improvement and we are getting ready to go into corrective action, why would we not be focusing some on 3rd, 4th and 5th. It was just beyond me so I met with the Title 1 teachers and I decided from now on enhancements or specials electives, 5th, 4th

and 3rd will have their electives in the morning. Now that was unheard of at that time because at that point it was all about giving everybody that big literacy block and you had to have your reading time in the morning.

She rearranged the schedule to provide additional services to students in grades 3, 4, and

5 in hopes of seeing increased student achievement:

> I flipped the entire schedule and instead of the kindergarten, first and second grade getting electives first thing in the morning I gave it to the 5th, 4th and 3rd grade and so what happened was 5th would have their first elective. They were the first group, then 4th and then 3rd. No excuse me, it was 5th, 3rd and then 4th and then after lunch around 11:30 or so it would be K, 1 and 2. What I did was I said, 'You know kindergarten teachers you do not really need your teacher assistant at 11:30' or I guess it was more like 12:05 'because you have already had lunch, you have already gone out on the playground. They've been out there with you and now you are going back to your room and your kids are one going to take a nap for twenty minutes. You are probably going to do something like storybook time or maybe students can go to different stations and I think you can supervise that on your own. I think your teacher assistant can be more useful in the upper grades so at 12:30 every day.' Every single teacher assistant went to a 3rd, 4th or 5th grade classroom and they stayed. They were assigned to that one classroom. They stayed with that one classroom and what I said to the teachers my expectation is that I will expect never to catch one of them from 12:30 to 2:00 or I guess it was about 2:25, in the copying room, copying. They should be assisting you in your classrooms, small groups, whatever that may be because what I did too was I gave them big chunks of time and I would say these are your big chunks of time. You have ninety minutes of math and ninety minutes of reading. You have social studies and science. You have to integrate your writing and your technology.

Principal D felt strongly that part of her role at the school was very focused on providing

the right resource for teachers:

> Well, my role, you know my role was to, and I always thought my role was to be you know the person that provided them with all of the resources that they needed. My role was to be there to monitor the things that they were doing in their classroom. My role was to be there to listen to them, hear their concerns and to work with them and the resources and the bodies that we had to create a master schedule or to create opportunities for them to have professional development.

You know, it is such a, it is such a strategic undertaking as an administrator I think. I think that was where my role was. Really I played two roles, two major roles. I was an instructional leader and I was a strategic leader. I did concern myself with human, the human resource side some because I was always trying to watch morale and keep the good teachers and then place teachers where they were supposed to be. But you know, I really feel like most of my time was spent thinking strategically about how to put the resources in the right place at the right time. Where to find the resources? How to come up with extra money to buy the extra things that the teachers said they needed.

Table 13 indicates the strategies used by principals to create additional resources.

Table 13

Strategies Principals Used to Create Additional Resources

Strategies Principals Used to Create Additional Resources
• Creatively used Title I funds
• Worked with the PTA to hold sales and conduct other fundraisers
• Made sure that existing materials were being fully utilized
• Built relationships with business partners
• Used own personal funds
• Used district level personnel as experts and for professional development opportunities
• Built relationships with community colleges and universities
• Hired outside educational research consultants for professional development
• Made full use of existing school personnel to reallocate their time and efforts

Theme 10

Principals recognize that continuous school improvement during year 2 requires resolve,

persistence and additional strategies.

As the schools had been successful in meeting all of their AYP target goals for the first year, they had to meet AYP for a second consecutive year in order to exit school improvement. This meant that principals had to be persistent in removing barriers for continuous school improvement. The information provided in the responses from participants indicated that principals felt they needed to continue with their efforts from the previous year but also determine further strategies with the staff and put those things in place to continue to increase student achievement. All expressed how they felt their role in the second year was to keep everything going which required a certain level of persistence and determination by each of them.

Principal A vocalized the need to meet challenges:

> So going into that second year I think one of the big steps was getting my staff to understand the urgency that we had to get this done. We had to get it done this year. We are over one mountain. We got another mountain to climb but this one is going to be difficult because going into that second year you know we had talked about before a lot of schools do not make it the second year.

Principal A felt she needed to offer those 13 new teachers her support and went to her leadership team, the School Improvement Team for help:

> In my second year that is what I got and so I got that animal to really dissect and to look at and so I brought that back to my school improvement team and we would talk about our new teachers and what are we going do for them? . . . So we devised an anchor team. . . . The anchor team is part of when those teachers come in they [anchor teachers] start to bond with them that day on the retreat day.

Principal A also felt that while the teachers had made progress in the area of reading, it

was not happening in every grade level with fidelity. She continued to provide her staff

with professional development opportunities to sustain growth and build capacity:

> I brought ERG in for my fourth and fifth grade teachers 'cause I was thinking
> well we got support for K3 what are we going to do for four-five? And they were
> involved in that and then all teachers were involved K-5, well preK-5 in the
> Stephanie Harvey comprehension tool kit with the literacy frame work. It is a
> comprehension tool kit, it is basically teaching students. You have to understand
> that it is based on using non-fiction text, informational text and how to change a
> child. We'll get a child thinking about what they are reading to learn and basically
> they train teachers on how to model inner conversations, inner thinking when you
> are reading.

Principal B felt her resiliency to continue to push for a culture change was important:

> Huge, huge because we had made so many changes. We had really drawn our
> hooks in and said these practices will no longer happen. These are the things we
> need to do and here's how we pay attention to data. All those things. It was a big
> cultural push, squeeze at that point. If it did not come out, if we did not come out
> smelling like a rose I was going to have mutiny. So it was huge, huge to clear that
> bar.

Opening herself up for some critical feedback, Principal B decided to provide her

teachers with a copy of her evaluation. She was continuing in her efforts to provide

teachers a voice and to allow them opportunities to better understand her role in the

school. She also decided to provide additional people in the classrooms in the second

year so that for a 45 minute window of time, small groups could occur in the 3-5

classrooms:

> It was not enough when we realized oh, gosh we have got this bar and it is really,
> really high and we are really, really nervous. Yes, we did good this year one but

going . . . results from this year two I am nervous especially with that bar being that high. So we literally, and SIT team agreed, we suspended duty free lunch and we let teacher assistants and K-2 rooms cover for a 45 minute block. We slid K-2 teachers with a partner [in 3-5].

Continuing to have children and adults believe the students of School C could continually grow academically was a challenge for Principal C. She was their cheerleader all year long in year two:

> The biggest challenge was to keep that steamroller moving from the year before. I had to well, the first of the year, my first faculty meeting I cheered for the staff. I cheered for the kids. I made the staff understand that we could not drop the ball. We had to keep pushing forward. I played the video from the little guy in Texas that spoke to the Texas school board. He said do you believe in me that was what I am going to ask my teachers. Do you believe in me? If you do how are you going to show it? So that was my question to my staff. Do you believe in the students that you serve? If you do, how are you going to show it? Then how are you going to make them believe in themselves? And so they, each teacher, went into their own classroom and they did their own little thing with their kids. Then at our first assembly, it was an academic assembly, and then after that assembly we were coming to the end and I asked the kids, 'Do you believe in me as your principal? And of course they all said yes, that they did. I said, 'Do you think that I believe in you?' Yeah, and I said, 'I do. I do believe in you. I believe that you are as smart as any kid in this county and I want you to show the rest of these people in this county.'

In every classroom of School C was an activboard, an interactive board, another instructional tool for teachers but Principal C was not sure how proficient they were and provided additional support:

> My technology person that comes, she worked with them that second year helping them to develop more flip charts and showing them how to go to the website and pull some that were already made and tweak them for their needs in their classroom. I saw the activboard used more and the children engaged more with the activboard. In fact, some of the classrooms the students were the ones running the activboard because the teacher was not that sure about it the kids were more

tech savvy than some of the, how should I say, seasoned teachers. But they were trying to learn, but the kids could do it so much quicker so they used the activboard more. They quit putting the kids in rows and all this stuff.

Continuing to have conversations with students also became a priority of Principal C:

At the beginning of the year I gave third grade through fifth an EOG: Set My Goal sheet. They had to conference with each child. Now third grade did not have any data to go back on so what they did was have their children decide what they wanted their goal to be for that year. There was a place for them to write it down and to write down how they were going to work towards that goal. Now they had to conference with them. They started the third week of school. They had to set down with them and conference with them and come up with that. Then right before Christmas, right before the Christmas break they'd conference again but in between that time I conferenced with them and said, 'Okay, tell me what goal you have set for yourself? Tell me how you are going to work towards it and what do you plan to make on that EGO at the end?' They all could tell me, they all could tell me how they were going to work on it. Then again in March I would conference with them again and then the teachers conferenced with them one more time prior to the EOG to see are you on track. Are you feeling confident this is where you are going to be? And for the most part what they predicted they were going to make is what they made.

Continuing to maintain the momentum, Principal D felt she needed to sustain programs and resources that were already in place but yet rework or make a course change midstream if necessary:

You got to always come up with something different. I just do not know that any one year is the same. I think there's a fine line between maintaining and trying you know, to increase everyone's skill in that second year. At the same time you can not really ever let up so you still have to keep pushing forward so in the second year there were lots of things that we were still continuing to do. We still had the Think-link. We still had SAIL which is the afternoon-remediation time. We had hired the tutors during our resource time so that we had them but then beyond that what I did was I also hired two teachers that came in and worked specifically with grade 5 students.

Additionally, she determined that reading comprehension strategies had to be increased in

the second year in order to see continuous improvement:

> They [ERG] talked a lot about reading comprehension skills and they began to work with our district to talk with our district about reading comprehension skills. So we just kind of took it on us, my instructional coach and me. We wanted to take it to the next level so we basically created a notebook that listed reading comprehension strategies and it has; it just, I think it just propelled us to the next level. I think it just did what we wanted it to do.

After Principal D's school had created the norms of expectations for all staff members,

going into the next year the same norms and expectations applied:

> We took those norms out and we just re-visited those norms and said we are rededicating ourselves to these things. We are rededicating ourselves to these promises to each other and to the students. I think that was probably significant because momentum was moving along. We were starting to see momentum. I had started building trust with them so they believed I was there to help them. They saw that I was working really hard. They understood through some very confrontational kinds of things with certain staff members that you know, I was not going to take no for an answer about what I wanted staff to do and they began to hear a little bit from the parents about how happy they were with the things they were seeing. We really were rejuvenated and I think that was the really key thing starting into that second year.

Principal D was mindful that part of removing barriers was her resolve about moving

forward. She needed to constantly assess the situation the school reform measures being

put in place and make sure that the school staff was fully implementing them:

> You know when you go into school improvement you are constantly kind of assessing. Am I looking at all of the components of my school wide Title 1 plan? Am I putting together these reform measures that are really going to change and impact my school? You know when you are in school improvement you really do have to think about, what are we doing that is going to be of high impact and really change what we are doing so it is not like other schools.

Table 14 provides the strategies used by principal to continue school improvement in

Year 2.

Table 14

Strategies Principals Used to Continue School Improvement for Year 2

Strategies Principals Used to Continue School Improvement for Year 2
• Worked with personnel to replace teachers who were non-renewed, retired or left the school during or after Year 1
• Worked with the School Improvement Team for additional assistance in understanding the need to continue and capitalize on the momentum built on the success of Year 1
• Created and assigned mentors for beginning teachers in order to acclimate them to the school culture
• Surveyed staff to determine professional development needs
• Hired outside professional educational consultants for additional professional learning opportunities catered specifically to their teachers' needs
• Continued to monitor Professional Learning Communities
• Selected mentors for beginning teachers and provided time for them to share
• Held faculty and student assemblies to celebrate the academic success of Year 1
• Continued to seek out administrative feedback on the principal's performance from the staff
• Partnered K-2 teachers with 3-5 teachers in order to provide additional classroom support
• Continued to tap into the expertise of central office personnel in order to provide additional support to teachers
• Continued to make themselves visible and accessible to staff on a daily basis
• Held one-on-one conversations with parents when needed or requested.
• Continued to conduct school-wide assemblies and other events in order to communicate with students and parents
• Held one-on-one conversations with students to see personal academic goals

Table 14 (cont.)

Strategies Principals Used to Continue School Improvement for Year 2
• Sought out role models for students that mirrored the school demographics
• Continued with team data teams like Collaboration Around Student Achievement to discuss school and student progress on assessments

Theme 11

Principals accept the stress and responsibilities of their job description yet find a way to maintain positive attitudes.

In examining the transcripts from each principal interview, I found that each one of them understood that a certain level of stress came with the job when they fulfilled their job responsibilities. Each discussed the stress of the position but it did not appear that it deterred them from getting the job done. Principal A acknowledged the stress:

> But I will tell you, you know it does put a lot of stress on you. You eat it. You breathe it. You sleep it. You live it. I mean, you do not sleep. But one of the things is making sure that my team was going to be as passionate and as dedicated to moving us out of school improvement as I was. I knew what the school was capable of when I was here as a teacher. We moved seventeen points and we became a School of Distinction.

Principal A discussed how she handled it:

> Well one is my own spiritual faith, that praying and knowing that there is something greater than myself that kept me going but family support and I will be honest looking at my son and being a leader. I will never forget our superintendent has shared the *Leader's Legacy* with us. That is a book that we read. What do I want to leave behind? Do I want to leave behind someone that gave up and you know kind of just said forget it? Or do I want to overcome this challenge and you know what? At the end guess how many lives you are going to effect. And that is a lot.

Principal B described challenges that she faced personally when implementing these

school wide measures:

> There were times I was just wore out. I mean I was at the point of tears. I was at the point of frustration. I was at the point of just simply angry. I told a colleague we should be sued for malpractice. I mean we should just be sued you know, I was very, very discouraged at times. I would not let them see it. So help me, I would not let them see it. I swore to myself going in to this knowing after I got into the data of just how far we had to climb, that they will never see me get tore up. They will never let them see me raise my voice in a faculty meeting. I am going to be bouncy, perky we can do this guys. But so help me when I closed my door there were days when I thought I do not know that I can. I do not really know that we can. I think we can.

Principal B overcame these challenges by taking the following two steps:

> I would get myself that tore up when I was looking at the whole picture, thinking we were farther than we were you know what I mean. It is one thing to think we are here in assessment and instruction and whatever only to go back and see that it was not. So when I would look at the whole picture and I walked down the hall and see only three out of 16 are doing what I thought we were, you know what I mean.

> I guess another step was, I would stop. I am a big Stephen Covey fan. I am a big Jim Collins fan. When I felt myself going where a good leader doesn't go. You know that eighth habit is all about do not do that, do not play down there, you can not you know. And so I would stop and steal some time to think about what does a good leader do here? You know what would a Jim Collins do in this situation? How do I bring passion back to this? How do I bring you know specific, how do we get out of this guys? So I would, I would pull a lot of Stephen Covey's they have or I'd pull Jim Collins anything that would pull me out of that. I would jokingly say we do not play in the wildflowers guys. So if I felt myself playing in the wildflowers. I need to pull out.

Even when stress exists and principals feel the pressure, there is a job to be done

and making people aware of continued expectations is important. Principal C knew her

style was going to be a big change for the staff from the previous principal. She described

it as "You know yourself, nobody likes change. And these are old dogs in here. They at first let me know, hey, we have had everything done in this school and none of its' worked." She dealt with passive aggressive behaviors from staff but Principal C, not one to back down about something, shot back:

> I know what you are doing but realize this folks. You either become a teammate, get on board with me or next year you'll come to work the first workday, and padlocks will be on the front door [implying the state would shut the school down]. The state trooper will be here, you will have lost your job and you might not get paid. Now if that is what you want you go ahead and keep playing your game but I said either you are going to play with me or stand a chance of never working in this county again. Now is that what you want?

Principal D explained how she knew that the changes she had made were drastic and that some push back from staff should be expected:

> I am certain there was probably plenty of push back. I mean plenty. But I guess I just had made up my mind so much that we were going to move forward. I really did not give it much importance or I did not allow myself to dwell too much on that because I knew that there was going to be push back. I knew there was going to be some unhappy campers with the things that we were doing. The changes were so drastically being made because I mean, it was overhaul, an absolute overhaul. It was a real turnaround. I mean it was a total turnaround. So I guess you know, I guess you always think there's probably a bottom before there's getting ready to move your way back up. But I almost felt like they were really probably bottomed out that summer when they had not made AYP again. I mean when they realized that the summer that I came on board.

The stress for Principal D was the challenge of continuing momentum:

> I mean it is just a challenge to always get people to continue to move forward and for every two steps you take forward, sometimes you can take a step back if morale drops, if money's not available, if what you said was going to happen can not come to fruition. So you have to constantly be thinking ahead and I think that is a big challenge for any administrator.

> The other is the challenge of keeping the vision and mission statement in the forefront of where we are going. Always making sure that people kind of keep their eye on the prize and this is kind of where we want to be in the future. So now we have kind of met our future. What is our next in our future?

Theme 12

Principals find ways to build morale by celebrating small and large successes.

Keeping excitement and energy in a building that has the challenge of meeting AYP for two consecutive years in order to exit school improvement is difficult because the school staff of each of these schools had felt defeated. They had persistently performed poorly on end of year state assessments. In year one, they had tasted success but keeping morale up and continuing to provide the vision what could be meant principals had to find ways to celebrate the small and large successes during the school year. It would be easy to fall back into familiar behavior. Each principal found different things to motivate their staff. Principal A stated, "We celebrate all the time." She provided small tokens of appreciation such as a cup and a tea bag for them that says they are tea-rrific. The staff participated in Falcon nights out where faculty did something fun like bowling or attending a rodeo. She also held a summer retreat each year. One year it was to Southern Pines where breakfast and lunch were provided and the staff participated in staff development. When the school made AYP for the first year she said "We had a celebration down in the cafeteria. I had a DJ come and we danced and I had it catered. We celebrated." In the second year they celebrated at a staff member's home.

> We had a pig picking at her house and by the pool. We celebrated and we had fellowship and they loved it. They were excited about it and that is how we celebrated. But just in small celebrations, I can have donuts in the media center. I

can have Subway in the media center and Teacher Appreciation Week. I make sure that they are appreciated.

Principal B's staff celebrated by coming together and acknowledging her contributions to their success:

Yeah and they were officially dubbing me Queen of Data. They had a little row of all these percent signs and different you know, different whatever and they gave me flowers and a sash. It is actually up there in my office and a crown and they do this little silly ridiculous song about you know, the Queen of Data and this that and the other. But they were so proud of themselves. You know what I mean? I got a lot of thank you for helping us do this. Yeah, you wore me out but this was so worth it.

Principal B was not satisfied with that distinction, she was still raising the bar of expectation:

I wanted to really show them where progression was coming from, what does this mean to be School of Distinction. I kind of did it like a map in a mall. Where you are now? You are here. So we did like, School of Excellence is what we are still after. We are at the blue ribbon, but School of Excellence and School of Distinction and all the way down. So we did all of that. Literally on the sidewalk that you walked up today, that huge area is where we did it. We drew a big happy arrow, you are here. So they only know we got one more level that is it, you know. This is where we have come from and look at all this down here. You are here!

Principal B also made a point to celebrate the small things:

It was a lot of celebration, a lot of like milestone celebrations, and a lot of just perky upbeat. I mean I would celebrate with them in small groups and write them notes of encouragement specifically about a student that you know, that had grown so much. I had faculty meeting celebrations even when I wanted to call my girlfriend that is a principal and say oh my gosh these people are killing me. But it was just a lot of you know, when data would come in I'd make the hugest deal of it. It was all over our teacher white boards about how much they've grown and oh

my goodness guys you are changing the world. You know, I mean just all kinds of celebrations of accomplishment, even individual ones. I would even write teacher assistant's notes if they were working with Early Steps or with individual kids that were slow in making gains.

By year two, School B had met AYP for two consecutive years and had grown 17 or 18 points. They *leaped* out of school improvement and celebrated their new school status:

> So we literally had the art teacher and a couple of other really good artists draw all over our sidewalks and stuff you know, School of Distinction and made high growth, so that it was not so cumbersome to parents. I knew if I printed it and sent it out no one was going to read it, but if it is all over the sidewalk they would be like what is that and be asking teachers. I prepared our teachers: Be sure to be able to communicate what all you did. What all the students did, I mean you know. Do not do all this work and not do a little bit of; yeah parents look at your kids look at, you know. So it was all over our sidewalks and our banners and whatever it took to communicate. I am trying to think . . . our PTA was really bragging.

Celebrations such as the one that Principal C had at her school after their second year of meeting AYP and exiting school improvement are the exception to the rule. Principal C shaved all her hair off for her students:

> I said 'What do you want me to do? Do you want me to go on the roof and stay overnight? What is it you want me to do?' And they all started screaming shave your head. I said, 'Alright, I will take you up on that.' I think my husband thought I'd lost my mind. He said, 'Do you really think you are going to make AYP?' I said, 'I hope so and if I do make it, it is worth me shaving my head.' Well, of course we made it so I shaved my head the second or third week of school.

It was a really big deal at Principal C's school for her to shave her head but she had made this promise to the students. If they did what she asked, she would do what they asked:

My daughter-in-law who is on the school board came and we made a big to-do of it. The TV was here. The superintendent was here along with several people, the Director of Federal Programs and the Director of Elementary was here. I shaved my head and they just thought that was wonderful that Principal C shaved her head and I looked hideous but hey, it was for the kids.

Principal C also made a point to provide small things to keep the morale up:

I just got to keep these teachers pushing on and you know I try to do things to keep their spirits up you know. We have Fruity Fridays. Every-so-often I feed them fruit or some breakfast snack bar. I go in the cafeteria when the kids are in there and if they are good, behaving, I buy them ice cream. Like Friday I bought them all a fruit roll up. They look forward to me coming in there because they know oh; she might get us something if we are good.

The first year that School D made AYP Principal D decided the school needed to celebrate by throwing a pool party at the country club before the next school year started. Principal D provided food for the staff and their families and had a DJ. When the school exited school improvement the staff celebrated with faculty recognition of their accomplishments. The students had a large school assembly. But Principal D felt it was the day-in and day-out things that made a difference:

I am going back to those teachers and patting them on the back and saying you are doing a great job. I appreciate how hard you are working. You know then giving them little things like we would give them incentives. I would give them 30 minutes of planning time and I would go in and cover their class and teach in their class for 30 minutes or I would bring doughnuts in and put them in the teacher's lounge. I mean even something just that small made a difference and then whenever we would see we were climbing in the ranks [benchmark scores] so to speak we would celebrate. Well you know we are not number 13 now we are number 8. We are not number 8, we are number 6.

Principal D also celebrated with children:

> The second year I bought 500 helium balloons in every classroom in January. After the 2nd semester started I had every teacher in the building have their kids draw a picture of their hand. We called it the "Wall of Fame". Every student wrote their goal for themselves for the end of the year and they put it on the wall. It was hand to hand and went all the way around the building. It was five hundred hands plus teachers. Every teacher made a goal . . . Then every student wrote a goal for themselves and they attached it to a helium balloon and we all went outside and we did it in grade levels. We took out the kindergartners first and every kindergarten student released their balloon . . . We did this big celebration in the gym at the end of the day where we had this big motivational speaker that had been in the Special Olympics. He came in and he was a motivational speaker and he talked to the kids of 3, 4 and 5 . . . We celebrated all the growth we had made the first semester. We celebrated what we were going to do in that second semester.

Table 15 indicates some of the strategies principals used to build and sustain morale.

Table 15

Strategies Principals Used to Build Morale

Strategies Principals Used to Build Morale
• Provided small tokens of appreciation in teachers' mailboxes regularly
• Organized faculty nights out centered on fun activities such as bowling or dinner out
• Held yearly retreats in places that catered to the staff and held professional development activities during them
• Provided catered breakfasts or lunches during the school year
• Held celebrations such as pool parties with DJs or dances with DJs
• Wrote notes of appreciation or encouragement to staff members during the year
• Examined data and celebrated when small successes occurred
• Allowed students to celebrate as well with assemblies or writing their accomplishments on the sidewalk

Table 15 (cont.)

Strategies Principals Used to Build Morale
• Followed through with their agreement with students if they were successful. Example: Shaving their head if they met all of the AYP target goals for the school
• Provided classroom coverage when needed to provide additional planning time
• Provided doughnuts or other incentives in faculty lounges during the school year

Core Practices

My study regarding principals as turnaround leaders of schools that successfully improved student achievement to exit NCLB school improvement sanctions presented twelve separate themes. In addition to offering insight into characteristics of these principals' leadership practices, these themes answered the research questions of my study regarding their role in the process. Furthermore, I have determined that embedded and running through multiple conversations of the twelve themes are five specific core practices that these principals utilized on a consistent basis and that principals in other schools in similar situations may emulate to assist them in their efforts. The conceptual map in Figure 2 provides a visual image of how the twelve themes effect and flow into the five core practices.

Core Practice I

Extensive and Effective Use of the School Improvement Team.

Each of the principals began to redefine the role of the school improvement team to ensure a successful transition from the tenure of the previous principal to their own. Within their own idea of how the team could successfully assist them, they proceeded to

educate the team in the process of shared leadership. The transcripts of each principal

rendered numerous references to their work with the team. In addition, the transcripts

suggest that the principals had a positive perception of the team's contribution to

assisting them in turning around instructional practices in the school and a positive school

culture. The collaborative efforts of the principal and the team allowed the school to

move forward and gain momentum into the second year in which successfully meeting

AYP to exit school improvement was so crucial.
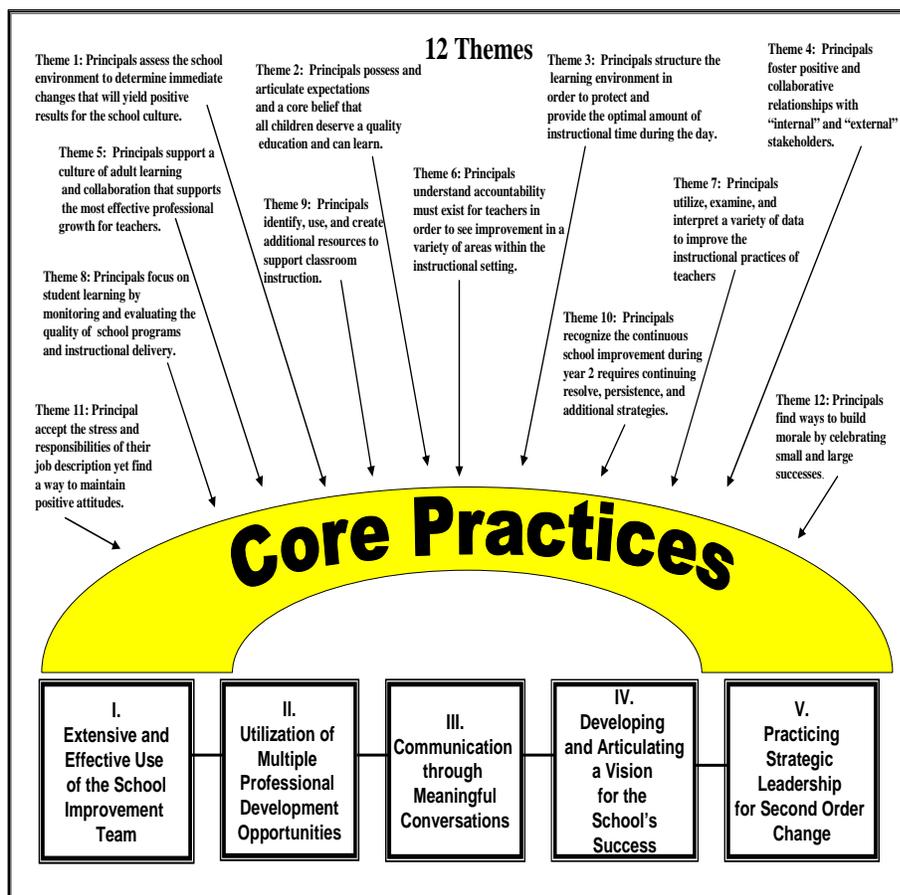
Figure 2. Conceptual Model 1.B

As I examined the transcripts I concluded that the principals of these four schools recognized the worth of increasing the leadership capacity of the teachers on this team, thus allowing for a greater sense of ownership for the schools' successes or failures. Numerous quotes are cited within the twelve themes that reference directly the principals' work to effectively work and collaborative with the school improvement team to see substantial changes in the school's culture, teacher instructional practices, and student achievement. In particularly, the following themes, theme 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 indicate that the principals sought to work with the school improvement team to improve a variety of issues facing the school.

Core Practice II

Utilization of Multiple Professional Development Opportunities.

Through my interpretation of the transcribed interviews and the identification of the twelve distinctive themes, it is clear that these principals understood the significance of what quality professional development could offer the staff in regards to improving teacher performance in delivering instruction. Furthermore, the principals indicated a willingness to go beyond normal efforts to ensure that the teachers in their school received what they needed to build sustainable improvement in the school's instructional programs. The ultimate goals for these principals was to impact negative teacher perceptions of the students' ability to be successful regardless of their socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds and to see radically improved performance of students on end of year assessments. They assessed the present beliefs and level of skills of their staff and

determined next professional development steps in supplying them with what they needed.

All principals met with their staff on a regular basis either formally or informally to discuss a variety of topics. As the principals established a level of trust and professional collegiality with the staff, teachers began to open up and share their needs in regards to professional growth. Each of the principals took their cues from the qualitative data, the conversations and stories of teachers, and the quantitative data, the student data from a variety of assessments, to determine how best to proceed in supplying teachers with professional development opportunities to increase the quality of the instructional practices within their classrooms. This examination of data was discussed by principals in theme 2, 4, 6, and 7.

The principals described their efforts in securing professional development for their staff by seeking out the resources available to them. Principals tapped into the talents of their own staff to ensure teacher buy-in. These principals recognized that by highlighting the strengths of their own staff, staff members would appreciate the recognition that talent existed in-house (see theme 4 and 10). Principals also understood that district level initiatives were a reality. To assist their staff in planning for and implementing district level initiatives, they requested technical assistance from their district office through various departments such as the Testing and Accountability, the Title I, the Curriculum and Instruction or the Technology Instructional Department (see themes 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12). Additionally, their ability to tap into various fund sources indicates that these principals were willing to work with a variety of stakeholders

indicated in theme 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 12 to secure much needed materials or the services of educational consultant groups that had proven records of success through a model of sustainable and embedded staff development.

Core Practice III

Communication through Meaningful Conversations.

These four principals possessed the ability to communicate with a variety of stakeholders. They understood that good communication was the key to their ability to building trusting relationships and that through those trusting relationships the vision of increasing student achievement could be obtained. Each group that these principals communicated with had to be convinced that moving out of school improvement was a possibility and that together as a united team could make that dream a reality. They also held meaningful conversations that examined instruction. The conversations centered on the readiness, interest and achievement levels of students. The attention placed on their conversations exemplified in theme 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 how they focused on what mattered, the *how* and *why* students learned. These principals conducted meaningful conversations that were different than what the teachers had experiences under previous principals.

Upon arrival as the new principal, the transcripts tell in theme 1 the story of how these principals worked to establish relationships early on by interviewing staff members the summer prior to the beginning of school. They listened to what the staff had to say and were able to make some assumptions about the school culture and attitudes of the staff regarding their inability to meet AYP. By examining the transcribed interviews I

have determined that the each principal went about communicating to staff in a variety of venues such as team meetings, faculty meetings, weekly newsletters or updates, monthly calendars, emails or one-on-one conversations. While each brought to the school their own individual leadership style, they communicated clearly defined expectations for all staff members (see themes 2 and 6). However, when each milestone or success occurred they took time to praise and celebrate (see theme 12). They communicated to the staff, not only by their words but also by their actions, their commitment to the school's success. Within the context of each school, the principals were determined to change the culture to what they valued (see themes 1-8). This was accomplished by welcoming open dialogue and cooperation in professional learning communities, school committees and the school improvement team.

The communication between these principals and the parents and business partners of the schools improved as the principals increased their efforts to establish a relationship of collaboration and mutual respect. These principals reached out to each group exposing their vulnerability and admitting that the school had not served the community and their students well previously but demonstrated their willingness to invite parents in as partners. Themes 4, 5, 6, and 8 demonstrate how they sought to establish new relationships with various businesses in order to provide teachers and students with much needed resources. The principals worked to enhance the buildings and the physical environment of the school which indicated to those outside of the regular school day that there were things going on in the school that were worth celebrating and that a sense of pride existed. In themes 2, 3, 4, 6, and 12 each of the principals discussed how they

increased parent involvement activities, student assemblies, and after-school activities in order to convey their message that the school was making considerable improvements in the area of student achievement yet interested in each student's overall growth and development. Thus the principals were successful in improving the overall school climate.

In the interviews, these principals described how students began to understand their role and purpose in the learning process. Themes 2, 4, 6, and 12 indicate that student conversations within the context of the classroom began to change and students demonstrated excitement about learning. Students' prior behavior and interest in learning was considered by these principals to be a product of an unsuccessful environment where an attitude of "they aren't capable of the work" prevailed. Principals made an effort to communicate to students how successful they could be and that the staff, parents and community was prepared to rally around the effort to see them achieve at their optimal level. Principals noted in their interviews that they made a point to communicate to students as often as possible their belief in their ability to be successful.

Core Practice IV

Display and Articulate a Vision for the School's Success.

While examining the data and determining the twelve themes, a common core practice by these principals was their ability to maintain a positive attitude and display a level of energy that appeared to be received well, as evidenced by the school's ultimate ability to improve student achievement. Sprinkled through each of the themes the principals demonstrated a desire to see the school be successful. Throughout my

interviews with each of the principals I was able to determine that these principals were consistently communicating to the school staff, parents, business leaders and students that success was possible. They appeared to build buy-in and broad base support through the level of collaboration with a variety of stakeholders. They were able to facilitate the school staff's ability to put into words the preferred future of their school. These principals helped each school identify goals that would allow them to achieve success and to identify a core set of beliefs and values that everyone could share.

Core Practice V

Strategic Leadership for Second Order Change.

As I read the transcribed interviews of each principal multiple times and reviewed their answers to the questions of my protocol, I began to see a pattern of strategic leadership that led to second order change for their staff. Earlier, in chapter two, I cited the research of Marzano and colleagues (2005) regarding second order change for sustainable school reform. In the case of second order change not only does the thinking about teaching and learning change but the behaviors linked to the teaching and learning in the building change as well. It was the strategic leadership skills that these principals possessed throughout themes 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 that illuminated how they consciously or subconsciously reshaped the behaviors of adults in their building with regards to the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. Their efforts led to sustainable and beneficial changes that removed their school from the sanctions of school improvement.

The North Carolina School Executive Evaluation Instrument (2006) is the instrument by which administrators in North Carolina are evaluated upon annually. The first leadership standard is listed as strategic leadership. Under this standard several practices are listed for school executives to utilize while working with their school staff, parents and students. Some of the items listed are: systemically changing the status quo, creating a vision for stakeholders, considering new ways to accomplish tasks, facilitating the collaborative efforts to create a school improvement plan and then systematically monitoring its' use, improving communication and leading change initiatives. Under the umbrella of these practices there are four distinct characteristics that are listed on the rubric that principals are evaluated on: (a) School Vision, Mission, and Strategic Goals; (b) Leading Change; (c) School Improvement Plan; and (d) Distributive Leadership. Most of the practices under each of these four distinct characteristics listed were implemented by these principals to encourage second order change. While these principals obviously held instructional leadership skills, what makes them stand apart from other school administrators in similar circumstances is their ability to think and work strategically to encourage second order change.

The four principals of my study understood that when leading change a principal has to concentrate on finding the right classroom practices that will likely yield the most positive changes. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) described some ways that it might look in a school environment: a break from the past, conflicts with prevailing values or norms, requires new knowledge and skills are implemented, emergent skills, and change in inputs to outputs. The principals observed changes in behaviors of adults

and students over the course of time when working with their school communities. The principals described these second orders as stressful, not only for the teachers and parents of the school but also for the principal themselves. However, the principals were able to use their strategic leadership skills to manage the changes successfully as evidenced by the buy-in they observed by stakeholders, the positive change in school climate and culture, improved quality in teaching and learning, improved student achievement and their ultimately exiting school improvement.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on this study, it is clear that the principal as the instructional leader continues to play a significant role in the school's overall success. Turning a school around for successful and sustainable reform takes not only instructional leadership but more significantly requires the principal to strategically think about their actions as the instructional leader. According to Duke and Salmonwicz (2010), "how leaders think about what they are doing sometimes has failed to receive much attention" (p. 34). Hallinger and McCary (1990) note that "strategic behavior involves skillful planning and management; it implies forethought, an understanding of the interdependence of actions within a social system, and a purposeful coordination of resources" (p. 91). The principals in this study had the ability to understand the volume and complexity of the changes that were needed within the context of their school setting.

In this chapter I discuss the implications, recommendations and conclusions of my study. First, I present five implications drawn from the five core practices of principals discussed in the previous chapters. I continue with implications of my research as it relates to school districts and to university preparatory programs as they work to properly prepare potential principals and enhance the skills of currently-practicing principals, particularly to lead schools where unique challenges of student populations and consistently poor academic performance on standards based assessments exist. Then I

make recommendations for further exploration and research. Finally, I conclude with my thoughts about the direct personal benefits of my research findings.

Implications for Principals

The implications of the research findings of this study can be applied to principals serving high needs schools that persistently underperform on state assessments. However, given the fact that within the walls of all schools are many similar issues, all principals should consider these findings as they apply to their work as school leaders.

Implication I: Principals should understand and capitalize on the value of their school improvement team.

The principals in this study understood and capitalized on the value of their school improvement teams. Every school possesses a culture in which certain values or beliefs are upheld and honored. "The new principal must understand the existing school culture in terms of its effect on student achievement and make decisions about what must be changed to make improvements" (Karpicke & Murphy, 1996, p. 27). Fostering a positive and trusting relationship with the staff is the first step in changing the culture of school. Bell (2002) pointed out that "work relationships must move towards being less hierarchical, more multi-functional and holistic based on a wider distribution of power within the organization" (p. 420). When principals engage in dialogue with the teachers and recognize them as equal partners in the decision making process, leadership becomes shared. "Shared instructional leadership involves the active collaboration of principals and teachers on curriculum, instruction and assessment" (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 371). This kind of shared instructional leadership can be found in school improvement teams

that effectively work alongside of the principal to assess the implementation and effectiveness of sound instructional programs and practices. When this occurs the actions of the principal are transparent. Transparent, meaning that the staff and other stakeholders "can see" what the principal's motivations are and what value they place on their leadership team by how they share the decision-making with them. "In a new, more democratic model of shared leadership, principals notice, nurture, and make use of the talents and knowledge of every staff member in formal and informal ways" (Mednick, 2003, p. 2). This fosters a professional learning community in which the professional judgment and ideas of teachers are valued by the school principal and collective efficacy begins to emerge.

According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2008), collective efficacy is the belief about one's ability or of a group of colleagues to perform a task or achieve a goal. "It is a belief about ability, not actual ability" (p. 497). Their study, conducted over a three year period, surveyed 97 principals and 2,764 teacher leaders to determine how effective leadership effects student achievement. Their findings were that building collective efficacy was an important link to student achievement and that effective leadership can have a positive impact. Furthermore, they site Bandura's (1977) conceptualization of collective efficacy "as a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (p. 477). In this study each principal worked to create a shared belief that together, as one group in agreement; they and their school improvement teams could begin to have a profound effect on the nature and the quality of the school's academic programs and student achievement.

Creating a coherent school improvement plan is a daunting challenge (Byrk, 2010) but when collective efficacy exists the principal can work through the team to facilitate conversations about student achievement. "When the principal elicits high levels of commitment and professionalism from teachers and works interactively with teachers in a shared instructional leadership capacity, schools have the benefit of integrated leadership; they are organizations that learn and perform at high levels" (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 393). Through the development of the school improvement plan, efforts of the entire team are then moving systematically and simultaneously in one direction rather than appearing disjointed and disconnected. It articulates the high expectations and outlines the responsibilities of all stakeholders sharing in its implementation.

Implication II: Principals should provide multiple professional development opportunities for teachers.

David and Cuban (2010) pointed out that "creating the conditions for success requires far more than grabbing innovations" and that "successful reform cannot succeed without well-trained teachers" (p. 190). Therefore one successful reform measure is about building teacher capacity through professional development that will improve teacher expertise and ultimately increase student achievement (O'Day & Quick, 2009). As "learning leaders" (King, 2002) principals must participate in "regular, collaborative professional learning experiences to improve teaching and learning" (p. 62). The first step is for the principal to assess the current level of expertise and the capacity for growth of the instructional staff. Knowing what they know and then determining what they need

assists the principal in making decisions with the school improvement team about how to precede in implementing reform measures determined to be research-based best practices.

Principals who actively engage teachers in adult learning do so in a variety of ways. One way is to work to create Professional Learning Communities (PLC). Hord (1997) describes a professional community of learners as teachers and administrators continuously seeking to learn and act on that learning for the benefit of the students. Members of PLCs think critically about student achievement and instructional practices that will bring lasting change. Through a professional learning community a principal can change the way that teachers and administrators work together and thus, create a shared vision. Stimulating an environment of collaborative inquiry and discourse allows the principal to create opportunities for professional growth that are often initiated by teachers reflecting on their own instructional practices. Through conversations and active listening, principals can determine the needs of the teachers thus catering the professional development to what they heard. Furthermore, necessary to that success is the principal's resolve to find the means to make the professional development opportunities available to the staff by capitalizing on resources presently available and seeking out new ones. Allison (2011) points out resilient leaders "understand that status quo is unsustainable, they also use it to move mountains" (p. 80).

Another source of professional development for teachers is the opportunity to utilize, examine and interpret a variety of data that will "provide a comprehensive picture of a school's strengths and challenges" (Feldman et al., 2003, p. 1). The data literacy of the staff is paramount to interpreting multiple types of assessment so that informed

decisions regarding classroom instruction can take place (Ronka et al., 2008). In this study, principals described working to educate and share data that assisted them in making adjustments to their instructional practices and to provide intervention strategies. This training can take place within a variety of venues such as the school improvement team and professional learning communities. Furthermore, by assisting teachers in improving their craft and knowing their subject area, the higher the level of accountability becomes for all involved. In some schools this exchange and dialogue surrounding data is called a data team, others may just call them a Data PLC, but no matter the term, effective leaders understand that using data to drive instruction and to use in the monitoring of student achievement (Hamilton et al., 2009) is essential in seeing the school turn around successfully.

Implication III: Principals should conduct meaningful conversations to enhance communication.

Communication skills, the ability to relate to a variety of people from different educational and cultural backgrounds, are paramount to the principal seeking to turn a school around. "It is counterintuitive to think that an excellent educational leader could possess a keen vision and have no ability to communicate that vision to students and staff members" (Tyson, 2006, p. 48). The principals in this study understood the power of allowing others to share their ideas and to be active listeners in the process in order to understand what they valued. Just as Stephen Covey's (1990) Habit 5 elicits the need to seek to understand first, the highly effective principal intuitively understands that active listening is about hearing what stakeholders have to say. By bringing people into the

decision-making process, meaningful conversations about the work can be purposeful. Purposeful conversations then get to the heart of what is important. Because the "need for meaningful and valuable communication is greater than ever, principals need to understand how to communicate for results rather than simply for information exchange" (Keil, 2005, p. 28).

Lambert (2005) notes, "The quality of the school is the function of the conversations within the school" (p. 40). Therefore, meaningful conversations require the principal to display a resolve to be courageous, especially in a persistently low performing school where morale is low and the idea of student achievement improving seems unobtainable. Having courage means communicating high expectations and talking about what is truly going on with instructional practices and student achievement. Farr (2010) explained no "magic" exists to make that happen, but teacher effectiveness in the classroom is essential. He noted that effective teachers who increase student achievement "are more likely to become lifelong advocates and leaders for systematic change" (p. 29). A principal must pay attention to multiple measures of achievement and then consider the implications by anticipating how that information will be received. It is important to engage in dialogue with staff as to the relevance and meaning of the information to help improve the effectiveness of classroom practices.

Typically, there is only one principal in each school, therefore, it is important for the principal to be the role model and set the tone. The ability to help the staff begin to think positively has to do with how the principal communicates successes and setbacks. Each of the principals in this study celebrated incremental successes along the way and

described how they constantly encouraged the staff as student achievement began to improve. Principals must be aware of their audience. Principals communicating positively and advocating for the school with other stakeholders like business partners and parents helps to build support for their vision (Williamson & Blackburn, 2010). In doing so they can enhance public relations and build community trust in the school's ability to provide a quality education for children while Byrk, (2010) pointed out that in building relationships "principals cultivate a cadre of leaders (teachers, parents, community leaders) who can help expand the reach of the work share overall responsibility for improvement" (p. 25). Successful principals are those that understand the power of community support and recognize that positive interactions are not necessarily made but are often by happenstance. These opportunities present themselves at odd times but allow the principal to make a real connection by them being available to speak to the angry parent, by being outside in the car line when a parent has a safety concern, or by seeing a parent in the grocery store and taking the time to discuss a report card grade or a classroom issue. Krug (1992) notes principals, as instructional leaders, "find opportunities in their everyday activities and encounters to meet the unique needs of the teachers and the students in their schools" (p. 436).

Implication IV: Principals should display and articulate a vision for the school's success.

Each school's culture and socio-economic context is different. "There is no single leadership style or approach that is fitting for all school settings" (Quinn, 2002, p. 452). Thus the principal understands that within each school there is a set of values or beliefs that were present far before their arrival. As any principal enters into a new assignment

they must begin to work with the staff to culminate and articulate a new vision for the school's success. This means engaging and asking stakeholders to come with them on the journey towards improvement. The staff has to believe that it is a possibility. When that occurs, Lambert (2005) noted that "each participant shares the vision, understands how the school is moving towards the vision, and understands how he or she contributes to that journey" (p. 40).

Principals develop strategies for getting their message across. They evaluate the staff's present level of understanding and commitment. Leaders work hard not to overwhelm their staff. They provide digestible bits of information that will assist in building collective efficacy in small incremental steps. They work to enhance relationships by asking others to be a part of the bigger picture. When doing so they share their vision. Principals realize that "shared leadership is leadership multiplied; authentic leaders enthusiastically empower those around them. By doing so, they create a surplus of vision" (Pigford, 1996, p. 117). That vision provides a framework for the school improvement process where decisions are being made about what is best for teaching and learning. When the principal constantly promotes a positive vision, it provides hope. Principals should provide hope—hope in the possibilities of what can be, hope and a belief that children in the school are capable of learning at higher levels, and the hope that schools can be turned around for success. Walker (2006) said it best when he said, "I believe leaders need to be hopeful and out of their fullness, they need to be able to foster this hope in others. They do this in spite of the complexities of our times, the rigidity of our thinking, and the deadlock of tensions of our diverse values and aspirations (p. 543).

Implication V: Principals should use strategic leadership strategies for second order change.

The core practices discussed in Chapter Four are closely aligned to the first standard on the North Carolina School Executive Evaluation Instrument (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction). The four performance goals identified under Standard 1: Strategic Leadership in that instrument are:

1. **School Vision, Mission and Strategic Goals:** The school's identity, in part, is derived from the vision, mission, values, beliefs and goals of the school, the processes used to establish these attributes, and the ways they are embodied in the life of the school community.

2. **Leading Change:** The principal articulates a vision, and implementation strategies, for improvements and changes which result in improved achievement for all students.

3. **School Improvement Plan:** The school improvement plan provides the structure for the vision, values, goals and changes necessary for improved achievement for all students.

4. **Distributive Leadership:** The principal creates and utilizes processes to distribute leadership and decision-making throughout the school.

It is clear that the four principals in this study used similar strategic leadership skills in working to solve the problems facing their schools. While the North Carolina School Executive Evaluation outlines seven important standards on which North Carolina School principals are evaluated annually, particularly significant to this study and to

principals who may be newly appointed to persistently poor performing schools is the use of strategic leadership skills. The findings from this study support "that leadership and school improvement capacity operate as part of a set of systemic relationships. Focusing on one without attending to the other is unlikely to bring about sustained improvement" (Hallinger & Heck, 2010, p. 107).

Smith (2008) pointed out that despite American schools constantly falling short in performance to that of other nations and despite legislation like NCLB, "the vast majority of schools in America deny they have to change, do not know how to change, or are unsuccessful in their attempts to change" (p. 5). To change the culture of a school means creating a second order change, and for that to happen, the principal must facilitate the changes. Therefore, principals must be change leaders of the school culture (Fullan, 2002; Reeves, 2006/2007). Changes in schools should come about through strategic planning by the school administrator and their school improvement team who focus not only *how* but also *what* the staff is doing. However, change should not occur simply for the sake of change. Vetrievel (2010) points out that any organization should be "ready to accept continuous change, capable of planning and controlling change and capable of implementing required changes in a timely manner" (p. 22). The principal must be capable of initiating and managing significant change.

The magnitude of change in a school is directly related to how the staff responds to it. Waters and Grubb (2004) discuss second order changes being quite different from first order change. They note that second order change is complex and promotes breaking from past practices or ideas and moving toward new ways of thinking and doing.

Consequently, this may conflict with current values or beliefs causing a paradigm shift. In addition, second order change is implemented by stakeholders rather than just the principal (Waters et al., 2003). Principals must be cognizant of how second order change can transform a school. However, Pappano (2010) discusses a school turning around as "not a result but a process" with the understanding that there is "no endpoint" (p. 150). In second order change not only does the principal shoot for 'buy-in" but ultimately they shoot for "action" by teachers (Whittaker, 2010).

Implications for the Preparation and Development of Principals

District level leaders or institutions charged with principals' training and development should make a connection to the results of this study when evaluating how they assist leaders in using their base knowledge and experiences to apply to their present school setting. Furthermore, given the alignment of the skills required on the North Carolina School Executives' Evaluation Instrument for Standard One – Strategic Leadership and the five core practices that emerged from the research, working to assist novice or veteran principals to enhance their strategic thinking skills as it applies to the school improvement process would be beneficial.

Given that within any organization a certain amount of turnover occurs, it is commonplace for newly appointed principals to have been previously employed as assistant principals in the same district or in a neighboring one. Many new principals graduated from a college or university preparatory program that provided them with a knowledge base but have all too frequently participated in a limited amount of experiences from which to draw from when making decisions once in their new position.

Teaching novice administrators how to problem solve and handle "on the job" challenges is the responsibility of the district if it intends to build leadership capacity within its ranks and sustain district level initiatives which often call for strategically changing the culture of a school.

District level leaders and college or university programs in the state of North Carolina are aware of the annual evaluation process for school administrators. This evaluation tool is reflective in nature and requires principals to be reflective in evaluating their daily practices in the areas of strategic, instructional, cultural, managerial, human resources, external development and micro-political leadership (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2008). Given that my findings suggest that strategic leadership skills were significantly present in the work of these four principals' daily practices, professional development or courses offered at the graduate level should focus specifically on providing viable and applicable experiences or opportunities for principals or aspiring principals to dialogue with one another and work through various scenarios related to strategic leadership. District level leaders or university professors could then assist in applying theory to practice. Opportunities to network and draw from the knowledge and skills of successful, turnaround principals should be provided as well. "The support and development of principals or school leaders in the field are rewarding and challenging. If programs are designed to take into account the learning and processing needs of these professionals, they can be extremely valuable" (Eller, 2010, p. 964). It is my hope that by reading this dissertation that principals can take away

information that will assist them as they work to create a better school environment for all stakeholders where the focus is on student learning.

Recommendations for Further Research

When reviewing the interview protocol and considering the data retrieved from the transcribed interviews of each participant, it is important to acknowledge that two relatively important questions should have been discussed in much more detail. During each interview principals were provided open ended questions. I had reserved the right to further explore a principal's response and in the course of each interview when I felt a response warranted it, I did so. However, one question from the interview protocol centered on leadership training or professional development that principals were involved in while working with their staff and that they felt may have significantly impacted their work. This question was not sufficiently investigated as I came to realize when providing the chronological narrative of each principal. I feel their responses to this question would have provided more insight into their motivation or perceptions of their work as it related to their own professional development. Furthermore, exploring the professional development in which principals participate could shed light on the quality of professional learning opportunities or programs presently available. Finding quality professional opportunities that improve strategic thinking could significantly improve a building level administrator's chances of making an impact on their school's overall academic performance and managing the complexities of turning around their school's culture.

A second area for future research involves the role of assistant principals. In three of the four schools, the principals had an assistant principal who worked with them during the period of time I was conducting my study. I failed to add a question to the interview protocol that specifically explored the working, professional relationship of the principal with the assistant principal. While interviewing the principals, this topic did come up but was not expanded upon during any of the three interviews. In retrospect, their relationship and the contributions of the assistant principals to the school's overall success may have added an additional dimension to the data. The five core practices' highlight the enormous power of collaboration and shared leadership when working to turn a school around. Examining these principals' levels of trust and confidence in their assistant principal's ability to work effectively in the school's environment and exploring the assistance they offered the principal during the time frame of this study may have offered me some insight into effective working partnerships. Other researchers could examine the complexity surrounding the principal and assistant principal's working relationship in similar circumstances as it relates to the effectiveness of school improvement and student achievement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the decision to enter into a research degree is not something to be taken lightly. Contemplating the effects of such an undertaking should be given considerable thought. During the past two years as I have worked to bring this research study to fruition, I have reflected on the growth process in and of itself and have found the experience to be both personally and professionally challenging and fulfilling. I find

myself grateful for the professional influences along my educational pathway that convinced me that this was worth my effort, not specifically just for the final destination of degree in hand, but more in fact for the journey of self-discovery.

During this time I have discovered that I am more than what I thought I was and far less than what I can be. I would have never believed that what I gained in knowledge and understanding of leadership theory, instructional leadership practices, comprehensive school reform measures and much more would benefit not only myself in my own professional job responsibilities but that someday, I would be in a position as I am now, to help and to guide others with my knowledge and experiences. I have found that I can be an innovative, independent researcher capable of critical thinking and problem solving, all the while managing a huge undertaking such as this dissertation required. Yet, I am humbled by the fact that what I have learned is only but a miniscule amount in the vast universe of learning in the world of academia. My desire is to continue to be a life-long learner and to inspire school administrators to continue to pursue their own professional goals. I want to bestow to them a sense of what they are doing is relevant and has merit but most importantly, that what they do on a daily basis does make a significant difference in student learning.

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APPENDIX A

PRINCIPAL PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol - School Administrators—Exiting School Improvement:

Principals' Roles in Turning Schools around for Success

INTERVIEW 1

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Position of the Interviewee: _____

Project Description: *The purpose of this study is to discover and detail the instructional practices and behaviors of principals who were able to turn their schools around.* **"Last year, in the 2009-2010 school year, your school exited school improvement. That is a notable accomplishment and only x number of schools in NC were able to accomplish that. Tell me, in as much detail as possible, your story and the journey of this school"**

**Interview Protocol - School Administrators—Exiting School Improvement:
Principals' Roles in Turning Schools around for Success**

INTERVIEW 2

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Position of the Interviewee: _____

Project Description: *The purpose of this study is to discover and detail the instructional practices and behaviors of principals who were able to turn their schools around.*

Questions:

1. Describe your role in the school's ability to make AYP for the first year?

2. What were the changes implemented at the school level that assisted your school in meeting AYP for the first year in the area of reading? Math?

3. What role do you see the District Office playing in your ability to meet AYP in both subject areas - what can you tell me specifically that they did to offer technical assistance to the school?

4. How did teachers' instructional strategies changed in the first year? What caused the change? What role did you play in this change?

5. What staff behaviors changed do you believe that led to the increase in student achievement from the year before your school first met AYP? What role did you play in these changes?

6. What did you do specifically in that first year to shape the behaviors of the staff in the building to improve student achievement and adult learning?

7. Do you believe that your efforts to shape the behaviors had an impact on your school? If so how?

8. What kind of professional staff development was offered to them to improve their instructional presentations in reading? Math?

9. Describe the School Improvement Team's role in the school improvement process.

10. How did your SIT team contributed to the implementation and monitoring of the school improvement plan?

11. What meetings, at the state level, if any, did you attend to help you better understand the school improvement process?

12. What technical assistance was offered to your school by the regional director or state wide monitoring team?

13. What specific steps did the school and its' staff take in the past two years to inform and involve parents about Choice, Supplemental Educational Services or Corrective Action?

14. What specific role did parents play in the increase in student achievement and performance?

15. Describe any leadership training that you have participated in (either through university programs, consortium workshops or through your LEA) that you believe significantly impacted your ability to lead the reforms needed to assist your school in meeting AYP?

16. What data analysis training and support did your district office provide to you for you to make informed decisions about school programs?

17. Can you tell me about how you utilized your Title I staff to support the instructional programs at your school?

18. Can you describe any changes within the school culture in the first year that improved teacher's attitudes about student achievement?

19. Can you specifically think of any other changes that significantly contributed to the school's ability to make AYP in both subject areas?

20. Describe challenges that you faced when implementing school wide reform measures?

21. What kind of steps did you take to overcome these challenges?

22. Describe how your staff celebrated their successes? How did you handle any setbacks?

23. What would you say you perceive as the most significant turning point in creating a culture of everyone owning the responsibility of educating all of the students?

**Interview Protocol - School Administrators– Exiting School Improvement:
Principals' Roles in Turning Schools around for Success**

INTERVIEW 3

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Position of the Interviewee: _____

Project Description: *The purpose of this study is to discover and detail the instructional practices and behaviors of principals who were able to turn their schools around.*

Opening Comments: Your school had made AYP for the first year in reading and math and the second year was such an important year because making AYP for the second consecutive year would have meant exiting school improvement. This was an important year. Can you tell me your thoughts as you entered that second school year knowing how high the stakes were?

Questions:

1. Describe your role in the school's ability to make AYP for year two?

2. What were the changes implemented at the school level that assisted your school in meeting AYP for two consecutive years in the area of reading? Math?

3. What role do you see the District Office playing in your ability to meet AYP in both subject areas - what can you tell me specifically that they did to offer technical assistance to the school?

4. Did teachers' instructional strategies changed in the year two from year one? What caused them to change? What role did you play in this change?

5. What staff behaviors changed do you believe that led to the increase in student achievement from the first year to the second year? What role did you play in these changes?

6. What did you do specifically in Year 2 to shape the behaviors of the staff in the building to improve student achievement and adult learning?

7. Do you believe that your efforts to shape the behaviors had an impact on your school? If so how?

8. What kind of professional staff development was offered to them to improve their instructional presentations in reading? Math?

9. Describe the School Improvement Team's role in the school improvement process.

10. How did your SIT team contributed to the implementation and monitoring of the school improvement plan from year one to year two?

11. What meetings, at the state level, if any, did you attend to help you better understand the school improvement process?

12. What technical assistance was offered to your school by the regional director or state wide monitoring team?

13. What specific steps did the school and its' staff take in the second year to inform and involve parents about Choice, Supplemental Educational Services or Corrective Action?

14. What specific role did parents play in the increase in student achievement and performance?

15. Describe any leadership training that you have participated in (either through university programs, consortium workshops or through your LEA) that you believe significantly impacted your ability to lead the reforms needed to assist your school in meeting AYP?

16. What data analysis training and support did your district office provide to you for you to make informed decisions about school programs?

17. Can you tell me about how you utilized your Title I staff to support the instructional programs at your school?

18. Can you describe any changes within the school culture in the previous two years that has improved teacher's attitudes about student achievement?

19. Can you specifically think of any other changes that significantly contributed to the school's ability to make AYP in both subject areas?

20. Describe challenges that you faced when implementing school wide reform measures?

21. What kind of steps did you take to overcome these challenges?

22. Describe how your staff celebrated their successes? How did you handle any setbacks?

23. What would you say you perceive as the most significant turning point in creating a culture of everyone owning the responsibility of educating all of the students?

24. Now that your school has exited school improvement, what challenges do you foresee in the next few years?