THE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF SUCCESSFUL
URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND THEIR ROOTS

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my daughter, Cassie, my parents John and Shirley Jackson and to my grandmother Lillie Valentine. My daughter laughed when I said I was going back to school although she also said “It’s cool, mom!” My parents and grandmother lived through a time when they could not imagine going to a school like the University of Pennsylvania. Mom, Dad, Mama Lille, I made it.
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I would like to acknowledge the significant thought partnership of my research chair, Dr. Jonathan Supovitz, in the development and refining of my research topic. He provided invaluable insight and support throughout the process. He pushed me to think more deeply and to consider how to make this dissertation relevant for my practice, which is immersed in school leadership and the connection between district support of academics and school leadership. I also would like to thank my committee members. Their feedback moved this dissertation in another direction – towards considering the perspective of the people principals lead.

I would like to acknowledge my dissertation coach, Dr. Alexander M. Hoffman. Dr. Hoffman made me think, re-write, and because of his deep knowledge did not just coach but also helped to re-focus my thinking. His constant refrain, of why does this matter was important in helping me understand that this work is important to me and may help others.

I would also like to acknowledge my cheerleaders: my life partner Jim, my friend Karen and my co-workers. They were constant in their support and gracious with listening to my writing journey. Last, I want to thank my daughter who laughed about me going back to school at my age, but was also encouraging and proud of her mother. The thought of modeling lifelong learning for her keeps me going.
ABSTRACT

THE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF SUCCESSFUL URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND THEIR ROOTS

Cheryl J. Logan
Jonathan Supovitz

This qualitative study investigated how effective urban elementary school principals enact five research based practices linked to improving student outcomes (vision; creating a climate conducive to teaching and learning; distributed leadership; instructional leadership; and managing people, data, and school processes). It focuses on understanding the practices in these domains of six principals in the School District of Philadelphia whose school demonstrated at least two cycles of positive growth on the Pennsylvania State Department of Education’s value added measure of school performance. Using a 360 strategy of interviews of the principals, two teachers from each school, and the supervising assistant superintendent, the research sought to gain multiple perspectives of the enactment of the research-based practices.

This study’s findings indicate that each of these six high performing principals exhibited an intentionality of practice. They consciously sought to connect all school operations and their leadership decisions to very specific visions that were carefully communicated so that they were well known by all stakeholders in the school. Moreover, they were consistent in adopting a learning stance, and an openness to learning, in both traditional and non-traditional ways. Furthermore, the principals exhibited high degrees of self-efficacy, informed by years of preparation for their leadership role and reinforced
by past success and thoughtful reflection. The principals also reported that they prepared
to become leaders long before they considered becoming principals.

Unsurprisingly, the teachers that were interviewed appeared only to be aware of a
small fraction of their principal’s work. More surprisingly, the principals’ supervisors
were also less aware of the principals’ enactment of the research-based practices. This
appeared to be due to their preoccupation with their evaluative responsibilities, which
kept them from the learning stance that could enable the district to replicate these leaders’
successes more broadly.

Implications for leadership development include providing multi-year
development of those aspiring to the principalship and a focus on the integration of the
leadership practices rather than on stand-alone research-based-practices strategies.
Leadership development also needs to extend to those who are supervising principals to
ensure that a learning stance optimizes the conditions for the growth and ongoing
development of principals. Lastly, using a 360 model for principal feedback may need to
be examined as this study illuminated the limited knowledge of the principal’s work by
the people they supervise and who supervise them.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ........................................................................................................... iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................................................................... iv
ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. v
LIST OF TABLES ......................................................................................................... xi
LIST OF FIGURES ...................................................................................................... xii

Chapter 1 – Introduction .......................................................................................... 1
  Problem Statement ................................................................................................. 3
  Purpose Statement ................................................................................................. 5
  Research Questions ............................................................................................... 6
  Conceptual Framework ........................................................................................ 7
    Principal Effectiveness and the Identification of Effective Principals ................ 8
    Principals’ Practices That are Linked to Student Achievement ....................... 9
    Principal Preparation ......................................................................................... 10
  Methodological Overview ................................................................................... 11
  Personal Significance of this Study .................................................................... 13
  Organization of this Dissertation ....................................................................... 15

Chapter 2 – Literature Review ............................................................................... 17
  Principal Effectiveness: What Is It and What Are the Standards to Measure It?  17
    The Balanced Leadership Framework ............................................................ 18
    Ten Traits of Highly Effective Principals ......................................................... 19
    Leadership Standards ....................................................................................... 20
    Cross Country Comparison ............................................................................. 21
    Principal Leadership Types: Transformational and Shared Instructional ....... 22
  Leadership Practices of Effective Principals ..................................................... 24
    Distributed Leadership .................................................................................... 25
    Creating a Climate Conducive to Teaching and Learning ............................. 27
    Instructional Leadership .................................................................................. 29
    Organizational Management: Managing People, Data and Processes ............ 30
    Vision ............................................................................................................... 32
    Self-Efficacy .................................................................................................... 33
  Evaluation of School Leaders with Student Test Scores .................................... 34
    Use of Growth Scores ..................................................................................... 35
    Comparing Growth Scores Models in Miami-Dade County ............................ 37
    Principal Effectiveness and Personnel Turnover ............................................ 38
    Meta-Analysis of studies tying principal leadership to student outcomes ....... 39
    The Meta-Concern .......................................................................................... 40
  Principal Preparation and Development ............................................................ 40
    In-service principal development .................................................................. 43
  Summary ............................................................................................................ 43
# LIST OF TABLES

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Potential School Sites</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>School Sites And Participating Principals</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Eastview Elementary School Description</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Eastview Elementary School Description</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Redwood Elementary School Description</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Riverbank Elementary School Description</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Summit Elementary School Description</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Eastview Elementary School Description</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

1 Conceptual Framework .................................................................................. 8
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The scope of the job responsibilities for principals reaches all aspects of school life. Research consistently points to the school leader’s impact on student achievement, usually through creating conditions conducive to each student’s learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2011). To date, school districts have usually attempted to capture the effects of school leader performance for the purpose of evaluation (Childers, 2012; Grissom, Kalogrides & Loeb, 2014; May, Huff & Goldring, 2012).

Stakeholders at all levels of public education acknowledge school principals’ leadership as a key element of a successful school. With the unveiling of A Nation at Risk report (Gardner, 1983), many states began statewide reforms in both teacher and administrator/principal training programs (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hess & Kelly, 2007). School reform pushed by federal legislation, such as No Child Left Behind (2001) and Race to the Top (2009), has been a significant factor in the continued reframing of expectations for the 21st century principal. Currently, school reform efforts are focused on inequality and on the poor performance of low-income and minority students (Theoharris, 2009).

Urban schools especially need instructional leaders that are skilled at providing effective teacher feedback, running effective systems and have both a clear mission and a clear vision – with buy-in from all stakeholders (Day & Gurr, 2013; Edmonds, 1979; Mendels, 2012). Today’s school leaders need to understand the potential for data to
change instructional practice and ensure that children learn the standards that they need to know (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008; Theoharris, 2009). Further, the *soft skills* of engaging people in a purpose and respect for others are fundamental to school principals in urban contexts having a chance to be successful (Johnson, 2007). Last, they need to navigate an increasingly complex milieu of value-added performance expectations and nurture not just children, but entire communities (Johnson, 2007).

The real-life story-turned-Hollywood-movie portrayal (Schiffer, 1989) of the short-lived success and eventual disgrace of charismatic, no-nonsense principal Joe Clark (e.g., wielding a baseball bat as he kicked kids out of school and locked the fire exits to ensure that students would not leave campus) illustrates the fact that the urban principalship is not about containment of young people. In fact, the high dropout rate caused by Clark’s draconian measures and the lack of improvement in student outcomes marked the beginning of the end of his fifteen minutes of fame as a leader. In truth, he needed real skill; his charisma and will could only take him, and his students, so far. Indeed, individuals who choose to lead schools in urban contexts face unprecedented challenges of poverty, toxicities of urban environments, high accountability, political pressure to yield rapid gains in student achievement and a usually shortage of resources (Hess, 2011; Jacobson, 2011). They engage in this work at great personal expense, spending most of their waking hours at work, often instead of attending to their personal and family lives (Wills, 2013). And yet, they are rarely rewarded even with the public accolades (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2013) of other public sector workers.

This research study focuses on many of the technical skills (i.e., practices and strategies) that Joe Clark lacked, skills that each of the principals in this study brings to
their work each day. Using student growth scores as the basis for identifying exemplar principals, this study explores the phenomenon of how urban elementary principals understand their own enactment of five evidence-based leadership practices correlated with student achievement.

**Problem Statement**

The challenge of the lowest performing schools, often serving neighborhoods populated mostly with the poorest students, often children of color or students for whom English is a second language, should compel us as a nation to address the crisis in urban school leadership. As the research confirms that school leadership matters (Branch et al., 2013), this must be a priority for urban districts. However, competing priorities and frequent one-size-fits-all approaches to building principal capacity explain the lack of progress during the last two decades (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson & Orr, 2007).

New principals in The School District of Philadelphia are likely to come from the ranks of teacher leadership rather than from school administration (Human Resources Department, School District of Philadelphia). I supervised principals for two years as an assistant superintendent supervising 26 principals one year (i.e., 2013-2014) and 45 the next year. In the 2014-2015 school year, 15 of the 45 principals were new to the role. Of these fifteen new principals, two most recently had been principals in district charter schools, two most recently had been assistant principals and eleven most recently had been teacher leaders. These recent teacher leaders were not merely learning how to be principals, they were completely changing their paradigm from peer (to other teachers) to
supervisor. In Lane’s study (1984), *The Making of a Principal*, he details the intricate processes of learning and reflection that requires socialization into a new community of practice and the assumption of a new role identity. “The transition requires a careful balance of knowledge development through classroom learning activities and skills development through situated learning activities guided by qualified professionals” (p. 470).

Scholarly research about new principal induction programs reveals consistent themes, such as mentoring, just-in-time support and job-embedded (on-site) support, technical training and professional learning communities as contributors to new and/or novice principals’ perception of their success (Darling Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson & Orr, 2007). However, the literature does not identify specific types of induction programs that work for a majority of principals. Rather the literature is clear that in order to create more effective induction programs, educational policymakers must first understand how novice principals experience and make sense of the support and training they receive. These same policymakers must also find out what types of support novice principals believe are the most and least effective in meeting their needs and to what extent they believe their induction programs were sufficiently comprehensive to address the complex demands of their jobs (Darling Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson & Orr, 2007; Mitgang, 2012).

All school districts plan for the development and support of their principals, especially their new and/or novice principals. Many novice principals in school districts in the United States report that they receive support, but that this support is not always adequate to meet their needs (Mitgang & Maeroff, 2008). Mitgang and Maeroff further
highlights that “the design and content of beginning principal support systems was often a result of chance and improvisation, as opposed to careful planning based on a study of the literature” (p. 41). Poverty, socio-linguistic and racial dynamics, along with expectations for instructional leadership and accountability for school performance, add to the complexity of the experience of the novice urban school principal (Theoharris, 2009). With such large numbers of low-performing students and the high turnover in leadership in these environments, understanding the novice principals’ experience in these contexts is especially critical for retaining and better supporting them (Spillane & Lee, 2013). Qualitative evidence of the principal’s effectiveness and their ability to provide their schools with high quality leadership that is game changing for the school and school community manifests by students having higher quality instruction due to effective and targeted feedback (Fuller, Young & Baker, 2007; Leithwood, 2005; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005).

This study rests on three bodies of literature that inform its design and subsequent data analysis: principals’ practices that are linked to student achievement, principal effectiveness and the identification of effective principals, and principal preparation and development.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was investigate how exemplary elementary school principals describe and understand how they have enacted leadership practices that have been linked to improved student achievement. In my work as a district leader, I have observed countless excellent business managers, who are child-centered and nurturing,
keep the lid on their schools, have excellent relationships with their communities and external supporters, and who are not threatening to teachers. One of the goals of this study has been to ask leaders who have demonstrated relatively high growth scores to identify how and where they picked up the skills they believe have led to their success. I created this opportunity for participants to offer advice for others, based on their own experiences, to generate an interesting window into the ways effective principals conceptualize their work and credit the support that have led to their success.

As this work has focused on the source of school leaders’ professional capacities (Hoffman, 2014), it has been aimed at improving professional development opportunities for new and/or novice principals in the future. Thus, the secondary purpose of this study was to draw attention to these sources so that they better utilized by others.

**Research Questions**

The research questions explored in this study are:

1) What are the leadership practices to which high performing urban elementary school principals attribute their success?
   a) How do the sample of principals enact the evidence-based leadership practices they cite at their school sites?
   b) What are the discreet strategies that the sample of principals use to enact the evidence-based leadership practices?
   c) How do principals connect the strategies they enact to student outcomes?

2) How do high performing elementary school principals describe acquiring the strategies they use to enact the evidence-based leadership practices?
3) What role does principal efficacy play in how high performing elementary school principals describe the enactment of their leadership practice?

4) What recommendations do high performing elementary school principals have to district leadership regarding the training and development of principals in the enactment of the evidence-based practices?

These four research questions guided the development of the interview protocols (Appendices D-G), site and participant selection, data collection, data analysis and all of my thinking through this research study.

**Conceptual Framework**

The figure below illustrates how principal leadership is conveyed in this study. Principals enact the five research based practices using effective strategies that amplifies the way they are experienced in schools by teachers, influencing the conditions that create optimal conditions for student outcomes. These strategies have been acquired over time from their prior experiences in the classroom, principal preparation and certification programs, in-service professional development to include mentoring and experience as principals. That journey has taken then from novice to master principal in terms of the skills and dispositions needed to become an effective principal.

Principal Effectiveness, considers what others have found concerning the role of the principal in establishing successful schools, the characteristics of effective principals and the use student outcomes (e.g., achievement data) to measure principal effectiveness. Because this study examines where leaders learned how to enact the research-based
practices it was important to understand what research can tell us about best practice in principal preparation.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Therefore, this study rests on three bodies of literature that inform its design and subsequent data analysis: principal effectiveness and the identification of effective principals, principals’ practices that are linked to student achievement, and principal preparation and development.

Principal Effectiveness and the Identification of Effective Principals

Current literature linking principal effectiveness to student outcomes is based on comparisons of principal qualities and their effect on overall achievement on summative assessments (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Fuller et al., 2007; Grissom et al., 2014). This is mostly due to the use of a relatively new construct (i.e., student growth scores) as an outgrowth of states receiving federal grant dollars from Race to the Top (Corcoran,
The use of student outcome metrics has mostly been for purposes of evaluation (Grissom et al., 2014; Rice, 2010).

**Principals’ Practices That are Linked to Student Achievement**

The *great man theory* (Murphy, 2000) is usually evoked when the term *leadership matters* is uttered by school boards, superintendents and/or the general public when referring to effective school principals. The great man theory is typically used in industry to describe a leader who is able to change an organization just by their charisma and ability to motivate. Although, being charismatic is certainly a desirable attribute for a school principal, charisma alone is unlikely to affect student performance in a meaningful way.

There are five leadership practices that research has shown are closely linked to improving student outcomes (Leithwood, 2005; Mendels, 2012). They are leadership of vision, creating a climate conducive to teaching and learning, management of people, data and processes for school improvement, and distributed leadership.

Effective principals know that ambitious and aspirational goals cannot be reached without a common vision (Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Kurland, Peretz & Heretz-Lazarowitz, 2010). This is especially true in urban schools where the odds can often be seen as insurmountable. Vision therefore sets the compass and direction of all of other efforts. Effective principals enact visionary practice. That is, they connect every school initiative or effort to the desired outcome (Hallinger, 2011; Kurland et al., 2010). In addition, they avoid attractive or trendy initiatives that are not aligned with the overall vision and mission of their school.
Several studies confirm that the qualities of distributed leadership and the building of collective efficacy are much more likely to be in play than singular leadership and mere self-efficacy (Darling, Hammond, et al., 2010; Harris, 2011; Brenninkmeyer & Spillane, 2008). Unlike distributed leadership, vision can be seen as the means to an end. However, vision needs distributed leadership, a climate conducive to teaching and learning, instructional leadership and organizational management processes in order to be reached. The practices are inextricably linked and the best principals weave them together to effectively manage and lead their schools (Harris et al., 2013).

**Principal Preparation**

Principal preparation programs vary, from traditional university master’s degree programs and certificates of advanced study, to residency programs, such as New Leaders for New Schools (Mitgang, 2012; Mitgang & Maeroff, 2008). Residency or internships programs offer alternate pathways to state certification. Both tracks offer similar sub-strands to develop competencies for the principalship, including instructional leadership (i.e., learning how to observe and give feedback to teachers), use of data, distributed leadership, visionary leadership, and what I term organizational management, sometimes referred to as the day-to-day operations (Mitgang, 2012). Many scholars have asked whether traditional approaches to preparing and licensing principals are sufficient (Louis et al., 2011).

Leaders of the University Council for Education Administration assert that in order to build leadership support programs practice must be revised (Young & Kochan, 2004). Theodore Kowalski (2004) has advocated for reforms in preparation programs’ accreditation, and state licensing standards. More compelling is the research that suggests
that principals themselves feel that the training that they received in graduate school did not prepare them for the current demands of the principalship (Harper, 2009; Hess & Kelly, 2005). In Harper’s study (2009), all but four percent of practicing principals reported that on-the-job experiences or guidance from colleagues has been more helpful in preparing them for their current position than their graduate school studies. In fact, 67% of principals reported that typical leadership programs in graduate schools of education are out of touch with the realities of the modern principalship (Farkas, Johnson & Duffett, 2003). Hess and Kelly (2005) examined the units and required readings contained in 210 syllabi collected from a national cross-section of 31 principal preparation programs. Rarely if ever did the syllabi contain real-life scenarios pertinent to urban school principals. Rather, scenarios consisted of curriculum challenges, dealing with parent complaints and student service issues from the frame of issues facing adequately resourced suburban schools.

The scholarly studies of these three bodies of literature (i.e., principal preparation, principals’ practices that are linked to student achievement, and the identification of effective principals) undergird this study of how principals understand their leadership practice and use that knowledge to trace where they learned the strategies they enact as a result. Using student growth scores rather than student achievement scores is an acknowledgement of the context in which these principals lead. Understanding the varying preparation programs available to potential candidates is important to examining where the principals recall that they learned their enactment strategies. Knowing which of the research-based practices is most closely correlated with student outcomes focuses this study on which of the key levers may be most important to examine.
Methodological Overview

I employed a qualitative method because of its broad approach to the study of phenomena (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), such as the topic of this study (i.e., enactment of leadership practices by high performing elementary school principals). I interviewed six principals, two teachers from each of their schools, and all of the principal’s direct supervisors.

I selected the six principals primarily based on their schools’ high growth scores on the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment (PVAAS) \(^1\) for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. The schools in this sample are all in the top 10% of elementary schools in the school district. In addition, principals needed to be in place during the entire growth cycle (i.e., a minimum of three years). I used PVAAS scores for grades 3 - 5, as these grades are part of the greatest number of elementary schools in the district. I randomly selected the teachers in this study from two categorical lists provided by the principal (i.e., one from a list of teachers hired by the principal, one from a list of teachers who preceded the principal’s tenure at the school).

I collected data via one-on-one interviews with each participant, using semi-structured interview protocols. In interviewed each principals twice, and each teacher and assistant superintendent once. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The principals were interviewed first regarding their enactment of leadership practices. I then used the data from the first interview to refine the questions for the teachers and the principals’ supervisors. My second interview with each principal focused on where/how

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\(^1\) PVAAS is data that offers an objective and more precise way to measure student progress and the value schools and districts add to students’ educational experiences. (www.pde.org)
they learned their enactment strategies and on recommendations they have for the district for the development of school principals.

I analyzed data using open and axial coding. This allowed me to examine the emerging themes in relationship to the theoretical framework of the study, to determine how what participants shared with me aligned with the theoretical framework.

Threats to validity in this study included researcher bias, positionality and reactivity. I conducted this research study in my work place, The School District of Philadelphia, where I am the Chief Academic Support Officer, where I have (formerly) directly supervised principals (including one of the principal participants). My positionality intersects in the context and setting of this research in another way. I am a former elementary school principal who led in an urban context. Throughout the study I had to monitor myself for bias. My focus on using the emic language of the participants allowed for me to give them greater voice, and acted as a bulwark against injection of my own biases.

**Personal Significance of this Study**

I was a principal for thirteen years (ten of those years in elementary schools) before becoming a district administrator, and am now the Chief Academic Support Officer for the School District of Philadelphia, the nation’s 14th largest school district. I have worked in urban and suburban schools outside of Washington, DC. I have faced many challenges in my professional life. However, nothing I faced mimicked the challenges faced by the majority of elementary school principals in Philadelphia.
For the last three years, I have supervised principals or had a role in their preparation in Philadelphia – where this study is situated. During this time, I have hired 25 principals. In one case, I hired the fifth principal that the school had had in just four years. I see the differences in principals’ effectiveness every day and have observed first-hand how some educators come to their leadership roles more prepared than others to work in an urban environment with our seemingly unprecedented fiscal restrictions and challenges.

In every school I visit, I meet bright, amazing young people full of potential. Juxtaposed with the promise of these children, I observe capable and competent leaders defying the odds and working tirelessly to make their schools safe, happy places where children are free to take risks and have opportunities to be challenged to meet their potential – exactly what students need to learn and grow.

Leading in deep poverty, surrounded by urban blight in a country that often appears to have given up on urban education, the leaders of these schools remain hopeful. They lead their communities and staffs through challenges that few (if any) suburban elementary school principals will never imagine, let alone face. I have witnessed how great principals can be game changers for their schools.

This study is grounded in my belief that great principals have enormous impacts on their school, and my regret that their many and complicated skills are often reduced by outsiders to mere charisma. Their technical expertise is rarely acknowledged in public forums.

This research study is important to me because that belief and that regret are at the core of my work as a school district leader. It is intensely meaningful and personal to me.
that we acknowledge publicly the varied and technical skills of exemplary principals. Furthermore, I believe that one of the ways out of our current urban educational crisis is to invest in the leaders such as those in this study, to learn what we can about their practice and – where possible – replicate their experience for others who want to follow in their footsteps as great leaders in our urban schools. With principal turn-over at alarming rates in urban school districts, I seek to find why some principals although faced with overwhelming challenges thrive and serve their communities with distinction.

The principals, who were graciously accommodating in their thoughtful participation in this study, facilitated access to the site of study and to their teachers. I hope that they will find this study honors their extraordinary efforts to lead urban elementary schools through significant and ongoing challenges. Last, I hope that they recognize their voices in this study, which attempted to tell their stories of enacting research-based practices through the authentic voices of the leaders who do this hard work daily on behalf of children.

Organization of this Dissertation

This dissertation consists of seven chapters.

Chapter 1 has included the background of my study, how I understand the educational context of my study and the purpose of my study. It also provided an overview of my methodology for this study and introduced my conceptual framework for my study. This chapter concluded with an explanation the personal significance of this study, to me.
Chapter 2 explores the literature that makes up my conceptual framework that informs my study. It provides a review of the empirical and related literature as it relates to the evidence based research practices, the connection of student outcomes to principal practice and principal preparation program.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology I used in this study. It also includes research design, research perspective and purpose, research questions, context, role of researcher, and study participants.

Chapter 4 includes detailed information about the context of the study. In it, I introduce each of the school sites selected for this study and each of the participants I interviewed.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 presents the findings of this study.

Chapter 7 contains a discussion of this study’s findings and their implications for further research, for districts and for all who have a role in preparing and/or developing school principals.
Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature examines prior work conducted in areas important to this study, and is divided into three sections.

In the first section, Principal Effectiveness, I review what others have found concerning the role of the principal in establishing successful schools, the characteristics of effective principals and the use student outcomes (e.g., achievement data) to measure principal effectiveness.

In the second section, Leadership Practices of Effective Principals, I give an overview of the five leadership practices most closely associated with affecting student outcomes and review self-efficacy as a construct that contribute to principal effectiveness.

In the third section, Principal Preparation and Development, I examine the literature on principal preparation programs, as they relate to principal recruitment and retention. I also deliberate on what prior research has found on the role of professional development in preparing school leaders.

In each section, I explain how this literature informs my study.

Principal Effectiveness: What Is It and What Are the Standards to Measure It?

Although it is widely agreed that principal leadership matters regardless of context (Leithwood, 2005) and there is general agreement about the qualities of successful school leaders (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2008; Mendels, 2012), there is still much unknown about which levers of principal leadership impact student
achievement. Principal performance is more difficult to capture than teacher performance, as principals are rarely responsible for direct instruction of students (Graham, Milanowski & Miller, 2012). Therefore, one must consider leadership holistically, viewing the principal as orchestra conductor ensuring that each of the components are working in concert to produce a well-rounded and well-educated student (Hallinger, 2011).

The Balanced Leadership Framework

In a meta-analysis of 70 studies on education leadership, Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2003) found 21 leadership responsibilities that are significantly related to higher levels of student achievement and led to what the authors call the “balanced leadership framework” (p. 1). This framework describes the knowledge, skills and dispositions that leaders need to be “effective” (p. 2) at improving student achievement.

The 70 studies involved 2,894 schools, 1.1 million students and 14,000 teachers. The four highest correlations with student achievement that they found were Situational Awareness (e.g., “is aware of the details & undercurrents in the running of the school & uses this information to address current & potential problems,” p. 4), Intellectual Stimulation (i.e., “ensures that faculty & staff are aware of the most current theories & practices & makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school’s culture,” p. 4), Change Agent (i.e., “involves teachers in the design & implementation of important decisions & policies,” p. 4) and Input (“is willing to & actively challenges the status quo,” p. 4). The framework is based on understanding that “effective leadership is more than simply knowing what to do; it means knowing when, how, and why to do it” (p. 3).
The balanced leadership framework research informed this study by its focus on the intentionality of practice of effective leaders. Its authors posit that many leaders appear to know what to do because they were taught in a preparation program or they know the correct buzz words from professional development through a district. However, the most effective leaders know when to pull certain levers, who to engage and connect all of it back to a clear vision and mission that is shared by other stakeholders in the school community.

**Ten Traits of Highly Effective Principals**

The effectiveness of school leaders is similarly considered by researchers and education stakeholders who have attempted to define and study it. McEwan, in her book *Ten Traits of Highly Effective Principals* (2003), explains the difficulty of defining effective principals this way, “There is a wide variety of ways people describe the principals whom they consider to be the very best” (p. xxii). Sergiovanni’s (2001) view of effectiveness helps to clarify and move from perception/opinion to a more concrete understanding, “achieving higher levels of pedagogical thoughtfulness, developing relationships characterized by caring and civility, and achieving increases in the quality of student performance on both conventional and alternate assessments” (p 204).

McEwan’s study illustrates the difficulty of defining an effective school principal. Effectiveness can be in the eye of the beholder. In this study, I attempt to isolate effectiveness around the five evidence-based leadership practices associated with improved student outcomes. This has meant ignoring personal qualities (e.g., charisma) in exchange for technical skill in enactment of leadership practices through discreet well-thought out strategies that move the needle of student achievement or growth.
Leadership Standards

Common leadership standards have facilitated educators across sectors and school types agreement upon principal effectiveness. Since 2000, almost all states have adopted new standards for leadership, usually based on a conception of the principal as instructional leader (McCarthy, Shelton & Murphy, 2016), and nearly half of the states now requires some form of mentorship or field experience prior to receiving state certification (Mitgang, 2012). The National Policy Board for Educational Administration now recognizes the 2015 Professional Standards for Educational Leaders\(^2\) are well supported by research (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). These policy leaders represent the most respected organizations in education, including the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), National School Board Association (NSBA) and the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE).

Identifying ten standards in which principals should have at least minimum competency, the theory of action behind the new leadership standards centers on how the ten standards support student learning (National Education Policy Board, 2015). These standards recognize the following domains: mission, vision and core values; ethics and professional norms; equity and cultural responsiveness; curriculum, instruction and assessment; community of care and support for students; professional capacity of school personnel; professional community for teachers and staff; meaningful engagement of families and community; operations management and school improvement. The standards recognize that they do not exist in isolation and are interdependent.

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\(^2\) Formerly known as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards.
The scholarly research on which these new school leadership standards are based focuses on a variety of factors that are associated with principal effectiveness. These factors include influencing teacher practice, ethical leadership, and the principal as a transformational leader rather than school manager (Supovitz & Sirinides, 2010; Terosky, 2014).

The PSEL leadership standards inform the Framework for Leadership (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2014), on which the evaluation for principals in the district of this study are based. The five evidence-based leadership practices at the center of this study are prominent in the PDE framework, and, as such, principals in the district are required to provide evidence of each for their evaluations. The crosswalk between the standards and the evidence based practices was important to support the significance of examining these practices.

**Cross Country Comparison**

In a 2005 article on successful principal leadership, Leithwood and Riehl synthesize qualitative studies from seven countries (i.e., Australia, China, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States) on successful school principals. These scholars used leadership constructs and a classification system (developed through a review of school leadership) as measures of school leadership. Their work included examining the strategies used by successful principals, variations in how they were implemented across contexts, and factors that linked the principals’ influence to student learning. The study’s findings revealed that the successful practices were generally the same across contexts; however, practices were adapted to be suitable for each context.
These successful practices include setting direction, developing people and redesigning the organization. Setting direction includes creating a compelling mission and vision around which people can galvanize their energy and motivating people to be a part of a new way of doing things with high expectations for their work and the collective work of their colleagues. Developing people in ways that stimulate them intellectually (e.g., providing opportunities to share in small learning communities of interest and relevance) is another way successful principals engage with their staffs and schools. Creating a schema for productive relationships centered on collaborative school practices and shared decision-making is typically included in redesign of school governance structures. The practices will be examined in detail in the next session of this literature review.

The finding from Leithwood and Riehl (2005) that practices cross contexts, even as their implementation varies, is particularly important to my study because I looked for common practices across varying contexts within The School District of Philadelphia – particularly differences in prevalence and depth of poverty, differences in size of ELL population, and racial/ethnic composition of the student bodies. All of these differences impact school performance (Grissom et al., 2014).

**Principal Leadership Types: Transformational and Shared Instructional**

Principal leadership types are also mediators of their effectiveness. A 2003 study conducted by Marks and Printy (2003) examined two types of leadership: *transformational and shared instructional*. They characterized transformational leadership by the primacy of the principal’s vision and mission, and the importance of principals’ fostering of creativity and innovation to augment their teaching faculties’
capacities. They characterized shared instructional leadership by the sharing of leadership by principals with their teaching faculties.

Marks and Printy (2003) write that shared instructional leadership occurs when the principal is not the expert; rather, the principal relies on the expertise of his or her staff. Furthermore, with this style of leadership, responsibility for the supervision of instruction is shared. Their sample of 24 schools (i.e., eight elementary schools, eight middle schools and eight high schools) was selected from a nationwide pool of schools undergoing restructuring and had instituted site-based management. The researchers noted that variation among these schools in their degree of engagement with collaboration and inquiry allowed the researchers to study the correspondence of transformational and shared leadership with teacher effectiveness. The found that transformational leadership was needed for overall school improvement and for changing the trajectory of school performance, but it needed to be combined with shared instructional leadership to transform teacher practice. Their findings suggest that when transformational leadership is combined with shared instructional leadership the results are substantial – and considerably better than when just one or the other was instituted in schools.

This Marks and Printy work (2003) informs this study as some of the practices, (i.e., vision and distributed leadership) are associated more with a particular leadership style, in this case transformational leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003). Although this dissertation does not examine leadership types explicitly, the discreet practices of school leaders cannot be distilled from their leadership type or style. Transformational leadership, which is based on both the principal’s aspirational vision becoming the shared
vision for the school and the principal increasing the capacity of his/her staff, is considered the most effective leadership type, because of its tight connection to many of the leadership practices it is briefly examined in this literature review (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Marks & Printy, 2003).

**Leadership Practices of Effective Principals**

The scholarly literature identifies several practices of effective principal leadership that are associated with improving student outcomes. Determining which leadership practices enacted by elementary school principals most directly affect student performance has been the subject of educational researchers and policy makers for decades. For the purposes of this study, I have included those which research has shown to have the most significant relationship to improving student outcomes (Marks & Printy, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2011; Witziers, Bosker & Kruger, 2003).

- Distributed leadership.
- Creating a climate conducive to teaching and learning.
- Instructional leadership.
- Organizational management.
- Vision.

(Some authors use the term *leadership qualities*, but I prefer the term *practices*. The word *quality* is often associated with a vision of *God-given gifts* or *innate/inherent traits*, which I think misleads from the underlying ideas at play.)
The literature on effective principal leadership can be divided into two categories: *practices* of effective principals and *strategies* of effective principals. *Practices* are larger ideas or principles that make up a school leader's philosophy and style. *Strategies*, on the other hand, are more discrete efforts that principals take and/or lead. Although it may be intuitive to think that these are one in the same, it is important to note the distinction. Strategies are how practices are enacted.

To illustrate this point, consider the practice of *distributed leadership*. It is one thing to understand that effective distributed leadership calls on a principal to identify the key people who can help lead the school and to whom leadership tasks may be assigned. However, ensuring that the people who are assigned to those tasks follow through with fidelity, holding the people they are working with accountable and completing the task or implementing the policy the way the principal intended is another. We all know people who have great ideas and know what needs to be done but never seem to accomplish anything because they lack the ability to *operationalize* the idea (Spillane, 2012). Hence, there is a need to distinguish between *practices* and *strategies*.

In this section, I also consider *self-efficacy* a distinct construct contributing to leadership effectiveness. Although I do not consider it a practice, it is a phenomenon worthy of consideration and has implications for how all practices are or are not enacted effectively.

**Distributed Leadership**

*Distributed leadership*, also referred to as *shared leadership*, is one of the most important leadership practices of successful school principals (Gronn, 2002; Harris, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008). In Spillane’s seminal essay on distributed leadership (2005), he
references the Distributed Leadership Study (2004) as his frame for understanding what distributed leadership is and is not. Spillane notes that, as a way to address the expanding role of the principalship, distributed leadership has the potential to not only lessen the workload of the principal, but also can (in its most efficacious implementation), foster buy-in from staff that share in the decision-making.

Several examples from Spillane’s 2004 study further illuminate what shared decision-making looks like, in practice. In a distributed leadership model, the use of data involves more than just the principal sharing data with the staff for post-mortems on student progress. In schools with the most effective distributed leadership, teams of teachers scrutinize the data, decide as a group how to modify instruction, implement the modification and then revisit later to discuss student progress. Creating the conditions for this to happen and initiating the various strategies to enact this practice is the responsibility of the principal and contributes to his/her effectiveness as a school leader (Spillane, 2005; Supovitz & Sirinides, 2010). Spillane stipulates that “distributed leadership often is cast as sort some of monolithic construct when, in fact, it is merely an emerging set of ideas that frequently diverge from one another” (Spillane, 2005 p. 144).

One should not view distributed leadership as something done to give people something to do simple so they will buy in to the principal’s vision. Rather, distributed leadership is practice that leads to goals – a means to an end. That can be any of increased student achievement, building a shared vision and mission, instructional leadership of teachers in creating a climate conducive to teaching and learning, and/or organizational management. That is, distributed leadership can support each of the other practices and the ultimate goal of increased student learning.
Distributed leadership is a means to an end, not the end itself. As such, effective principals use distributed leadership to lead instruction, create a climate that is conducive to teaching and learning, share their vision and manage people data and processes. Effective principals know that it is impossible to do their job alone and that part of their job is to promote the leadership of others. Distributed leadership manifests as a way of doing business that is routine and a part of normal school operations under the leadership of the most effective principals.

Creating a Climate Conducive to Teaching and Learning

School climate can refer to many things. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will use a definition from Hoy and Miskel (2005), "The set of internal characteristics that distinguish one school from another and influence the behaviors of each school's members" (p.185). Creating a positive school climate that is conducive to teaching and learning is essential to support student achievement. It is difficult – if not impossible – for children to learn in schools characterized by chaos. Scholarly research on principal leadership and school climate confirms that productive school climates are essential for effective schools, and that the actions of their principals are largely responsible for their climates (Peterson & Kelley, 2001; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998).

One large study of note (Blanchard, Hambleton, Zigarmi & Forsyth, 1991) examined the relationships between principals' preferred leadership style, teachers' perceptions of their principal's leadership style, and teachers' perceptions of school climate. This research included 31 schools, their corresponding 31 principals and 155 teachers (i.e., five per school). The study was limited to schools without an assistant principal. For each school, the principal and one teacher responded to the Leadership
Behavior Analysis II (LBA II; Blanchard et al., 1991) and four teachers were administered the Staff Development and School Climate Assessment Questionnaire (SDSCAQ; Zigarmi & Edeburn, 1980). The SDSCAW measures phenomena ranging from communication to innovativeness while the LBA II requires principals to self-rate their leadership style and teachers to rate their perception of their principal's style.

Blanchard et al. found correlations that suggest that school climate is associated with teachers’ perceptions of a principal’s effectiveness. Positive relationships were statistically significant between teachers' perceptions of their principals' effectiveness scores and climate scores. School climate tended to be rated more highly when principals were perceived to have high effectiveness and lower when principals were perceived to have low effectiveness. One limitation of this study stems from its inclusion of just schools without assistant principals, as this limited the study to smaller schools, and in this case, mostly rural (Kelley, Thornton & Daugherty, 2005).

School climate sets the stage for everything to happen in a school. Children cannot learn in chaos. In fact, when I think about principals that other people consider exemplary, one thing they all enjoy is a calm school climate. Climate, however, can also be a red herring that masks instructional inadequacy. Therefore if a principal keeps a lid on the building and everyone is happy, the school’s poor academic performance can go unnoticed – especially in a large city like Philadelphia where there are many environmental factors impacting school climate. In this study, in which student growth on summative assessments is the only criterion for exemplary principal quality, the selection criteria eliminate the subjectivity that can often color principal evaluation systems and public perceptions.
Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership by principals is the processes by which principals lead, guide and monitor instructional practice in their schools. This can include the notion of shared instructional leaderships (as suggested by Marks & Printy (2003)), as opposed to the idea of the principal as the instructional expert. Glickman (1989) describes the principal as the “leader of instructional leaders” (p. 6).

Hallinger (2003) defines in instructional leadership the defining of school mission, managing of instructional program and the promoting of a positive school climate – demonstrating how different scholars group or organize leadership practices in different ways. In his definition, goals are developed as part of the school mission and then instructional activities planned through backwards mapping to operationalize the mission. Researchers have found that a number of factors influence principal leadership of instruction to include leadership style. As noted above, style and substance (i.e., leadership practice) may be inextricably linked.

In a study conducted by Shatzer et al. (2013), 590 teachers in 37 schools were given the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (Hallinger, 1985). The average length of tenure for the principals was 4.39 years. They found that that instructional leadership explained more of the variance in student achievement than did transformational leadership, considering both raw scores and growth scores. This study confirms the impact of instructional leadership, though is not definitive about the two leadership style’s relative values. (They may not sit in separate silos, and therefore each may influence the other as part of the natural condition of effective school leadership.)
As *instructional leadership* is one of the main five practices that I examined in this study, the literature on instruction has been vital throughout this project. During the last twenty years there has been a shift, mostly due to school reform efforts, from principal as building manager to principal as instructional leader (Hallinger, 1992; Elmore, 2000). Principals can no longer depend on central office specialist and others, rather they are now expected to have high levels of instructional content expertise and together with their teachers lead the charge for instructional improvements in their schools.

**Organizational Management: Managing People, Data and Processes**

Leaders must deftly improve school cultures, build collaborative processes, and rework organizational structures because without these organizational adjustments, they are hard pressed to successfully achieve a school improvement agenda (Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons & Hopkins, 2007). The *organizational management* function of principals was transformed during the effective schools movement of the 1980’s, with a shift away from principal as manager to principal as instructional leader (Lezotte, 1989). However, recent research acknowledges that the coordination of all school functions is *essential* to effectiveness.

One of the difficulties with connecting *organizational management* to *principal effectiveness* is what Grissom and Loeb (2011) describe as the “attribution problem” (p. 1092). For example, principals hire teachers – hopefully good ones. However, they need the support of a human resources department. The success of that department is also attributable to whether or not they have quality candidates from which to choose. Further, factors such as the student demographic and school context (e.g. neighborhood safety)
can contribute to the teacher recruitment (and retention) – factors outside of the principal’s control.

Grissom and Loeb (2011) examined a list of tasks that characterize the job of the principal and how effective principals accomplish those tasks. In their study of 314 principals in the Miami-Dade Public Schools, they asked principals to self-rate on common job tasks, using a four-point likert scale. They administered a similar survey to assistant principals, asking each to assess the effectiveness of their principal on the same 42 tasks. They also surveyed teachers regarding their job satisfaction. They looked at pre-existing a school climate survey data, which included parents’ A-F grades of their children’s schools. Last, they merged a variety of administrative data, including the state rating scale (based on state assessment data and school demographics).

Grissom and Loeb’s findings reinforce the notion that all of the work of the principal is linked. There are aspects of organizational leadership that influence instruction, and vice-versa. Their results suggest that there is a relationship between principals with greater organization management competencies and student achievement in their schools. Although there are other factors that could account for students’ increased achievement, the competencies on these factors covered in the survey appear to have made a difference.

Organizational management has many facets that are important to school improvement efforts of principals. The processes, systems and structures by which school operates are among the things that visitors to schools likely notice first. Is the school clean, and well run, for instance. These also include the predictability of what happens daily. Organizational management, however, is a vehicle for other practices (e.g.,
instructional leadership and creating a climate conducive to teaching and learning). Like distributed leadership, effectiveness in organizational management practice can amplify the effectiveness of other domains of leadership practice.

**Vision**

Much of the research on the meaning and importance of *vision* for school principals is contained in scholarly studies on transformational leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Sergiovanni, 2001). School leaders need to create a sense of purpose that binds together teachers, students and parents in order to create cohesive conditions management structures that are continually focused on the goals of the organization (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2001). This is the operational definition for *vision* for this study. Vision may be also be considered a *future desired state* (Bennis & Nanus 1985), “a credible and ideal future but not yet attained goal” (Daft, 1999 p. 126). For example, the idea that *all children will achieve at high levels* is a vision.

In a 2010 mixed-methods study of 104 elementary schools in Northern Israel, Kurland et al. collected data (from 1474 teachers) which showed that the school vision significantly predicted schools’ organizational learning. To participate, principals needed to have been in their schools for three years, as researchers determined this was the minimum amount of time needed for principals to project their leadership style onto their teachers and for teachers to be become well-acquainted with the leadership style of the principal. The researchers measured 22 attributes of school vision, using a 5-point likert scale. The study results indicate that school vision is significantly predicted by the transformational leadership style of the principal. “It appears that by articulating a common school vision that is task-oriented (expressing direction and process, focused
and bottom-line-oriented), inspiration-oriented (generates enthusiasm, inspires, expresses values), and communication-oriented (declarative, detailed, and easy to explain), school leaders provide meaning and a strong sense of purpose that motivates school staff to act” (p. 19).

As vision is one of the main five practices that I examined in this study, the literature on vision has been vital throughout this project. It shaped my thinking during data collection and data analysis. It informed my thinking as I considered the various implications of my study. Kurland, et al.’s (2010) linking of vision to transformational leadership has been especially influential in my thinking.

**Self-Efficacy**

Last, the belief of the principal in his or her ability to effect change is a necessary condition for effectiveness. “To realize their aims, people try to exercise control over the events that affect their lives. They have a stronger incentive to act if they believe that control is possible -- that their actions will be effective” (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is a key variable in better understanding effects in most organizations. Pointing to the similarity of self-efficacy and self-confidence, McCormick (2001) claims that leadership self-efficacy (or confidence) is a key variable regulating how leaders works in a rapidly changing and fluid environments. There is even evidence that educators’ collective efficacy can be a stronger predictor than their students’ socioeconomic status (Bandura, 1993; Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000).

The literature regarding principal self-efficacy is generally split into in two baskets. The first focuses on the self-efficacy of the principal and the second on the collective self-efficacy of the school, the faculty and contributing stakeholders (Grissom
& Harrington, 2010; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). For example, Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) consider school leaders’ two types efficacy beliefs – beliefs about their own efficacy for improving instruction and student learning and beliefs about the collective capacity of their colleagues across their schools. They find that both sets of beliefs have significant effects on school leaders’ practices or behaviors, conditions in schools and classrooms known to account for student learning, and student learning. Because principals are not directly responsible direct instruction, it is important to understand how they affect the collective self-efficacy of staff, especially in light of the urban context of this study.

Choosing to lead in an urban context is not for the faint of heart. In the media, from parent groups, and from school reformers we often hear the refrain of “failing schools” when the schools in The School District of Philadelphia are mentioned. Indeed, if one only looks at the achievement scores of the schools in this study, they might also come to that conclusion. The self-efficacy of leaders is a fulcrum on which the potential for these schools to improve is balanced. It is necessary for leaders to have high levels of self-efficacy and to promote a collective efficacy among their staff. Without the belief that they can improve outcomes for students, these schools would be doomed. However, the enigmatic optimism of effective leadership drives schools that are succeeding in urban contexts, such as the ones in this study.

**Evaluation of School Leaders with Student Test Scores**

Educational researchers generally agree about the skills and dispositions necessary for principals (Leithwood, 2005; Grissom et al., 2014). There is no agreement,
however, on how much or how little principal leadership impacts student test scores. In spite of this, there has been a movement towards greater and greater use of student test score data to evaluate school leaders.

Student achievement scores have been used to measure principal effectiveness by some school districts in the United States for about thirty years (Eberts & Stone, 1988). These efforts have been part of larger efforts by educational advocates and policy-makers to reform schools by holding them accountable for improving student performance – typically on state or national assessments (Grissom et al., 2014). Using student test scores to measure school effectiveness and, in turn, teacher and principal effectiveness, is due to relatively new national accountability policies tying evaluation of both principals and teachers to student performance just within the last two presidential administrations (Baker, et al., 2010).

Several factors complicate this, however. First it takes anywhere from three to five years for a principal to effect measurable change in a school that can be attributed to their leadership (Walters & Cameron, 2007). Second, most principals in urban districts have a tenure of three years or less. Nevertheless, the Race to the Top initiative of the Obama Administration requires states to build value-added models that tie school principal evaluation to the achievement scores of their students (Fletcher, 2010).

**Use of Growth Scores**

Because of differences between students, composition of individual classrooms, grade, and school level, growth scores are considered a fairer way to determine effectiveness than straight achievement scores or proficiently (Kane, Staiger, Grissmer & Ladd, 2002). Rather than simply examining students’ achievement scores, the various
approaches to growth scores all try to account for factors that may impact students’ scores that are outside the control of the school or teacher. Among other things, they try to control for student prior achievement levels before the school year in question, and thereby focus on how much students have learned rather than how much they know. When used to evaluate principals, they attempt to capture school conditions can be attributed to principal leadership (Leithwood, 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003; Fuller et al., 2007; Dufour & Marzano, 2009).

Models that tie evaluation of principals to student growth are generally considered to level the playing field because of the distorted picture drawn by models that tie evaluation to simple student achievement. This is especially true in schools such as the ones in this study, where conditions outside of the principal’s control (e.g., poverty, English language learning status, parent availability to engage and race/ethnicity) are significant. It is important to note that these high-needs schools have the highest rates of principal turnover (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014; Grissom, et al., 2014).

Growth scores have only recently been used for these purposes, as their widespread availability is a relatively new phenomena (Baker, et al., 2010). Despite a lack of available research (owing to their only recent invention/ adoption), growth scores are used in SDP district’s school performance rating and account for 40% of schools’ overall score (SDP Research and Evaluation, 2016). In this study, I use student growth scores (rather than overall achievement scores) to recognize exemplary principals. This is because the district uses growth scores like this, and they are used by evaluators of principal performance as a metric of effectiveness.
Comparing Growth Scores Models in Miami-Dade County

In a large mixed-methods study in a large urban district (i.e., Miami-Dade Florida), Grissom et al. (2014) measured the contribution of principal performance to student achievement. The study used several different value-added models (a type of growth model) for the purpose of selecting one for official adoption. Using longitudinal data on student achievement, they compared the models in how they locate performance and their degree of correlation with other measures principal performance (i.e., subjective personnel evaluations and teacher surveys). This large study included 523 principals (with 719 principal-by-school observations), using the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) – which includes math and reading components for students in Grades 3 to 10.

Grissom et al. found a key problem with these models. The different models could be quite inconsistent from each other. This led the researchers to concluded that district officials should reconsider whether to use them at all to measure principals’ effectiveness. The researchers were troubled by how the different models could potentially lead to different conclusions about the same principal, even though they were based on the exact same test score data.

Grissom, et al. (2014) point out that the movement to measure principal performance by utilizing student performance measures lacks sufficient guidance about how this should best be accomplished.

Which principal qualities bring contribute most greatly to student outcomes in high poverty school differs significantly with schools that are not high poverty (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2012). It could help school districts struggling to retain leaders
(because of job demands and working conditions) to focus their efforts on developing effective principals if they understand the mission critical skills school leaders must have prior to taking on the principalship,

**Principal Effectiveness and Personnel Turnover**

A mixed-methods study on the impact of principal leadership used data from the UTD Texas Project and data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and include 7,420 unique principals and 28,147 annual observations of principals. This large sample provided the opportunity to investigate differences based on socioeconomic status (Branch, et al., 2012). The researchers focused on personnel decisions and how principals did or did not retain the highest quality teachers. Its findings included that the most effective principals did retain said teachers and the effect was more pronounced in high poverty schools than low-poverty schools. Further, it revealed that the most and least effective principals tend to leave high poverty schools, and that a considerable share of the least effective principals was likely to take principal positions in other schools and districts. This underscores that the purpose of value-added measures to evaluate principals has two parts: first, identifying what the value-add is, and then doing something about it—either by reinforcing or rewarding excellent performance or by holding people accountable for poor performance.

The impact of principals/leadership is not constant. It can be positive or negative, and likely increases with experience and/or tenure (Branch, et al., 2012). In this large research study of a large Texas district, Branch et al. found—contrary to conventional wisdom—that more effective principals are less likely to switch districts and
are more likely to remain in the same school than less effective principals, especially in schools with lower initial achievement.

This work informs my study in that it supports my belief that principals’ influence is most visible in schools in the most challenging contexts, which contributed to my decision to locate my study in The School District of Philadelphia. Further, this work by Branch et al. suggests that studies of effective principals should focus on those with more experience. In part with this in mind, my study only includes those with at least 3-5 years of experience.

**Meta-Analysis of studies tying principal leadership to student outcomes**

A large quantitative meta-analytic study (Witzier, Bosker and Kruger, 2003) centers on the effects of educational leadership on student outcomes in studies conducted between 1986 and 1996, including both domestic and international. The researchers chose this older time period due to the important advances in statistical methods and their ability to shed light on issues that could not be addressed with the available methods, originally. They selected thirty-seven prior studies, based on two criteria. First, studies had to be constructed to study educational leadership with a valid instrument design. Second, they had to have explicit and valid measures of student achievement. Thirty-two of the thirty-seven studies explored direct leadership effects. In all of the studies the effect size was small (< 0.10), however, *communication of a mission* and *vision* had a larger correlations (r > 0.35) in the studies they analyzed. Further, they found no significant difference by national context. This large study underscores the difficulty that educational researchers have in attributing the effects of principal leadership to student outcomes.
My study uses qualitative data from exemplar principals to understand how urban elementary principals with high growth scores perceive their leadership practice, and aims to inform district practice in the future. As Witzier, Bosker and Kruger (2003) note, the leadership context did not have an effect on student outcomes. I would expect that to be consistent in this proposed study as growth scores are being used to level the playing field.

The Meta-Concern

As Grissom, et al. (2014) ask in their study, even if we can tie principal performance to student outcomes does that really help districts? Districts need to determine what might actually be gained from different potential efforts the best use of administrative efforts. This question is compelling to me as a practitioner in that, in my experience, rarely (if ever) are principals removed from their positions for poor student performance. Renaissance efforts to reconfigure entire school staffs in some of the large cities notwithstanding, the principals who are removed typically are not fired. Rather they move on to other schools – often lower performing schools. The development of principals does not seem to be a priority of district efforts, nor part of long-term strategies. This study will inform next steps for districts to consider in efforts to grow principals and where scarce resources will best be utilized to address the shortage of educators prepared to lead elementary schools in large urban districts.

Principal Preparation and Development

The chronic problem of urban principal turnover has been a dilemma for urban district superintendents and policy makers for three decades (Partlow, 2007). Urban
school districts are constantly searching for highly qualified principal candidates to fill vacancies – typically in schools with the most vulnerable student population (Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, Ikemoto, 2012). It is estimated that approximately 40% of the approximately 100,000 principals in the United States will be eligible to and/or will retire by 2020 (Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2014-15 Edition). This will open positions in less demanding/more desirable schools for principals currently working in quite challenging urban schools – further exacerbating the critical shortage.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) reported that urban districts have found it essential to create leadership development programs to create a pipeline of potential candidates. It is common for these districts to partner with local colleges and universities. The exemplary programs share many of the same attributes. First, they know what they want to produce. That is, such programs have a clear mission and vision based on the standards of instructional, organizational and change leadership. In addition, they are based on adult learning theory and are constructed around a collaborative cohort model of field experiences, and adult-learning theory (Orr, 2007; Petzko, 2008; Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; Mitgang, 2012).

The attributes of effective programs require further examination, in that a critique of all programs is that they have trouble keeping pace with the ever evolving and changing role of the principal and the unrealistic expectations thrust on principals in urban settings. Connecting the dots of the research on the qualities and dispositions of effective principals and the qualities of effective programming requires an understanding of the evolving role of the school leader in the age of what have you done for me lately expectations of parents and policy makers.
In addition, several alternative programs to certification have emerged such as New Leaders for New Schools and the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL). Large districts, such as Chicago and New York City have launched initiatives (i.e., the Chicago Leadership Academy and the New York City Leadership Academy) to grow their own leaders, and now consult with other districts to provide training. In both large city examples, the districts partnered with local highly regarded universities (i.e., University of Chicago, Columbia University) to bolster the quality and the perception of their programs (Mitgang, 2012). Philadelphia does not utilize either of these, but has partnered with NYCLA to provide training for new principals and the state uses NISL for its required certification courses. Philadelphia has a pipeline program it uses in collaboration with The New Teacher Project, Philly Plus. Its residents spend an apprentice year with a principal and have narrowly defined duties (for example, they can only work with a maximum of ten teachers and are not responsible for student discipline or student services). A study conducted by the district’s Office of Research and Evaluation revealed that less than half of these residents are selected to become principals, mostly because of principal supervisor perceptions of their lack of preparedness (SDP, Office of Research and Evaluation, 2016).

In *Educating School Leaders*, Art Levine (2005) describes how, in a race to create low-cost programs to fill the need for school principals, many universities create low quality programs. He called this, a “race to the bottom” (p. 54). He cites a leadership preparation curriculum in disarray, disconnected faculty, insufficient quality control and disparities in institutional quality as the culprits for turning out principals who are ill prepared to assume the role, as have others (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). However,
school district’s belief in their ability to grow their own principals is essential. Research shows that through effective programs, effective leaders can be developed, building the capacity of candidates in the domains that will impact their performance (Mitgang, 2012; Mitgang & Maeroff, 2008).

**In-service principal development**

Grissom and Harrington (2010) examine principal professional development thru the lens of how teachers rate their principal’s effectiveness. This study defines administrator professional development programs as “formal opportunities for continuing education that principals or other administrators undertake in conjunction with their job responsibilities” (p. 585). This large national study discovered that a positive relationship between principal’s participation in mentoring over university programs and/or more formal district provided programs. This accounted for the content of the program’s focus in mentoring, which was a based approach in the most successful programs (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007). Mentoring programs were sometimes associated with coaching programs, with coaching programs being the most effective examples. Despite many confounding variables that the study needed to account for, it was conclusive that the opportunity for theory.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I have reviewed three bodies of literature: principal effectiveness and student outcomes, principal practices associated with improved student outcomes and principal preparation and development. The work of these scholar and researchers is the
foundation upon which my study of how the principals in this study enact and make meaning of their leadership practice.
Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss the research methodology for this study, including my rationale for methods selection, data collection procedures, approach to data analysis and a discussion of addressing validity concerns. My purposes for this study were: (a) to examine the discreet strategies among this set of effective school leaders associated with the evidence based practice at the center of this study and to investigate what they do to improve instruction and increase student achievement; (b) to examine how, if at all, these principals learned how to enact these strategies; and (c) to examine what recommendations, if any, these principals have for the school district for training and development of principals.

Chapter III is organized into six sections:

- research questions,
- rhetorical structure,
- sample selection,
- data collection,
- data analysis and
- validity.

Each section details the methodology of researching and writing this qualitative phenomenological case study.
Research Questions

This study was built around four research questions.

1) What are the leadership practices to which high performing urban elementary school principals attribute their success?
   a) How do the sample of principals enact the evidence-based leadership practices they cite at their school sites?
   b) What are the discreet strategies that the sample of principals use to enact the evidence-based leadership practices?
   c) How do principals connect the strategies they enact to student outcomes?

2) How do high performing elementary school principals describe acquiring the strategies they use to enact the evidence-based leadership practices?

3) What role does principal efficacy play in how high performing elementary school principals describe the enactment of their leadership practice?

4) What recommendations do high performing elementary school principals have to district leadership regarding the training and development of principals in the enactment of the evidence-based practices?

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

I employed a qualitative methodology because of its broad approach to the study of phenomena (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) – in this case, the enactment of leadership practices by high performing elementary school principals. Its interpretive nature and its grounding in the experiences of people (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) is appropriate for a study of practitioners and how they work. Qualitative research is naturalistic, it respects the
humanity of the participants, is emergent and evolving, and is interpretive (Yin, 2013). Use of this method allowed me to become the instrument by asking questions in semi-structured interviews. Yin (1989; 2013) noted that qualitative research explains, describes, illustrates, and explores the phenomenon under investigation. Hearing directly from the participants in their own words necessitated a qualitative design. Understanding the very personal experience of leadership is essential to the findings of this study. The research participants have quantitative evidence that what they are doing is working in terms of student growth scores; however, this opportunity to share how the enact to includes their thought process on how complex it is to lead in an urban context.

This research study has a narrative and phenomenological design (Creswell, 2014). First, this approach allowed the principals in the study to narrate their experiences of enacting of leadership practice in their own words. This structure allowed for a topical study with a narrow of focus of the phenomenology of interest to me (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), the research-based leadership practices. Further, a phenomenological approach gives priority to the subjective experience, intentions and perceptions of the research participants, a critical aspect of this research, as it seeks to understand how each principal enacts their (research-based) practices. In fact, though the data collection procedures of this study are grounded in multiple case study, in fact, the data analysis, findings and implication are more grounded in phenomenology.

Another aspect of qualitative research that made it appropriate for this study is its compatibility with case study (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2015; Yin, 2013). Qualitative research provides the opportunity to “examine cases in their full complexity” (Remler & Van Ryzin, p. 62). Specifically, the series of case studies in this project, with their
perspective design, may influence the content or process of future principal training and recruitment efforts initiated by the school district. In addition, the findings of this project may inform academic departments in connecting school improvement efforts and principals’ leadership practice. Last, the findings may also be transferable to principal induction programs initiated and/or administrated by this and other large urban districts.

This project is made up of a series of six multiple-perspective case studies. For each of the six cases, I interviewed the principal of the school, two teachers from the school and the principal’s supervisor. This theory triangulation (Patton, 2002) approach allowed me to examine the perspectives of the teachers in the school and those of the principal’s supervisor. This was designed to triangulate the data, and develop an understanding based on multiple views of the principals’ enactment of leadership practice in their schools. This corroboratory strategy (Yin, 2014) was an effort to strengthen the construct validity of this multiple case study research.

This qualitative dissertation research design qualifies as a case study as it includes the two essential elements from the definition of a case study according to Yin (2014). It “investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its real world context” (p. 16). It studies the principals in their schools among the teachers they supervise and the principal’s supervise responsible for the school. It also seeks to understand the “boundaries between phenomenon and context that are not clear” (Yin, 2014 p. 16) In this case it is an exploration of how principals understand how they enact the evidence based leadership practices, where they learned their craft and recommendations they make that may be useful to others.
I chose to use interviews with this project’s participants for data collection for several reasons. I used semi-structured interviews, as that allowed me to guide the direction of each interview while also allowing participants to add any information that they thought would be valuable to my understanding of their experiences, including answers and sub-topics that I might not have anticipated (Creswell, 2014; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I have worked in schools for more than twenty-five years and it was important for me to understand participants’ experiences and views from their perspectives, rather than simply through the lens of my own experiences. Interviews allowed me to hear about the experiences of the participants in my study, about real life people and their situations, so that I could make sense of behavior and to understand behavior within its wider context (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

**Protection of Human Subjects and Organizational Approval**

To insure the protection of all participants (i.e., the human subjects) in this study, my proposal was submitted for approval to the University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and signed a consent form prior to data collection (see Appendix A). The consent form included a summary of the purpose of the study, a statement of voluntary participation, information about the confidentiality of the study, and a reminder of their option to withdraw from the study at any time. I also sought (and received) permission to audio record each interview. Audio files and interview transcripts were stored in a password-protected file on my own personal computer. Following approval from University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board (IRB), I obtained permission to conduct the research in The School
District of Philadelphia from the district’s Department of Research and Evaluation (see Appendix B).

**Site and Participant Selection**

I identified six elementary schools from The School District of Philadelphia (SDP) for this study. Elementary schools in SDP include both schools serving students in grades K-5 and K-8. However, this study only considered the growth scores for a consistent grade band for students (i.e., grades 3-5). Sampling did not control for the degree of poverty or percent of total student enrollment receiving English as a Second Language (ESOL) services at each school. I decided that this was unnecessary, as growth scores (rather than overall achievement scores) guided my site selection.

In site selection, I considered the length of principals’ tenure at their schools. I also looked for growth scores over two consecutive growth cycles that showed a positive trajectory. Two cycles required principals to have been in their schools for at least three years. This time span is also consistent with research studies which report that a principal needs to be in place for a minimum of three to five years in order for the impact of their leadership to be measured (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009; Leithwood and Day 2008; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2011).

**Use of PVASS Growth Scores**

For the purposes of this study, I defined principal effectiveness using the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS)\(^3\) for the 2013-2014 and 2014-

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\(^3\) PVAAS is a statistical analysis of Pennsylvania (PA) state assessment data, and provides Pennsylvania districts and schools with growth data to add to achievement data.
2015 school year for grades 4 and 5. The use of growth scores (as opposed to overall student achievement) largely mitigates the impact of having a majority of low SES students, large numbers of students who have weak family support structures and/or are learning English as a second language – three traits common to schools in SDP. The schools selected for this study are all in the top 15 schools for growth during the sample criteria time frame (See Table 1). I could not simply select the top six schools by growth scores because several of these schools have principals who have been in their schools less than the three-year selection requirement. Further, one principal declined to participate when invited and one principal was out on extended leave. There are 154 schools in the districts with students in grades 3-5. Therefore these six schools were all drawn from the of the top 10% of SDP elementary schools, by combined growth scores over the two year cycle.

This lens of measuring student learning provides educators with valuable information to ensure they are meeting the academic needs of groups of students, as well as individual students.
Table 1
Potential School Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection</th>
<th>Principal Tenure (Years)</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Other/Multi</th>
<th>SPED</th>
<th>PVAAS Growth Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineligible</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Included</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>5.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5%</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>6.80</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Included</td>
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<td>90%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineligible</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>20%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDP Average</td>
<td></td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Student demographics rounded to obscure their identities.
According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, growth scores are helpful measures for districts because they measure a student’s growth across time and have little or no relationship to a student's demographics (http://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/Pages/default.aspx#tab-1). Previous studies confirm the relevance of the use of growth scores in urban school contexts (Grissom et al., 2014), because growth scores compare student performance to his/her own prior performance. Growth scores also give school districts a more comprehensive picture of their own effectiveness in raising student achievement (http://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/Pages/default.aspx#tab-1). As I showed in Chapter 2, growth scores act as an equalizer for schools in this district because of variations in the share of students with significant educational challenges.

**Principal Invitations**

Principals were invited via email communication asking for their participation and explaining how they were considered for the sample.

This sample is interesting, in that none of the participating principals have been in their schools less than five years (see Chapter 4). Each of them previously was a teacher for several years and served as an assistant principal prior to becoming a principal. This was an unexpected windfall for this study. Because the findings can be used to plan for principal development, the sample provided an opportunity for connecting the practices of the principal with retention within the profession.
Principal Supervisor Selection and Invitations

I also scheduled interviews with each principal’s supervisor. These interviews took place last, after all other interviews for the site. These assistant superintendents were contacted via email to ask for their participation. They were informed of the criteria for site selection for the sample, and informed that the principals had agreed to participate in the study.

Teacher Selection and Invitations

Teachers were selected from lists provided by the principals. During each initial interview, I asked the principal to provide a list of teachers who were hired during their tenure and a list of teachers hired prior to their tenure at the school. I then randomly selected a name from each list. Each teacher was given an invitation which included my email address, to let me know if they would be available for participation. Teachers contacted me via email, and I then set up their interviews at their schools.

Data Collection

For this 360 study, I conducted a series of two interviews with the participating principals, one interview with each of two teachers from each school, and one interview with each principal’s supervisor. I conducted the interviews in this order intentionally, as discussed below.

Scheduling

Upon receiving approval from the Department of Research and Evaluation, I scheduled interviews with the selected school principals. During each first interview, we scheduled the second interview and discussed a schedule for interviewing the teachers.
All of the principals in this study suggested convenient times during the regular work day for teachers to be interviewed, times that did not conflict with teachers’ regular instructional duties.

**Principal Interviews**

At the beginning of my first meeting with each participating principal, we discussed the informed consent form (see Appendix A), which he or she signed before the interview began. I gave one copy to the principal and kept one for myself.

I began each interview by giving the principal an opportunity to share their background and to tell their story of how they become the principal of their school. The interview then turned to a review of the five evidence-based practices that are associated with principal effectiveness as it pertains to student outcomes. I asked each principal to rate themself on each practice on a scale of one to ten, with ten being exemplary practice—defined as, “I am exceptionally competent in this practice and could teach it to others” (see Appendix C). I did not use these ratings in data analysis, rather they were to familiarize each of the leaders with the practices and to frame the interview topics for the principals.

These practices were drawn from the literature (DuFour & Marzano, 2009; Gronn, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Spillane, 2005) and include:

- distributed leadership;
- creating a climate conducive to teaching and learning;
- instructional leadership;
- organizational management; and
• vision.

I then asked each of the principals to identify at least three ways they enact each of the leadership practices. I used probes such as, “Tell me more about…,” and, “What does that look like?” in instances where I thought more discussion was needed for me to fully understand how these principals perceive how they enact their leadership practice in each of the five areas.

I then asked each principal to identify any other leadership practices they felt were important but that I had not included among practices I presented at the beginning of the interview. I then told principals that in our second interview that we would explore how they learned the strategies that they detailed previously in this interview. I explained that it might be necessary to “activate their memories” to prepare for that. We concluded by scheduling the second interview, and going over the lists of teachers I drew from for teacher selection (see above).

In the second round of interviews, I asked the principals where they “learned” the strategies they associated with each of the practices and we explored their leadership journey. Prior to the second interview, I reviewed and coded the first interview transcripts for the strategies shared by each participant. I constructed each question for the second interviews based on those responses, taking advantage of the iteration that a qualitative approach (Maxwell, 2012) and interviewing allows. For example, following up on a first interview response about distributed leadership, during the second interview I asked, “Where do you recall that you learned how to organize teachers in teams and identify teacher leaders in order to distribute leadership?”

56
Principals’ responses in the second interviews led to an exploration of principal self-efficacy, as all of the participating principals identified personal qualities as responsible for the enactment of certain leadership strategies (see Chapter 5 for a fuller discussion of this topic). We concluded each second interview with the topic of their recommendations for future professional development for principals. However, their responses were not exclusively about development, as all of the participating principals also referred to principal selection and recruitment efforts.

**Teacher and Principal Supervisor Interviews**

After initial introductions and signing of consent forms, I asked both teachers and principal supervisors to share their backgrounds as education professionals. I asked the teachers additional questions, about how many principals they had worked for and their relationships with their principal from any contexts other than their current school. I did this to make sure I understood whether teachers that were hired by the participating principals had been favored due to prior common work history or other factors.

I based the teacher and principal supervisor interviews on principals’ responses from their first interview. Similarly to how I prepared for second interviews with principals, I used the coded the responses from the principal’s discussion of their enactment of strategies to compose questions for the teachers and the principal’s supervisor. Teachers and principals’ supervisors were each given an opportunity to share any other information about the principal’s leadership they thought pertinent to the topics we covered in the interview, in case my questions may not have captured everything they thought relevant.
Research Memos and Member Checks

While I primarily used research memos and member checks as part of my analytical process, they did play a role in the data collection phase of my study. I used research memos to reflect on my interviews during and after each round of data collection. For example, I reflected how ordering of my question may have confused a participant and how I could correct that in future interviews.

Data Analysis

I used many layers of data analysis in this project, beginning with the interlayering of data collection and data analysis mentioned above.

Coding

I used axial coding throughout data analysis to analyze what participants shared with me. Axial coding allowed me to reconstruct the data and to make connections between the categories of principal practice and principal enactment (Kolb, 2012; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). By allowing the themes I saw to emerge from what participants told me, I was able to make meaning beyond what was stated most directly, and to interpret what I was told in light of the rest of the data and my own understandings. The open and axial coding approaches I used in this study allowed me to examine the emerging themes in relationship to the theoretical framework of the study (see Chapters 1 and 2) to determine how and/or what participants shared with me added to my understanding of my theoretical framework.
The coding for data analysis for this dissertation took place in stages, in an iterative process. First, I developed a coding structure for each of the research questions, organizing the structures to specifically look for the following:

- enactment of each literature based practice;
- specific strategies related to enactment of each practice;
- location of the learning of strategies related to each individual practice;
- other constructs (e.g. leader efficacy) that leaders identified, related to their enactment of practice;
- recommendations leaders have for principal development; and
- perspectives of teachers and principals’ supervisor of principals’ enactment of research-based practice.

I developed my first set of codes through a deductive process, using the research-based researched practices and the research questions (See Appendix H). I used the first set of codes when coding the first interviews, so that I could construct the interview questions for the second round of principal interviews based on their earlier responses. This analysis of the first set of principal interviews prepared me for the next round of data collection. As a result of the earlier analysis, I thought critically about probing types of questions for the second round of interviews. In consultation with my research chair, I created the third and second set of codes using inductive codes, using the emic language of the study participants.

I utilized Dedoose software to code the interview transcripts. After the data was initially coded, themes emerged between and among each of the coding schema. Before I
could identify themes, I extracted the coded data and then coded again, according to emerging themes. I then categorized these themes and organized them in order to work towards the findings of this study. Some themes which merged strongly that were not initially a part of this study, such as leadership efficacy. This analysis process continued, uncovering relationships between the codes that developed into categories, and finally to my findings and implications.

I was very careful to ground my findings and implications in participants’ responses, because of my biases as a practicing principal and a former supervisor of principals. I used the principal supervisor and teacher responses as confirmatory evidence of what the principal told me, facilitating triangulation. This method of triangulation involved using different informants as a check on one another, seeing if their responses were divergent or convergent, and to determine if their responses support a single conclusion. I used this strategy to reduce the risk that my conclusions were simply a product of my own biases and to allow me to better understand the perceptions of the participants in relation to their growth scores (Maxwell, 2004).

In accordance with Maxwell’s (2004) and Yin’s (2014) assertions regarding how different methods can help with a holistic view of what is really going on, I used the interviews detailing the principal’s approach to leadership in their schools to understand how they perceive their effectiveness, to (myself) understand and gauge their perceptions of their effectiveness, and to understand how they conceptualize how all of this plays out in their daily work in their schools.

For this study I employed deductive and inductive coding. For the inductive codes, I used in-vivo codes. In-vivo uses words and/or phrases from the participant’s
language in the transcripts as codes (Miles et al., 2014). In addition, I employed magnitude coding to indicate the frequency of different themes and to look for trends that were consistent across participants. Because of the nature of this study, I had to make extensive use of sub-coding. According to Miles et al. (2014), sub-coding is particularly helpful for case studies with multiple participants.

**Research Memos**

As mentioned above, I used research memos to reflect on trends, challenges and emerging themes as I proceeded through the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

These research memos were the most helpful in reflecting on interviews and meetings with my committee chair. The research memos also helped me to consider my positionality as a researcher and district leader, and to account for my biases as I conducted interviews and coded transcripts.

I used evaluative research memos as a way to express how I viewed the quality of education for students and quality of teachers in the work settings of the participants. If left unexamined, these views could have biased my analysis throughout. Instead, memoing allowed me to apply my experiential knowledge to influence my analysis appropriately (Maxwell, 2004).

**Research Journal**

I utilized a research journal to ensure that I completed each component of the study in accordance with my research design and methodology. It also helped me to keep use and keep track of input from my research chair and to staying on track to complete the study on time. The research journal was originally in a template/checklist format for
each study component. However as the study unfolded, I also used the research journal to record and categorize themes. The three major iterations of the coding scheme were recorded in the research journal, as well. Because my meetings with the research chair were an important component of my analytical, I also included the notes from those meetings.

I actually used two research journals during the study. The first was the formal research journal (stored on my computer), in which I stored the information and jottings detailed above. The second research journal was a hand-written journal, where I recorded concerns about my potential biases. I did not want to keep an electronic record of these reflections, because of my regular work at the site of this study. I used the hand-written journal to complete the validity section of this dissertation.

After a careful analysis of the data and the themes that emerged, I wrote the findings and implications of this study.

**Research Roles/ Issues with Validity**

In this section I discuss the threats to validity and trustworthiness of this study. I first expose threats to validity related to positionality, reflexivity and reactivity. I then discuss descriptive, theoretical and evaluative validity. Although other kinds of validity exist, these represent the most pertinent to this study.

**Positionality, Reactivity and Reflexivity**

This research study was conducted in my work place, The School District of Philadelphia, where I am the Chief Academic Support Officer. My previous role, however, was that of Assistant Superintendent, a role in which I supervised 45 principals.
In fact, I previously directly supervised one of the principals in this study. Although I did not directly supervise any study participants during this study, I did lead district-wide initiatives in academics, including special education, multi-lingual services, curriculum, instruction and assessment, academic enrichment, career and technical education, college and career readiness and organizational management.

I still have a quasi-supervisory role in the supervision of assistant superintendents (they are called principal supervisors in this study). In addition, it is widely known that I am consulted and provide feedback on principal changes and moves. Further, my current office regularly recognizes principals for performance in student growth and, more importantly, leads all initiatives are focused on progress monitoring and student growth.

All of this obviously created challenges in positionality for me. For example, because of my background evaluating principals, I found it difficult to hear some responses that were not aligned with my expectations for those who serve in the role of principal. It is my job to have expectations for principals. Therefore, both during the interview process and while I was coding data, tried to stick to the emic language of the participants. I was careful not to impose my own expectations, but rather to use their language in the results section of this dissertation, and to reflect and write about what they said rather than what I think they should have or I wished they would have said. During the interviews, while I was probing, I used the interview protocol with fidelity. Although I told participants that I would not share with their supervisors any negative information that they shared with me, there was always risk that some were not as candid as I might have wished. The potential for problematic reactivity because of my presence
and position had the potential to change responses, due to their (quite reasonable) perceptions of me (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Therefore, I used the emic language of the participants in the results section of the dissertation to support my interpretations (Maxwell, 2012; Murnane & Willett, 2011 Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

My own professional history intersects with the context and setting of this research in another way. A former elementary school principal, I led schools that were similar in terms of demographics and size of the schools in this study. Although I did not work as a principal in SDP of study, my history relevant here, as I have walked in their shoes. As Ravitch and Carl (2016) describe, there are two prominent ways in which my “social location” (p. 11) may have impacted this research and my ability to act as an impartial interpreter of data in this study. I have external positionality as chief academic officer and internal positionality as a former elementary school principal.

I frame this research as practitioner action research, a qualitative methodology, which is conducted in the “natural setting” (Anderson, Herr & Nihlen, p. 159) of participants. This study fits the characteristics of practitioner qualitative research detailed by Anderson, et al. (2007). Because of my positionality and as the “instrument of the research” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 45), threats to validity notwithstanding, I used my insight to create findings. Serving on the design team for professional development for principals, this study afforded me the opportunity to not only seek the answers to the research questions, but it also allowed for self-study of practices of my current organization. Last, consistent with participatory research, this study methodology facilitated an integration of
theory and practice, as well as an opportunity for the participants and me to produce critical knowledge for our organization (Anderson, et al., 2007).

**Descriptive, Theoretical and Interpretive Validity**

Theoretical validity evaluates a measure by how well the measure conforms to theoretical expectations (Creswell, 2014; De Vaus, 2002; Murnane & Willett, 2011). This study is based on the evidence-based leadership practices associated with principal effectiveness. The major of the focus of the study was the focus on these practices, and not other factors that may be associated with principal effectiveness. However, as the interviews and data analysis proceeded I had to include other factors identified by the leaders. This could have caused an over-reliance on the literature I reviewed before conducting this and an under-valuing of participant responses that were not aligned to the research-based practice.

Other threats to validity in this study were descriptive. I audio recorded each interview and had them transcribed using an online service, Rev.com. The transcripts were generally reliable, however it was evident that non-native English speakers completed some of the transcriptions. Therefore, I had to review each transcript to correct syntactic errors.

Interpretive validity was a bigger threat, mostly due to my intersecting positionality. This was assuaged by my effort to use emic (rather than the etic) language as much as possible during the findings section of the dissertation. The critical connection between the methods of this study and findings led me to pay careful attention to using the words of the participants, rather than simply reflecting on my own experiences as findings were created.
Member Checks

The use of member checks during this study supported validity and trustworthiness of the study findings. These member checks allowed the participants to weigh in on whether or not the findings and major themes felt accurate to them (Creswell, 2014). Member checks took place twice, once after the first interview and again towards the end of the study to discuss overall findings. The second member check, after I compiled the initial results, allowed for participants to identify whether they saw their responses reflected and to ensure they were comfortable with how the data was presented in this section.
Chapter 4

CONTEXT

This study examines six sites in The School District of Philadelphia (SDP) that meet the sample criteria. In this chapter I provide context about SDP, each of the schools and the study participants. For each site, I give an overview of the students the school serves and introduce each principal. I also introduce the two teacher participants and the Assistant Superintendent who supervises the school’s principal.

I offer this to contribute to readers’ understanding of the richness of the data I collected and the diversity of viewpoints that contributed to this project. However, this study is not a true multiple case study, and I do not analyze the sites individually. That is, the identity of each school is irrelevant to the overall goals of this study, which are to understand the phenomena of the practices and the habits of mind of successful school leaders, where leaders learned these practice and habits, and to make recommendations that will benefit principals and (ultimately) the students they serve. To protect the identity of participants and maintain confidentiality I have given each participant and each school a pseudonym and slightly altered the descriptions of their schools to make it more difficult to identify specific schools and the participants this study who work within them.

The School District of Philadelphia

As the 14th largest school district in the United States, the School District of Philadelphia serves 135,000 students in 219 schools. The district is also the charter authorizer for the 67,000 students currently enrolled in 86 charter schools in the city
(www.philasd.org). The district faces well documented funding (Oliff, Mai & Leachman, 2012; Superville, 2015) as well as labor challenges (Wolfman-Arent, 2016), struggling to remain solvent and to maintain a basic level of service to students and communities. Unlike the other school districts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, SDP does not have taxing authority and is dependent on city and state revenue for most of its revenue (Title 22, PA School Code). The majority of its students qualify for free and reduced meals and non-white students from traditionally low-performing student groups represent more than 65% of its students (SDP, Office of Research and Evaluation).

Principals in the SDP are faced with all of the challenges of an urban setting. Juxtaposed with a devastating budget crisis (Superville, 2015) in its fourth year in 2016, school reform efforts and high stakes testing in a system that primarily serves children living in poverty. The new and novice principal faces an uphill battle, on his or her best day. The school district’s supports for new and novice principals have suffered cuts that are even more draconian than school sites (cite), leaving SDP to struggle to provide new and novice principals the resource supports they are need to grow in their positions. Accordingly, and consistent with national trends, principal turnover is high. For example, in 2013-2014 school year the district replaced 21% of district principals equating to more than 40 and in 2014-2015 15% did not return for the next academic year (SDP Office of Research and Evaluation, 2015).

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4 In 2013 the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) created a subgroup of all students in a school who are English language learners, special education students, and/or students receiving free or reduced lunch. This group of students constitutes the subgroup of “traditionally low-achieving students.” The group was created for comparison purposes to define achievement gap.
In 2012 the state controlled school governing body, the School Reform Commission (SRC), hired a new superintendent for the 130,000 students of The School District of Philadelphia (Chang, 2012). In 2015 his contract was extended until 2022 (Alvarez, 2015). The superintendent’s management structure divides the district into thirteen networks, nine of which are geographic regions and four of which are by school portfolio type. These networks range in size from seven schools to twenty-two schools, and each is led by its own assistant superintendent. These assistant superintendents supervise the principals in their networks, and manage their instructional and operational leadership.

**Participants overall**

In the interest of respecting the confidentiality I promised the participants in this study, I do not identify the ethnicity, age, or experience level of individual participants, below. However, as a group, these factors all vary. Their pseudonyms are consistent with their apparent gender identities.

Of the six principal participants in this study, there was gender, racial and ethnic diversity. There were two men and four women and participants were African-American, Latino and White. Their apparent ages range from mid-thirties to mid-fifties. Their experience in education spans from 13 to 30 years.

The assistant superintendents had one to four years of experience in their roles, as of their participation in this study. Their apparent ages range from late thirties to early fifties. Their experience in education ranges from 15 to 29 years. Teachers were overall experienced. Their experience ranged from 5 to 25 years.
Table 2

School Sites and Participating Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>School Performance Report</th>
<th>Principal Pseudonym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastview Elementary School</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Harry Murphy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maple Ridge Elementary School</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Ronald Russell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redwood Elementary School</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Teresa Martin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverbank Elementary School</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Anna Lee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summit Elementary School</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Kathryn Ward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood Creek Elementary School</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Lillian Robinson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Eastview Elementary School**

Eastview Elementary School serves approximately 400 students, in kindergarten through grade eight. It is located in a neighborhood of rental units, a neighborhood plagued with urban blight in the form of boarded up homes and high crime rates. The school serves a population that is mostly African-American. 10% of students receive special education services and no students receive English as a Second Language instruction. 2015 PSSA achievement scores are 15% in reading for students in grades three through eight and 10% in math. Eastview school has 40% of students attending at least 95% of school days. Redwood’s School Performance Report score is 30. An SPR of 30 is in the watch category (i.e., the second lowest of the four classifications) and very close to intervene, the lowest on the rating scale.

5 The School Performance Report (SPR) card is a district created vehicle used to categorize schools into peer groups based on achievement, growth scores, student attendance, climate data (e.g. suspensions and teacher attendance) with like schools determined by student demographic profile. There are four tiers of performance in the SPR. They are from highest to lowest: Model, Reinforce, Watch and Intervene.

6 The School District of Philadelphia defines excellent attendance as 95% and reports the statistics in its School Performance Report Card.
Table 3

Eastview Elementary School Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Enrollment</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL Instruction</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Services</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSSA – Reading Proficiency</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSSA – Math Proficiency</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &gt; 95% of Days</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Performance Report</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Harry Murphy has led Eastview elementary school since 2010. He also served as a principal in another school district (where he went to high school). He became a principal in his mid-twenties.

I'm finishing my 11th year as a principal. I come from a suburban district not too far from Philadelphia. Prior to that, I was a middle school English teacher. I was also Dean of Students at the middle school and principal at two elementary schools in the other district, prior to coming to Philadelphia. [This is my] 5th year at Eastview.

Philip Wilson and Kathryn Foster have taught at Eastview Elementary School for five years and fifteen years, respectively. Ms. Foster teaches kindergarten and serves as the kindergarten lead teacher for a team of three. Mr. Wilson teaches mathematics and writing to fifth graders. In addition to his teaching duties Mr. Wilson serves as the technology teacher leader. He describes his duties as, “Being the go-to if teachers don’t understand something technology related.”

Donna Collins is the assistant superintendent for Eastview’s network. This is Ms. Collins’ first year in this role.

I think my job is to support the schools around increasing outcomes for their students. The first half of the year was around needs assessment, just learning the school. I did a very formal walkthrough at each school, where schools had the
opportunity to bring their teams to the table and just talk about what the schools are doing, their obstacles, the challenges they're having, the points of pride, their focus for the year. After we talked about their focus, we visited classrooms (not the team). The principal and the network team visited classrooms to see if we saw those things in place in the classrooms. From the walkthroughs in the classrooms, we developed together an action plan which was going to be the basis of the work for the year, aligning it to the school roles. Every time I went back to the building for a visit, that was the document that we used to base our school visits on.

Ms. Collins worked in SDP as a principal prior to becoming an assistant superintendent. Therefore, she supervises principals who were recently her colleagues.

**Maple Ridge Elementary School**

Maple Ridge Elementary School serves approximately 600 students, in kindergarten through grade six. It is located in a neighborhood of neatly manicured twin and row homes. The school serves a population that is 70% white. 15% of students receive special education services and 5% are English language learners. 2015 PSSA achievement scores are 50% in reading for students in grades three through six and 35% in math. Maple Ridge school has 70% of students attending at least 95% of school days. Maple Ridge’s SPR is 70. An SPR of 70 is in the reinforce category (i.e., the second highest of the four classifications).

Table 4

Eastview Elementary School Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Students</th>
<th>% of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Enrollment</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL Instruction</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Services</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSSA – Reading Proficiency</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSSA – Math Proficiency</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &gt; 95% of Days</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Performance Report</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ronald Russell has led Maple Ridge elementary school for eight years. Mr. Russell’s experiences prior to becoming the principal include a brief stint in a central office. Mr. Russell was the principal of two schools, an elementary school and then a middle school that eventually officially merged to become Maple Ridge Elementary School.

Sharon Thompson and Amanda Jackson are the teacher participants from Maple Ridge. Ms. Thompson is a National Board Certified kindergarten teacher\(^7\). She has taught in the school for twelve years and has twenty years of teaching experience. In addition to her teaching duties she serves on several school committees, including the School Advisory Council (SAC). Ms. Jackson is the special education teacher leader. She is currently working on her principal certification and has taught at the school for four years.

Principal Russell is supervised by the same assistant superintendent as the principal of Redwood, Mr. Patterson. He has been her supervisor for two years.

**Redwood Elementary School**

Redwood Elementary School serves approximately 600 students, in kindergarten through grade five. It is located in a neighborhood of neatly groomed single family and townhomes. The school serves a diverse population with students from more than 50 countries, speaking more than 30 different heritage languages. Approximately one-third

\(^7\) National Board Certification (NBC) is a voluntary, advanced teaching credential that goes beyond state licensure. NBC has national standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do. The National Board certifies teachers who successfully complete its rigorous certification process. [http://www.nbpts.org/national-board-certification](http://www.nbpts.org/national-board-certification)
of students receive ESOL (English as a Second Language) instruction and 10% of students receive special education services. Pennsylvania System of State Assessments (PSSA) achievement scores are 40% in reading for students in grades three, four and five and 40% in math. Redwood elementary students have excellent attendance with more than 70% attending at least 95% of school days. Finally, Redwood is a peer leader for its School Performance Report (SPR) peer group. Redwood’s SPR is 65. An SPR of 65 is in the reinforce category (i.e., the second highest of the four classifications).

Table 5
Redwood Elementary School Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Students</th>
<th>600</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Enrollment</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL Instruction</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Services</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSSA – Reading Proficiency</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSSA – Math Proficiency</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &gt; 95% of Days</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Performance Report</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teresa Martin has worked her entire career in Philadelphia and grew up attending archdiocese schools in the city. She has been the principal of Redwood elementary for ten years. This is her first and only principalship.

I started as a substitute teacher back in 1987. From that route, I enrolled at [a local university]. They had a program for students who had bachelor's degrees in anything other than education. It was an accelerated program with 45 credits, which then you received your master's degree. That included [the] work internship. I worked at that school. They kept me. Another teacher went out sick or something, and they kept me until the end of the year. I did that, and in 1992 I became a permanent teacher in Philadelphia at Leeds Middle School. I worked there for eight years. After the eight years, I applied to get a job at the district [office] as a - back years ago, we called it a facilitator. I was assigned five schools - one school each day of the week. I went to the schools and worked with new teachers, assisting them with better strategies and skills, classroom management
skills, whatever I needed to help them. After that, I did that for three years and then they phased out that particular job. During that time – my mother always said “always have more than one egg in the basket” – so while I was working as a facilitator, I went back to school at night for training to get my administrative certificate, so when that job was phased out, I was ready to become an assistant principal. At that point, they didn't want anyone to remain, so they got rid of the whole school - the teachers, the staff, administration - and I went from there to Vanguard. I was at Vanguard, which at the time was a middle school. While I was there, it was one of the five schools that became a high school. Each year, we lost a grade and we gained a grade, so I was able to see how you grow a school from a fifth grade through eighth grade to a five-through-twelve [school]. I was there for four years and then I interviewed and became the principal here at Redwood.

In her ten years as principal, Martin has hired more than half of the staff at Redwood. The two teachers who participated in the study (Laura Lee and Sandra Lewis) have each been at the school for more than ten years, the entire tenure of the principal. I asked each principal to identify both teachers whom s/he hired and whom s/he had not hired so that I could randomly invite a potential participant from each group.

Unfortunately, Principal Martin’s list contained at least one error, resulting in both of the selected teachers predating her tenure at Redwood.

Laura Lee is the school-based teacher leader at Redwood. As described by Principal Martin, at Redwood the school-based teacher leader assists the principal with the management and instructional leadership of the school, as well as serving as the unofficial dean of students. Ms. Lee told me that, in addition to her those duties, “I also help with Math [Night] and Literacy Night, the school fair, fifth grade promotion ceremonies, as well as any other catch-all things where they need an extra hand.”

Amanda Lewis teaches English as a Second Language to second and third graders and has been a teacher for sixteen years, thirteen of them at Redwood. Prior to her joining the school District of Philadelphia, she taught in a suburban district in the region.
Joseph Patterson, assistant superintendent for Redwood network, has been in the role for four years, with 25 previous years of experience in education.

My main focus area is improving instruction in each classroom, and being able to reach each and every student in every classroom, making sure their needs are met – whether it's they're struggling, or they're gifted or talented, or middle of the road students.

Mr. Patterson has supervised Principal Martin for two years.

**Riverbank Elementary School**

Nestled in a tree-lined community in one of the historic neighborhoods of Philadelphia, Riverbank elementary serves 300 students in kindergarten through grade eight. 20% of students receive special education services and virtually no students receive English as a Second Language instruction. 2015 PSSA achievement scores are 30% in reading for students in grades three through eight and 10% in math. Less than half, 45%, of Riverbank elementary students have excellent attendance (i.e., attending at least 95% of school days). Riverbank’s SPR is 40. An SPR of 40 is in the watch category (i.e., the second lowest of the four classifications).

Table 6

Riverbank Elementary School Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSSA – Reading Proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSSA – Math Proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &gt; 95% of Days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Performance Report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

76
Anna Lee attended a public high school in Philadelphia and has been the principal of Riverbank School for seven years.

I started off as a teacher in Philadelphia. I taught here for six years, was a school-based teacher leader for mathematics, left the district in 2005 and went to [another district]. I served as an AP for three years there, and then as acting principal in middle school. I returned to Philadelphia as principal at Riverbank School, so I've been here seven years now.

The teacher participants at Riverbank School are both veteran teachers. Andrea Diaz is the school-based teacher leader. According to Principal Lee, Ms. Diaz' serves as the unofficial assistant principal and assists with instructional and managerial leadership in all ways – with the important exception of evaluating teachers. She supports new, novice and struggling teachers, assists with discipline, works with parents and supports all aspects of school life. Jeffrey Adams is a second grade teacher. In addition to his responsibilities for his own classroom, he sponsors an after-school club which helps students be physically active and supports self-discipline and self-regulation.

Rebecca Hall has supervised Ms. Lee for three years.

The core work of an assistant superintendent is instructional leadership. So, what is my impact and influence as a content expert? Not knowing all the answers obviously, but [rather] really having my work grounded in the day-to-day instructional leadership. Making sure that the principals really know what constitutes mastery teaching, really understanding systems that will lead to having them focusing on instruction. My work as a[n assistant] superintendent – even though as a generalist with operations, systems, family-community engagement – has really been (first and foremost) grounded in instructional leadership. Everything we did in my curriculum as assistant superintendent was really focused on instruction, so every time I was with [principals] we focused on instruction. The work – if I were to articulate and getting really tight in right now as it evolves to be instructional supervisors – has really been the work for the past 3 years of me working with all these assistant superintendents, with all the principals.
Summit Elementary School

Summit Elementary School serves approximately 800 students in kindergarten through grade four. Located in a neighborhood suffering from urban blight, there are many boarded up homes and active drug activity at all hours of the day near Summit. The church in the neighborhood shuttered its doors approximately five years ago, according to the school principal. The school is comprised of two buildings, one of which is located about a block away from the main building and houses the kindergarten students. 15% of students receive English as a second language instruction and 10% of students receive special education services. 2015 PSSA achievement scores were 15% in reading for students in grades three and four and 15% in math. 40% of Summit Elementary students attend at least 95% of school days. Summit’s SPR is 38. An SPR of 38 is in the watch category (i.e., the second lowest of the four classifications). On the other hand, in 2015 Summit Elementary School was recognized by both the state and SDP for having the highest growth scores in the district.

Table 7

Summit Elementary School Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of Students</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Enrollment</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL Instruction</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Services</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSSA – Reading Proficiency</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSSA – Math Proficiency</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &gt; 95% of Days</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Performance Report</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kathryn Ward, the principal of Summit School, has been the principal for six years. Although a few teachers remain from before her tenure, she reports that most of the staff is new to her school.

I went to college much later. I was in military. I received a lot of, in my opinion, a lot of leadership examples, leadership and non-leadership examples [in the military]. Once I exited or I should say, was honorably discharged from the Military, I went to work at the local hospital with a job that I learned while in the military. At almost 30, at 29, I went to college. And pretty much went for 6 years straight until ending up with my master's in education and later on, years later, went back to get a principal certification. I've been a principal now for six years. This is my sixth year here at Summit and I was an assistant principal for two years at [another SDP school].

Principal Ward’s entire career in education has been in the School District of Philadelphia. In addition to what she details above, she was previously a supervisor for English as a Second Language (ESOL), an ESOL instructor and a classroom elementary teacher.

The teacher participants from Summit, Jane Scott and Sarah Morgan, have worked at the school for twelve years and two years, respectively. Ms. Scott teaches fourth grade and sponsors multiple after-school clubs. Ms. Morgan is a kindergarten teacher, and therefore does not teach in the main building.

Brenda Bailey supervises the principal at Summit Elementary School. Ms. Bailey previously served as a principal’s supervisor in another district and is in her first year as assistant superintendent in the School District of Philadelphia. Ms. Bailey describes her role as “a balance or a scale. You've got accountability on one side. You've got support on the other.” Prior to supervising principals, Ms. Bailey was an elementary principal in another district as well, as a principal in a suburban district in the southern United States.
Wood Creek Elementary School

Wood Creek elementary school serves approximately 300 students in kindergarten through grade four. It is located in a gentrified neighborhood bordered by two universities. The school serves a population that is mostly African-American. 10% of students receive special education services and 5% are English Language Learners. 2015 PSSA achievement scores are 55% in reading for students in grades three and four and 40% in math. Wood Creek school has 70% of students attending at least 95% of school days. The principal reports that 20% of her students, (i.e., approximately 60 students) are homeless. Some live in homeless shelters, while others maintain homeless status – as their parents/guardians have not established a permanent residence. Wood Creek’s SPR is 65. Finally, Wood Creek is a peer leader for its SPR peer group. An SPR of 65 is in the reinforce category (i.e., the second highest of the four classifications).

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>% of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Student Enrollment</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL Instruction</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Services</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSSA – Reading Proficiency</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSSA – Math Proficiency</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &gt; 95% of Days</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Performance Report</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lillian Robinson is the principal of Wood Creek elementary school. The school has partnerships with the two local universities adjacent to the school. Principal Robinson is in her first assignment as principal and has been at the school for six years.
This is my sixth year as a principal. I've been at Wood Creek Elementary as a principal all six of the years that I've served as principal. Prior to that, I was assistant principal at Gotham Elementary – also a K-4 school. I was there for two years. Prior to my time as an assistant principal, I was in a position that the district had, at the time, called Intervention Administrator. The work of an Intervention Administrator – essentially we were assigned to regions. We had a caseload of schools within that region. Your job, really, was to troubleshoot with the principal and the leadership team of that school around why they were failing to make AYP, when that existed within the district. Prior to that, I was the Director of Instruction and there were 27 schools in Region 8. I worked directly with the regional superintendent around all the instructional initiatives in the district. I had a team of coaches, also, that I worked with. I was a lead academic coach before that. Before that, I was an instructional coach for literacy. Before that, I was a reading specialist. Before that, I was an elementary school teacher. I taught every grade - first through fourth.

Principal Robinson is the only principal participant in the study with extensive central office experience.

The two teacher participants in the study from Wood Creek, Amy Young and Julie Turner, are very experienced, having twenty years and thirteen years of teaching experience, respectively. Ms. Young, a National Board Certified teacher who teaches first grade, has been at Wood Creek for seventeen years and Ms. Turner, a second grade teacher, has been at the school for three years. Ms. Turner attended Wood Creek as a student. In addition to her teaching duties at Wood Creek, Ms. Young teaches teacher candidates at one of the local universities. Ms. Turner tutors students after school and is completing the requirements to become certified as a school principal.

Principal Robinson’s supervisor is Ryan King. Mr. King has supervised principals for four years in two districts to include the SDP.

The way I look at my work is I'm responsible for overall outcome of student achievement, like, is a school progressing? Within that, it's mainly about leadership development, so it's about how I work with my leaders, whether it's in their schools or through professional development, PLCs, around their actions and their behaviors of how they would work with their teachers and their school.
community to improve the outcomes for students through improving climate, instructional practice, analyzing data, looking at the scope and sequence, backward mapping standards, things like that.

Mr. King has supervised Principal Robinson for two years.

I am thankful to all of the participants in the study. All the interviews took place over two weeks during the end of the school year, a time that can be particularly busy for educators. I am grateful for the time they gave to this study. However, I especially appreciate their dedication of each and every one of them to the students and communities they serve.
Chapter 5

RESULTS: FIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND SELF-EFFICACY

In this chapter, I present the findings of research question one, on principals’ enactment of five research-based leadership practices.

- Distributed Leadership.
- Creating a climate conducive to teaching and learning.
- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students.
- Improving instruction.
- Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement.

I then briefly explore the idea of self-efficacy and personal qualities that emerged during the interviews (RQ #3). In the next chapter, I present findings examining where leaders identify they learned how to enact the strategies they associate with each practice (RQ #2). I also present findings on recommendations that leaders have for principal development based on their experience as effective urban elementary school leaders (RQ #4).

Distributed Leadership

Based on their responses, principals in the study vary in their enactment of distributed leadership. Distributed leadership, also known as shared leadership, collaborative leadership and democratic leadership (Diamond & Spillane, 2007), describes the degree and manner in which principals involve the faculty and staff they lead in the management and instructional leadership of their schools. As I describe the
results in this section, I assume that there is not a “pure original state” (Diamond & Spillane, 2007 p. 15) of distributed leadership and that participants’ responses reflect their working definition of distributed leadership and how it is enacted in their schools. The principals in this study appear to intentionally integrate transformational, instructional and organizational leadership with distributed leadership in each of their schools.

In this section, I examine the themes that emerged during the interviews with the six school leaders. I first examine how the leaders in this study report utilizing distributed leadership as a mechanism for coping with stress and the challenges associated with leadership. Next, I discuss how participants describe how distributed leadership is used as a mechanism for sharing subject-matter or technical expertise for school improvement. Third, I examine how distributed leadership enhances and builds trust and collegiality between teachers and administration. Last, I present the connection of distributed leadership to a shared vision. These leaders’ enactment of this practice demonstrates intentionality. It is a means to an end and distributed leadership in their schools is purposeful and deliberate.

Distributed Leadership: Coping with Stress and the Challenges of Leadership

Participants’ responses about how they enacted distributed leadership were varied, but can all be characterized as an effort that led to better functioning of the school. The job of principal, similar to all leadership positions with high degrees of accountability, can be a lonely endeavor (Rooney, 2000). Immersed in their own work and dealing with the demands of students, parents, teachers, central office and community, principals have
many bosses. Describing their own understanding of distributed leadership, several participants said it often taking the pressure off of making decisions alone.

For example, Principal Murphy told me about the challenges of his first year. The idea of being an authority figure (as the principal) was daunting and he knew he did not have all of the answers, but that the teachers would look to him as the person with the answers. He used his staff as a way to generate ideas and to figure out what he should focus on first.

Certainly, when I became a principal I didn't know where to start first. I didn't know which issue to tackle first. I didn't know which issue was an issue. Learning how to say, "Pull a team together of professionals who have different experiences, let's talk about this work and what we want the outcome to look like and how we're going to get there."

Principal Murphy described the loneliness of his first year as a principal and how it was difficult for him (or for that matter at any other time) to ask for help. It was difficult for Principal Murphy, who became a principal in his 20’s, to ask teachers for help for fear of being viewed as “clueless” It was difficult to ask his supervisor for help for fear of being viewed as incompetent. He uses distributed leadership as a way to leverage the expertise of his team and as a new principal to fill in gaps in knowledge for stuff he admitted, “I should have known.”

Principal Ward also told me about using distributed leadership to take pressure of making decisions alone.

We know right away whether we want to offer that person a job. We almost don't have to convince each other. If there's ever a tie, I'm like, “It's probably best we don't go with that.” Like, “If you're not all on board, we shouldn't go with them.” Observation, so I go with Terry (which is our teacher leader/SBTL) if it’s a literacy lesson I'm going to observe. If I know I'm going to observe math, I like to take Mary.
She uses the expertise of her teacher to construct meaningful feedback for others, capitalizing on her team’s content expertise.

Principal Russell described how having a School Advisory Council (SAC) of teachers to help make budgetary decisions that impact staffing helped mitigate his stress and anxiety from having to tell someone that they no longer have a position at the school.

By spreading it out and letting people have their say, you don’t feel like you’re the sole person deciding, solely who is deciding who stays and who goes.

In all of these examples, principals detail that making decisions with others made them easier and in some confirmed a decision that he/she may have made anyway but that the team served as sounding board. They further shared that this ability to share decision making seemed to increase buy-in, especially when difficult decisions needed to be made.

**Distributed Leadership: Sharing Expertise and Sharing the Work Load**

Participants highlighted the possibility of schools benefiting from the expertise of others as they discussed their enactment of distributed leadership. For example, at Riverbank elementary, Principal Lee elaborated on the school-wide benefit of augmenting the instructional program with new content.

I like to feel like I create a culture of support where people know that if they assume [a] leadership position, they're going to have the support of the principal. My TTL [Technology Teacher Leader], when I initially got here, she was a science teacher. She said to me that she enjoyed technology and that was an area she would like to work in. The following year, she taught a science prep for my older students and she did technology for the younger students. We put together a lab. It went so well, I said, “This is what we're going to do. Science needs to go back into the hands of classroom teachers because that's where it should be anyway, and we're going to get a lab together and we're going to make you full-time technology.” Since that time, our students, every year for probably the past two or three years, have taken home awards at the technology fair. We have a lot of things going on. We're starting blended learning. Kids have just learned so
much. We have a lot of programs that incorporate the use of technology, but that was because [she] and I collaborated about what it would look like and how she would become a leader in that regard.

In this example, the principal leveraged the expertise of her teacher to lead instruction in a new and innovative way. This example further illustrates how distributed leadership is not done haphazardly. The principal was *intentional* in how she embraced distributed leadership – in this instance, for the purpose of instructional enhancement and creating opportunities for school-wide instructional improvement.

Participants shared how, in addition to addressing instructional needs, distributed leadership offers many other benefits. It fosters teamwork and the ability to address climate issues. It provides struggling teachers with support and access to better differentiated professional development by utilizing the expertise of the teaching and support staff.

We'll get everyone on board, but we discuss the “What's going on?” and then people volunteer to do this or to do the other. Everyone steps up and runs off as that lead in that area, and things get done. I feel I need to give myself credit for that because they know they can do that. That is expected of them. (Principal Ward)

We had an issue today where a child was in crisis and each person – the counselor, the psychologist, the teacher, and me – were in sync. We knew what to do and were coordinated. It feels good, although the situation is so sad. When we have a safety emergency our team doesn’t have to guess, everyone has a leadership role and knows that we are counting on them. I even tell the teachers you are leaders too – in your classroom of the children. (Principal Ward)

I'm just trying to think of all the different things that I know they need, and especially if something is terribly off. We're talking everything is off; there's an immediate SWAT team in the classroom. The SWAT teams comes in when a teacher is really struggling and helps a teacher with everything from classroom management to daily lesson planning. (Principal Martin)

My SEL [Special Education Leader] is phenomenal, so she leads professional development for special education instruction, helping teachers to understand
what good inclusive practices look like and what good inclusive planning looks like as well. My school-based teacher leader – who was a reading specialist before she was a teacher leader – she's able to really go into the classrooms and provide good feedback to teachers on practices around guided reading. (Principal Murphy)

In each of these examples, principals discussed how they utilize distributed leadership as a way of sharing the work load, addressing a school need with the goals of instructional improvement and/or school climate management. The participating principals in this study spoke of considered enactment of the practice of distributed leadership, defined by the leader and implemented by a variety of school actors for specific purposes and clear outcomes.

**Distributed Leadership: Building Trust and Collegiality**

*Building trust* is critical to effective principal leadership and overall school improvement efforts (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). A critical component of relational trust in schools is collegiality around teaching and learning. All of the participants in this study spoke of nurturing opportunities for collaboration.

One such example, from Principal Robinson, centered around lesson study.

Just one example of collaboration – something that we did this year that I think really supported teachers and their growth and practice – during our grade group meetings, we implemented a lesson study process. Teachers would plan collaboratively. They would plan a lesson. One teacher on the team would be identified to teach that lesson. The other members of the team, as well as myself, would go into the classroom, observe the lesson, and debrief it and talk about – not so much talk about it from the perspective of, “What are the strengths of the lesson and what would you do differently?” That was certainly part of the conversation, but it really was used as a vehicle for the teachers to almost have a mirror on their practice, and for other teachers to see things that they then could apply in their own classroom.

This epitomizes how a principal can use opportunities for teams of teachers to work together to improve practice. The teachers serve as the experts rather than the principal in
giving feedback to colleagues. The principal has handed over her power to provide meaningful and actionable feedback to teachers over to the teachers themselves. The teachers hold each other accountable for the changes and share in each other’s successes.

Similarly, Principal Murphy explained that distributed leadership is a way to support collegiality and peer accountability. Teacher collaboration around a collective goal can be an effective vehicle to improve schools (Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, 2007).

I think that's how I really empower my staff to feel like they have a voice. I believe that's why they implement like the next steps – because it's coming from their colleagues in the building. I think that makes them believe it and be more attuned to really working together to make sure they exercise it.

**Distributed Leadership: A Vehicle for Shared Vision**

All of the participating principals discussed how anything they do in their schools using distributed leadership is done with their overall vision of the schools in mind. They discussed saying “no” to suggestions for collaboration or to leading an effort because the teacher or community partner who suggested it could not make a clear connection to how the effort would support student achievement. Principal Martin was quite clear on this.

Also, listening to their ideas about things they want us to do, whether it's activities, fund-raising, a book that they want me to purchase, a program they want me to implement, things like that. We talk about that together, and listen to them. Not making it just my decision. We decide and we vote, *how will this improve our student's scores?* Because it always has to come back to student achievement.

Participants described their enactment of distributed leadership and connected that enactment to the school vision. This is consistent with intentionality of effort or *paying attention to everything*. Because, as they describe, they pay attention to the little things, several principals discussed how they struggle with giving up control and sharing
responsibility with their faculty. It is likely not a coincidence that no one shared a
negative experience with delegation. Although they delegated, they continued to pay
attention to the progress of an initiative or activity and/or had in place a system to
monitor effectiveness. Their willingness to say “No” to initiatives suggested by teachers
demonstrated attentiveness to insuring that resources and time are used to support efforts
that everyone can clearly connect with the school vision (i.e., improved student
outcomes).

I have said, “No,” to teachers who want to lead efforts and to many things
because it could not be connected to our school goals. (Principal Lee)

Partners come in with a lot of ideas of stuff that they want to do and sometimes it
is disconnected. They never want to hear “No.” [They might say,] “Hey we want
to sponsor an after school robotics club with your third graders.” Well we have an
activity going on already with our third graders that supports our school wide
literacy goals so this is not a good time. STEM being such a big deal right now
they we resort to *guilting* you in to it or tattling on you to make you look bad.
They have written a grant without really checking because that is what they want
to do. We appreciate them taking the lead but they need to understand who is
steering the ship. (Principal Robinson)

The two quotes above illustrate how leadership practices cannot be considered in
isolation. Principals do not practice distributed leadership one day and vision on another.
Any practice carried out by an effective principal must be connected to the overall goals
of the organization and the *why* needs to be evident to everyone in involved. The fact that
participants did not share negative experiences around distributed leadership can be
attributed to checks and balances about the connection to the principal’s expectations.
The principals have made his/her expectations clear and everyone in the school leading
efforts aligns their work with those expectations.
The leaders in this study use distributed leadership as a mechanism for coping with stress and the challenges associated with leadership, sharing subject matter expertise, building trust and collegiality and enacting a shared vision. Although they delegate responsibility all have some system for monitoring the progress of those responsible for leadership in their schools. These intentional efforts are connected to other leadership practices and are all focused on student outcomes.

Creating a Climate Conducive to Teaching and Learning

The scholarly research is consistent in its findings that the *strongest* factor linking principal effectiveness to student achievement is setting the conditions for student success (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). School climate is many things, but to most it is the way a school feels.

- **Do people want to be there?**
- **How are the people there treated by their school administrator?**
- **How do the teachers interact?**
- **How do the students interact?**

School climate is in the answers to those questions, and in the combinations of those answers. In this section I detail the findings around these six principals managing the climate in their six schools. In Chapter 4 (Context), I provided quantitative data about each school’s demographics (including behavioral and attendance data). This *qualitative* review of data here about climate gets more to *the heart of the school*, as some researchers refer to climate in elementary schools (MacNeil, et al., 2009, Thapa, Cohen,

- Safety
- Relationships
- Teaching and Learning
- Institutional Environment
- The School Improvement Processes

These five align with Thapa et al.’s (2009) meta-analytic review of school climate research, which was quite helpful to me in understanding of all of the dimensions school climate. I present these themes through the voices of the participants as they discussed their enactment of this leadership practice.

**Safety and Behavioral Supports**

Philadelphia has the highest deep poverty rate among the largest 10 cities in the United States (Lubrano, 2015), and the challenges these schools and the children they serve face mirror their local communities. Several principals mentioned safety and behavior as their number one concern. Principal Martin said, “Safety is important to us. That’s why I’m a little upset at myself because I counted it last in my response to you.” She discussed safety drills and providing safety tips to her staff each month. The need to monitor safety and create a safe climate for their students was construed by at least two principals in terms of the physical plant and a reaction to the neighborhood environment.

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8 The annual salary for a single person at half the poverty line is around $5,700; for a family of four, it's around $11,700. Philadelphia's deep-poverty rate is 12.9 percent, or around 200,000 people (philabundance.org)
My students know how to do a lockdown drill so quickly. We have them regularly, due to shootings and other events in the neighborhood, such as when the police or US Marshalls are doing a house-to-house search. We frequently have to cancel outdoor recess. My teachers and students know what to do. When it happens during the instructional day, my students sit on the floor and do their work. The teacher sits on the floor too, so as not to be in the line of fire if someone is outside shooting.

Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS)

Three of the six principals told me that their schools have a formal program for behavior, Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS). PBIS is an evidence-based approach to school-wide discipline, with an emphasis on “school-wide systems of support that include proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors to create positive school environments” (OSEP Technical Assistance Center, 2014). These principals use PBIS to contribute to building a safe climate in their schools.

Each of these three principal indicated that they, with support from school staff, applied for a grant to pay for the program. The PBIS grant applications required a minimum percentage of staff to buy-in, through mandatory professional development in the summer prior to the start of the school year. These principals also spoke about their schools before instituting PBIS, what PBIS provided for students and staff, and their belief that PBIS has had a positive impact on students through improving the climate of their schools. Principal Murphy spoke to advantages of having gone through this.

That's really helped us to really have common language around what good conduct looks like and what good student expectations are, and how do you measure that/how do you capture data to inform better decision making around climate and behavior.

According to these principals, this allowed them to plan professional development, tweak plans or redeploy personnel to improve the climate. Getting all staff
on board for this new initiative came with challenges. At Summit School for example, Principal Ward discussed the lengths she had to go to have a resistant key support staff member participate in the effort to wear a lanyard (that housed the tickets students received to reinforce positive behavior).

That being said, she was one of my, “I'm not wearing a lanyard.” I said, “Oh, yes, you are – because this memo says you will and here's your lanyard. Now put it on. This is what we follow here. Now your job is to make sure that you give 10 to 30 out a day. Look for people doing the right thing. You seem to find everyone doing the wrong thing, find them doing the right thing.” I can't change her, so she's still one of my, "I'm anti-PBIS." But everyone [else] is on board. She is feeling the pressure from her colleagues, because they told her that it is good for the kids.

Principal Ward understands that climate for her school includes buy-in for her staff. It would be difficult to focus on climate when some staff members are not on board. In this case, she made a point with this staff member that this is important to their school and to their students and that reinforcing their positive behavior is something she expects from all staff members.

Principal Robinson, from Wood Creek Elementary School, also noted the need for all school staff to fully participate in PBIS. She reported that, because her teachers have systems in place, have well established routines and that instruction is good, there are fewer behavior problems in classrooms. However, outside of classrooms, where students have their unstructured time, there are still issues with behavior.

We spend a lot of time doing training for support staff. What I've found is most of my teachers are fairly experienced. I have a few new teachers, but most of my teachers are fairly experienced. Classroom management issues, things of that nature, are not really – you always have some outliers in every classroom, but for the most part, referrals from the classroom are really not occurring very frequently. Any kind of discipline referrals are coming out of the more non-structured times, when students are not with their classroom teacher.
Principal Robinson’s theory is that if students are engaged in the classroom that creates a climate where there will be few discipline problems. Her focus is on the best instruction possible and student engagement, which together diminish opportunities for students to go off track.

Other Token Economies

Schools without a formal PBIS program also have some kind of token economy. At Riverbank, Principal Lee has a point system in place, with a monthly reinforcement activity called *Riverbank Earns Rewards*.

Students receive points every day for being in school, being on time, being dressed in their uniform, having completed homework, participating in class, and demonstrating good citizenship. Every child knows off the bat, if you are in school on time in your uniform, you already have three points. Other three points you have to work a little bit harder for, so you get six points every day. At the end of whatever rating period we're doing, say we're going for a three-week period, maybe the total amount of points you could have earned would be 18 points. In order to be eligible for any special event that we have in the school – it could be assembly, it could be a trip, it could be pizza party, ice cream party – they always have to have at least 85% of the total points to be eligible.

This effort to have a single-school culture through a token economy reinforces the climate expectations for students. Students focus on how they are productive in ways that the reinforcement matters to them and they want to do well.

Similarly, Principal Martin at Redwood has a school-wide system to ensure that students receive feedback for “doing the right thing.”

We have lots of incentives built in. We have our daily shout-outs for perfect attendance. We have our shout-outs for students that are doing well in other areas. We have our *Get Caught Being Good* coupons, which can be given by anybody who walks in the building. If you were in the hall and you saw a class, and you could grab a slip. They're out on the counter. You could fill in a name and you could give it. At the end of the month, those are all tallied, and the three classes that have the most *Get Caught Being Goods* are celebrated.
The focus on positive behavior reinforces the climate expectations of the school. Students expect to be reinforced for what they do right, rather than reprimanded for what they do wrong.

From the principals’ perspectives, the token economy is a way to ensure that all students are rewarded, and it frees individual classroom teachers from having to come up with their own schemes to reward students. The notion of a single-school culture is important to all of the principals in the study and each talked about the importance of consistency in how teachers deal with safety and behavioral issues, as well as how consistency is experienced by parents and students.

It also helped me to get everybody on the same page, because it's a horrible thing when a parent calls and says, “I have three kids in school and my oldest wasn't in uniform. I know, because I didn't have a chance to wash, but she's going on a trip and my other two, the teacher has a different set of standards.” I wanted to eliminate all of that. Community needs to know, whether you have five kids here or one kid, the standards and expectations are what they are. The teacher next door should have the same expectations as the teacher on the next floor.

It is important that parents have the same or similar experience if they have multiple children. It helps parents reinforce school expectations if the climate expectations are the same throughout.

Pledges

All of the schools in this study have a ritual for daily school opening, where students recite a pledge. The principals shared that they believe that this is a way for students to reflect every morning and to reinforce behavioral expectations daily. The Eastview Scholars’ Pledge is typical of the form.

We, the scholars of Eastview Elementary School, will achieve and succeed. We will believe in ourselves and one another. We will act responsibly and honestly with self-respect, self-reliance, and concern for others. We will take our studies
seriously, complete all assignments, and make no excuses for not trying. We will be dedicated, committed and self-confident students. We will never give up if we falter or fail. Instead we will reach out, get help, and keep going. We will live well, dream big, and aim high. After we graduate from college, we will work hard to make this world a better place. We are scholars. We will succeed.

In two schools, whole school recites their pledge in unison, in the school-yard. At the other four schools, students recite their pledge in the classroom while it is recited over the public address system. The pledge at Eastview school is representative of the pledges at all of the schools. Students understand the expectations for the school and it reinforces a safe climate.

Leader Visibility

Principals also identified leader visibility as a support for safety and student behavior. All of the leaders reported that they greet students first thing in the morning and see them off in the evening. They also talked about being available to parents to address concerns rather than letting them fester and having them wait for an appointment. Principal Russell said, “Many things can be diffused by just the parent knowing that the principal knows.” That visibility extends to the classrooms and an ethic of care that is modeled by the principal.

Principals Martin explicitly linked visibility to safety.

Make sure I’m visible in the classrooms. Make sure the kids knew who I was. Made sure the kids knew that this was our school and not my school or the teachers' school and that we all have to buy into this vision of a safe place, a loving place, and a place where we can encourage and foster learning in kids.

The principal is seen in these schools as a calm and reassuring presence. The principal is also an important figure in communicating and supporting expectations for student
behavior. The principals’ presence reinforces what he/she communicates to students about school expectations via the school rules, pa announcements and the school pledges.

**Relationships**

These school leaders highlighted the foundational work they do to improve student behavior by fostering positive relationships between and among students, staff, administrators and parents. Principal Murphy at Eastview, as he puts it, “Took one step back” to the relationships that students had with staff and how he felt the staff (who was mostly white) did not understand the students’ context. More bluntly put, they had no idea what it is like to be black and poor. During the spring prior to implementing PBIS, he provided professional development to teachers on understanding black children and families, children living in poverty and Mindset.

I also knew, too, that I had to do a lot of work with my teachers to understand – to help them understand – the children that they teach. Most of the schools that I've been in have always been predominantly African American, and predominantly schools that are low income. And the teaching staff never looked like the children. So really getting them to understand the importance of understanding culture and norms and so forth, so that they can really create a safe space for children, so that [students] can take risks in the classroom.

Principal Murphy understands that children will respond positively to caring adults. He further understand that to create that climate his staff must understand the children’s experience and be open to how people from a background different from their own conceptualize and experience the world and – more specifically – how they experience relationships with and expectations of their teachers.

This extended to a reset of relationships with parents. Principals detailed making time to meet with parents, especially those who were in distress because of a conflict or those parents who themselves need support. Principal Russell told me about an instance
when a parent had a job interview, but had no one to pick her child up after school
because weather (i.e., heat) forced an early school closure.

I will have a parent come to me in distress. A parent came to me yesterday and
she was telling me she has some new job. She just heard that there's a possibility
that the school is going to close. What will we do with our daughter? I said,
“Watch your daughter till you get here. Don’t worry about it.” It was … She knew
that she felt assured that she could be okay. It was not a new job; it was a new job
interview, at 1 o'clock. I said, “You worry about the job interview. I'm not going
anywhere. Go! We’ll watch your kid until you get here.” I think that that
connection has to be there, but it has to be promoted.

Here, Principal Russell used relationship building to promote a climate of acceptance (of
the parent’s experience and context). He explained that he would be in the building
anyway and therefore accommodating the parent was a little thing that went a long way.
He also understood that the parent would share this experience with other parents and that
when he needed to enforce a not-so-popular policy that these kinds of accommodations
build “school capital” with parents.

Wood Creek Elementary School serves a large homeless population, and many of
Principal Robinson’s students do not live with their parents. She meets monthly with the
directors of the local shelters to ensure that they are aware of what is going on at the
school. Through this, she is able to learn of some of the challenges that her students face
that she can share with teachers and use to provide support plans for these students at her
schools.

I have a large homeless population. More than 20% of my students live in five
different shelters near here and are zoned to this school. I meet with the directors
monthly. I share what we are doing and the programs we have going on and they
update me on what’s going on with the children. There are many barriers for these
students, but we try to make sure that we provide everything they need. That is
made easier if we have good information about what’s going on with them.
Principal Robinson’s understanding of all of the actors who interface with children living in a homeless shelter reinforces the role that the workers in the homeless shelter play in supporting children’s attendance, ability to complete homework and allows staff to fill in when parents are unavailable to support their child. It also supports the shelter as a partner in the children’s education and allows the shelter to leverage resources that support school goals and student outcomes.

Principal Robinson builds relationships to promote a climate of acceptance of students who are homeless and an ethic of care that goes beyond her job related responsibility. She uses these relationships to work with the directors of the homeless shelter in building relationships. These relationships are powerful for the students and families who experience them, and also set a tone for the staff, in that these principals model understanding the challenges that students and families face – not just in words, but in deeds. Both of the examples above illustrate the importance of understanding the context of parents and families and how a school can in small ways ameliorate familial stressors affecting education outcomes. Principal Murphy’s enactment is also directly connected to school attendance. If the parent has to worry about the child’s pick up she may elect to not send the child to school that day or pick her up early and she will miss instruction.

Support for Teaching and Learning

Supporting teaching and learning takes on many forms in these schools, from providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate, to listening to their ideas, and to providing professional development. There is a climate of the school as a learning organization that is reinforced by the principal’s enactment of this practice.
Principal Russell detailed how a climate of openness facilitated rebuilding some relationships after feedback from the district told him that there needed to be some changes in instructional practice at Maple Ridge Elementary school. He told me about hearing this from a senior member of his staff.

She didn’t feel I was sticking up for her and teachers in front of the Assistant Superintendent, because they thought he was too critical about certain things that he saw in the building, and they felt that I should have stuck up for them. She was one of the people who felt comfortable enough to come and talk to me, and I saw it also as an opportunity, because people were not happy with me. I took it as an opportunity to help me reconnect with the staff and draw that trust again. The trust was really important because what he [the Assistant Superintendent] pointed out was stuff that we really do need to work on. This being considered one of the good schools in the district, sometimes the staff can feel entitled. But we need to grow. We can’t sit back and admire our success.

Principal Russell said that he felt the teachers needed more affirmation and to feel that their leader supported them. Another teachers come to him about problem she sees.

This concept dovetails with how the same leader points out how communication about the effectiveness of instructional practice is important in all aspects of running a school.

She [a teacher at the school] might say, some things aren’t working well, but it’s good that she is vocal. She’ll tell me when something is wrong, and that kind of thing, that communication is there, but I don’t think everyone here understands how lucky they have been here.

This links to a climate of support for teachers that facilitates openness and sharing. A climate where teachers feel like they can share their challenges or in this case when something isn’t working well allows the principals to make adjustments based on authentic feedback.

One leader’s responses when I raised the issue of climate were all framed in terms of instruction. All of Principal Robinson’s responses connected to instruction, which did not surprise me, because she has some of the highest achievement scores and the second
highest SPR in the district. His school’s success on these metrics is all the more
impressive because 20% of Wood Creek students are homeless and almost all are African
American. For Robinson, instruction plays a critical role in behavior, and his time and
energy are focused on improving instruction, often through providing structures for
teachers to collaborate to improve instruction.

I got to that point, with a considerable amount of professional development for
teachers, a considerable amount of time spent in classrooms observing and giving
feedback, helping folks to be reflective about their practice, and understanding the
role that they play as a classroom teacher – not only in helping students learn
whatever the content is, but there are things that you do that support whether
students are going to attend to what you're doing or not. The beginning of my
time here, there was considerable amount of time on those kinds of things.

She reported small numbers of discipline issues and indeed has few out of school
suspensions at her school. She credited the focus on excellent instruction as the way to
eliminate student disengagement leading to behavior problems in the classroom.

Leaders in the study did not bring up the physical structure of their buildings, nor
their physical plants, but they did raise issues stemming from their school’s
neighborhoods and their with the local authorities (e.g., the police and fire departments)
in order to ensure safety. One principal discussed how, due to the budget cuts, she had to
act as the school nurse, and that limited the health services the school could offer students
– a particular challenge for students living in poverty and lack access to regular
preventative care. Another leader detailed sweeping the schoolyard each morning with
her building engineer, to ensure that students didn’t pick up needles left by the drug
activity in the neighborhood. Neither of these responsibilities are not usually associated
with the role of the principal. The best principals, it seems, though, attend to things
outside the scope of their formal responsibilities because they know that it will impact their students.

**Institutional Environment**

Leaders in the study did not bring up the physical structure of their buildings, nor their physical plants, but they did raise issues stemming from their school’s neighborhoods and their collaboration with the local authorities (e.g., the police and fire departments) in order to ensure safety. One principal discussed how, due to the budget cuts, she had to act as the school nurse, and that limited the health services the school could offer students – a particular challenge for students living in poverty and lack access to regular preventative care. Another leader detailed sweeping the schoolyard each morning with her building engineer, to ensure that students didn’t pick up needles left by the drug activity in the neighborhood. Neither of these responsibilities are not usually associated with the role of the principal. These issues are more community writ-large issues rather than specific to the school, however, they undoubtedly impact the school climate. The best principals, it seems, though, attend to things outside the scope of their formal responsibilities because they know that it will impact their students.

**School Improvement Processes**

Participants in this study spoke of regularly adjusting schedules, redeploying support staff and working with parents to support school efforts as things they do regularly, as part of the process of school improvement. Principal Murphy explained how he made sure time was available for teachers to engage in the work of instructional improvement.
I built a schedule, last year, to make sure that teachers have time for collaboration with each other. It goes more beyond common prep, but having a protocol about how do you use that time. You can’t tell teachers to plan together if you don’t create a schedule that allows them to do that. You can’t tell teachers to be reflective in practice if you’re not able to share what it is that you see them do every day to be reflective. I really built a schedule around that. We’ve built a weekly opportunity for teachers to engage in [grade group] meetings. When I first got to Pennell, they used to be held at the end of the day – it was like the last 20 minutes of every day. It wasn’t that great, because it just wasn’t that great; it was just too many interruptions. Now my teachers give up a prep, they get it back, but they give up a prep, so there’s like 45 minutes every Tuesday for them to really dig deep into…just into practice.

Other principals spoke of similar efforts, on their parts. They also used monitoring strategies (e.g., protocols, the use of technology) to ensure that everyone is included and can contribute. When the contributions need to be (or can be) asynchronous, they sometimes use technology so teachers who are not present can contribute.

The recurrent theme is that these principals set expectations for everything that occurs in their schools, and then pay attention to whether or not people do what is needed to meet expectations for their school’s climate. All of the principals utilized discrete strategies, items in their toolkits, that enhance the climate in their schools. They are strategic in what they choose to do and involve their entire staffs and student bodies in working together to build a climate conducive to teaching and learning.

**Vision**

In this section, I present my findings around how the principals in this study describe and understand how they enact vision in their schools. I did not define “vision” for these leaders, rather each shared their strategies that they associated with the word. Despite my not supplying a definition, their responses were not divergent and, it turns out, are consistent with Deal and Peterson’s (1999) definition.
Deeper values and purposes shape a school's vision – its picture of a hoped-for future, its dream of what it can become. These obscure and often veiled dreams provide a deep and rich sense of purpose and direction for an otherwise uncertain future. This mythic side of schools is the existential anchor and spiritual source for the school's traditions, hopes, and fears. (p. 23)

I present the findings that emerged from the data on vision in four parts. The first is about principals defining and refining vision for their school. Next, I present findings on principals alignment of instructional strategies and programs with school goals via vision, including accountability, goal setting and the use of data. Third, I examine principals use of shared visions in their schools. Last, I look at the notion of rituals of vision in schools to reinforce the vision.

**Defining and Refining Vision**

Each of the six principals in this study reported revisiting the vision and mission of their school, each year. When talking about this topic, they often used the terms vision and mission interchangeably. When they did differentiate them, it was to speak about their visions of “how they wanted to be” and the mission as the discreet acts and daily work that their schools undertake achieve those visions.

At Maple Ridge Elementary School, Principal Russell was leading a school redesign when we spoke. This is a competitive process, held yearly by SDP, where schools present plans to change the design of their schools to include a specialized focus (e.g., project-based learning). Principal Russell spoke of the necessity of changing his school’s vision and mission as a part of this redesign – one that he thought his teachers did not think they would need to do.

We just changed that [the vision statement], recently. I can’t even articulate it word for word, yet, – the one that we have now – because it's part of the redesign.
It really is the one that involves project-based learning and career learning and really trying to produce global minded students

He also shared, however, that they had redefined the school’s vision yearly, and the process that they use to redefine the mission.

Principal Lee at Riverbank discussed the necessity of refining his school’s vision to reflect district and national trends, and curriculum changes.

This year we tweaked a couple of things and added language like, “For college and career readiness,” that was consistent with what's in the Common Core. Everybody, again, had a hand in helping to write that, which I think is important.

Further, Principal Murphy, of Eastview school, said that yearly realignment is necessary to focus staff and to ensure that any new staff are brought on board.

Part of what we do yearly is to start the school year off really looking at what our school vision is, looking at data, setting goals together as a team. And then, sharing that information – as I said – with all sectors: parents, teachers, so-forth. I don't think that's very unusual from what any other principal does.

Both of these principals use this process of revisiting their schools’ vision statements as part of their regular practice, and use it to build a shared vision (discussed below).

At these schools, the work of refining their vision statement took place both during whole staff meetings and during leadership team meetings. In other cases, a school’s School Advisory Committee (comprised of staff, parents, school partners and administrative staff) worked on the revising the vision statement and then shared it with full staff. All the participating principals reported using data and their school improvement plans to drive discussion during this process.
Alignment of Instructional Strategies and Programs with School Goals Via Vision

All the principals reported working to align the strategies they use in their schools and on the care/thoughtful intentionality of that work. Further, the principals talked about saying “no” to initiatives and strategies proposed by school staff or by partners when they did not align with their/the school’s mission and vision. Principal Russell offered just such an example.

Some partner came in to propose that we do the positive Zen thing with our students, and it well intentioned, and – yes – the kids like it. But, my teachers and I were saying this really doesn’t fit in the model that we are looking at right now, and actually said, “Thank you, but no thank you.”…The thing is, if it's something that we can actually do with fidelity and something that doesn't really align with the vision, we will turn things down. The Zen thing is reported in the local education news as “the latest and greatest thing to help kids with anxiety,” so turning it down was a risk. We let it die a natural death at the end of a school year.

According the Principal Russell, it was not that the Zen program was deficient or lacked benefits for students. Rather, because it was not aligned with the Maple Ridge vision, he felt the school could not devote attention and resources to it. In the world of competing priorities and with his doctrine of focusing on “the main thing,” Principal Russell explained, “It was not something that brought enough value-add to utilize valuable resources – both time and human”.

Principal Lee said it as plainly as possible, “In terms of scheduling, it's just I try to align everything to my mission or vision.” It is ingrained in staff that when they propose an activity the need to consider the vision, and is part of the proposal process for consideration by the leadership team.

If a person wants to do an after-school club or activity, I'll ask, "How does that align to the vision of the school?" When people submit proposals, they'll chime in, “And this fits….” So, that's kind of nice, because it keeps everybody just consistent and on track to what it is we're trying to do.
Principal Robinson explained how the value of this kind alignment goes beyond furthering the school’s goals.

I just think the principalship can become so overwhelming for a person who does not have a clear vision. There are things that are constantly coming your way – things from teachers, things from students, things from parents, from central office – and you really have to have something that anchors you. Otherwise, you could run around all day working really hard, doing lots of things and at the end of the day, feel like you’ve accomplished really nothing - or nothing as it relates to whatever your goals are.

Filtering out ideas and programs that do not align with the school’s vision can help a principal to get her work done, and saying “no” is – at times – necessary to keeping her from being overwhelmed.

Principal Martin’s conceptualization of alignment of strategies extends to how she views the preparation students receive at her school for her vision of their future.

Of course, we talk to some of the middle schools to find out what they need in preparation for coming there, and then build from there. I am sure that they read novels, and that we would do novel studies, and that we do some really rigorous writing, and that it wasn't just two or three paragraphs, that it was actually a couple of pages.

She added,

We talk about preparing students to be ready for what is required in the 21st century and we should be doing stuff to prepare them for the next step. They are not leaving here at the end of elementary school and going straight to work. They have some next steps and that is what I am preparing them for.

Her discussion of the enactment of vision in terms of preparing students for the next level was an outlier as well. The intentionality of instructional strategies she plans along with her teachers was the most detailed among the principals in this study.

The principals in this study tie their personal leadership practice to the school vision. The old adage “they walk the talk” is applicable here in that their actions both
subtle and forthright signal to those they lead their intent. That intention is to enact their personal leadership practice in ways that reinforce the school’s vision.

**Shared Vision**

Accountability for enacting school plans that carefully align with the school’s vision is important at Riverbank Elementary School and is a part of shared vision which are the next group of findings. At Riverbank, parents hold the school accountable by asking about activities and opportunities for students that are noted in the vision statement, but that parents perceive students aren’t receiving.

In my parent meetings we talk about it [the vision for the school] with parents and the community, so the vision is always there, and I have people spit it back to me sometimes. “Well, you said your vision was this and the kids haven't done this.” Which is good. That means people are listening to what they want to do and what we promised, so to speak.

All six principals discussed the ways in which they work to build a shared vision. Whether it is the participation of stakeholder groups (teachers, parents, etc.), the way the vision is shared or the hiring of staff that have similar belief systems, all spoke of the importance of a shared vision in terms of outcomes for students. They gave the clarity needed so that teachers and students know the expectations and “where the school is headed” as the main reason.

So, I guess making it crystal clear what you expect so everybody on the team knows it, and then those team members carry your vision (or your mission) out to the rest of the school and the community as well. (Principal Lee Riverbank School Interview One)

Always being clear on where it is you're trying to go and communicating that to everybody. Everyone on the team really also understanding, “This is what we're here to accomplish.” I try to do that. We start every year off with that conversation. That's a conversation that happens across sectors. It's not just a conversation I have with teachers. It's with teachers, support staff, parents – everyone really having a conversation. It might get explained a little differently.
with each of those sectors, but really being clear about what you're trying to accomplish. (Principal Murphy Eastview School)

The shared vision illustrated here demonstrates the principals’ understanding that each stakeholder group may need to hear the message differently. For example, Principal Murphy said that he explains school policies to parents’ in a way that reflects the vision through the lens of the parents, and what they value. He shifts his approach when explaining things for teachers.

In another instance, Principal Robinson explained how his school external partners must share the school’s vision and how she helps them. He also revealed the frustration of dealing with partners who come in with a vision that may or may not intersect with the school’s vision.

I tell them, you're here to be helpful, but the help is not really helpful. It's just another thing to do, another thing to manage. You have these cutesy ideas that you want to bring in, and they have nothing to do with what I'm trying to do here. Really, just trying to wrangle the partners in and helping them understand the vision, what you're trying to do, and where they could fit in, so that things didn't feel so disjointed. So you have to take the time to make sure they share the vision or at least know it.

Principal Martin, spoke about the process she goes through each year to build shared vision. Sometimes, she explained, it is because they school has a few new staff members, but most often it is sharing her instructional priorities and incorporating that so that all staff know, understand and can articulate the vision.

We meet and we discuss what we've done the previous year, and where we need to go. I'll give a little bit. I don't want to just give my whole vision, because I want them to feel like they can create. If I tell them the whole vision, up front. Then, it's just, “Okay, we're going to get on board with Mrs. Martin’s vision.” Well, it has to be our vision. I might give some points, then we talk about it, and then we create it.
According to these leaders, the focus of their shared vision needs to be *student centered*. All staff actions should match the belief that the children come first and that they are there for the children. Principal Ward describes it this way.

It has to be that *we do what is right for children*, regardless of cost, of staff or frustration to staff because of the change. The vision has always evolved around what it is we're doing for children. When someone comes and asks a question or wants to change something, I'm like, “That's great, but how is that good for kids?” I won't promote something in the building, whatever it is, unless it's for kids, versus for your [the teachers’] monetary gain. If it's something for you, I'll probably say “no,” because I'm like, "You need to go back and check your heart. Go back and check it because you're not really doing it for children." I think that my vision is clear. I think a teacher, hopefully all of these teachers, may say something to that effect. I'm pretty non-bending with that.

Like Principal Robinson, Principal Ward described how important hiring the right people is, and how their belief systems need to align with the schools. She noted, “It’s likely that they won’t be a fit, if they don’t think the children come first…. It will come out in some way.”

Sharing a vision that undergirds the way a school operates and its focus is critical to these school leaders. In addition, the manner in which the vision is shared and constancy of practice aligned to vision grounds their practice.

**Rituals of Vision**

Student at these schools recite a school pledge or motto, every day. At some schools, all students recite it before they enter the building, as they line up for school. At others, the principal may read the pledge (using the public address system) as students recite it in unison in their classrooms. This ritual is strategy important strategy for sharing the vision *with students*.  

111
For example, at Eastview Elementary School, students are expected to exhibit \textit{PRIDE}. That is, \textit{Purpose, Responsibility, Integrity, Determination} and \textit{Excellence}. Teachers use the pledge to provide positive feedback to students, and to re-direct student behavior through student self-regulation (once they have been reminded or are asked to recite a portion of the pledge applicable to the situation). According to Principal Murphy, the school has posters displaying \textit{PRIDE} in all of the classrooms and there are more posters in the main hallways.

Though not all schools in SDP do this, all six of these schools have made the vision visible and actionable for students through this use of recitation of shared beliefs. I do not believe that it is a coincidence that the principals at these six high performing schools share this common strategy.

\textbf{Instruction}

Principals are responsible for all aspects of their schools’ results, including that shown in quantitatively in student achievement scores and growth outcomes. Although principals typically do not teach any students themselves, they are accountable for what happens in their schools’ classrooms and their summative results (usually through high stakes state testing). The leaders of Philadelphia schools are no different. The research on instructional leadership (sometimes called \textit{leadership of teaching and learning}) supports the idea that principals are indirectly responsible for student outcomes by how they set the conditions and expectations for instruction in their schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Supovitz, Sirinides & May, 2009). This includes both support for teachers and for students. I categorized the emerging themes from participants’ responses about how they
enact leadership in instruction into four main areas of focus: the cycle of feedback, the development of teaching talent in their schools, structural components of instructional planning and the student’s experience of instructional delivery.

The first instructional theme that emerged was the *cycle of feedback*. This includes frequency of feedback, the stance of this feedback (supportive and/or evaluative) and how feedback is connected to curriculum, instructional practice and assessment of student outcomes. The second category is *development of talent in their schools*. This includes traditional professional development structures, professional learning communities (PLCs), book clubs and more norm-challenging practices as lesson study and peer observation. The third category is *structural components of instructional planning*, focusing on the intentionality of changing structures to support instructional models and design. The fourth category is *students’ experience of instructional delivery*. This includes how parents are included in instructional planning.

**The Cycle of Feedback**

All of the principals in this study indicated that they regularly visit classrooms in their schools and observe their teachers. Of course, their responses could have been influenced by the fact that they were speaking to me (i.e., their Chief Academic Support Officer) and our district’s expectation that school leaders complete a certain number of observations each year, themselves. However, they spoke about observations in enough detail and with enough thought that I believe that they are active and busy in this task. For example, Principal Russell spoke about his new process.

I feel with the observations…I’ve realized that the drive-by observation does not work. We are talking about time and quality. I’ve tried this year and it’s killed me. To me, with every teacher it’s important that I do an observation and sit-down
conference. Talk about the observation, not just having it in writing, and not finalized it [in writing] until [after] I have sat down with them, and discuss it, set some goals, set another observation.

He went on, explaining that he negotiated with his supervisor to do fewer observations, but do them better. The pre-set number was not working for him or his teachers. A cycle of continuous feedback for teachers who really need that kind of support is important to him and he would rather go deeper with those few teachers than spend so much time on the observation process with teachers who need less feedback. He also explained that each year he knows exactly who he wants to work in this kind of depth to improve their instruction (and, thereby, their instructional outcomes) and that he focuses on teachers who are new and/or new to his school. He pointed out despite detailed expectations about the written observation report, for him and his teachers the conversation about the observation is more meaningful, useful and important.

Similarly, Principal Lee addressed the challenge of the balancing of contractual requirements, the need for authenticity, helpful feedback and the important issue of timeliness. Of course, by contracts principals must observe teachers and teachers have a right to the feedback from these observations. Principal Lee detailed how (like Principal Russell) she balances contractual obligations with what she believes will help her teachers, though in this case she aims to far exceed contractual requirements precisely because she believes it will help her teachers.

So, just being in classrooms as frequently as possible, looking at data, and making sure…teachers need that feedback. I know contractually we have five days, but the faster you get it out to people, the better it is. People are at the place now. If I come in a classroom in the morning, by lunchtime they're at my door. “You have feedback for me yet?” I'm like, “Not quite yet, but I'm working on it.” They look forward to it and, more importantly, they implement the feedback quickly. I give
them bite size pieces, like one thing to work on so they can see if that worked. If you give them multiple things then you won’t know what worked.

Principal Lee said more about the importance of spending time in the classroom.

Outside of my leadership team, it is my goal every day to start out in classrooms. And with the newer system that we got last year, it makes it very easy to go in with your laptop, give people feedback, and to follow up with them. The more you're in classrooms, the more you really learn about what's actually happening in your building. Sometimes the things that are happening in your building [are not] what you want to happen, or [are not] what you think is actually happening.

She is focused on a rapid cycle of feedback for her teachers and as she puts it, “What’s actually happening in your building is intimately tied in with instruction.”

The cycle of feedback that participants in this study spoke of did not end with feedback from the principal to the teacher. Principal Russell noted above how he “sets another observation” when he has a post-observation conference with a teacher. He does this to check on how the teacher implements his recommendations into their instructional practice. Several other leaders also noted that follow up is the most important part of the observation cycle. “If teachers don’t think you are going to follow up they are less likely to implement the recommendations,” said Principal Lee.

Principal Murphy spoke of visiting classrooms just to see one specific skill. “It was about data and text dependent analysis. We spent a lot of time on text dependent analysis, for sure.” He explained how he ensures that his feedback is all about that specific skill and connecting what teachers learned in professional development sessions to what he was looking for in classroom.

I really feel like protocols help. I use a protocol when I do my debriefing with teachers, when I see staff, so I can make sure that what I’m saying is focused and specific.
Other principals spoke of how short cycle of feedback was important. Principal Ward mentioned the impact on students, when she said, “Really talking about what is relevant to really add impact on Johnny tomorrow. We have those discussions too.” In this case, the cycle included further feedback seeing an impact on students quickly.

Short cycles of feedback allow these principals to do them frequently. Principal Robinson told me about using frequent classroom visits to raise her awareness of what goes in her school, and managing school-wide cycles of feedback with those for individual teachers.

Those touch-points with teachers are so frequent. It allows me, also, to be specific and strategic, so I'm able to capture trends. These are things that I feel like we need to work on as a school, and then also to be able to differentiate and say, “These are the things that this teacher needs.” And, having a school-wide plan going simultaneously with a plan for how to move an individual teacher around a couple of key levers that identify with them, as a result of what I'm seeing in their classroom.

Principal Robinson explained that in order for feedback to improve teaching practice it must be frequent and meaningful. Principal Ward approaches things similarly

I spend a lot of times in classrooms. I do a lot of informal. I don't really do walkthroughs too much but I do spend a good bit of time doing informals. I talked about the follow-up conversations that I have with teachers. One of the things – the reason that I chuckled to myself – the people that have been here since I've been here, they're just used to it. People who have come here after my time here, sometimes they're kind of taken aback. They're like, “Why is she here so much?” People just talk about the regularity, or the frequency, of my time in their classroom and it being different.

These leaders spend a lot of time in classrooms, monitoring instruction, so that they can have an accurate sense of what is going on in their schools, instructionally. They believe that frequency of feedback is important and use protocols to ensure that they stay focused and consistent on bite-sized feedback. Principal Murphy, for example, tries to
makes sure that what they are talking about in the post-observation conference is relevant. “I don’t want to talk about the bulletin boards. I really want to talk about what kids are struggling with and how teachers are adjusting instruction.” All the principals in this study spoke about the importance of frequent feedback Principal Lee described it as “keeping everyone on their toes” while Principal Martin said, “It was important that the kids know the principal knows what they should be learning”.

**Development of Talent in Their Schools**

Professional development is a critical component of improving instructional outcomes for students. The schools in this study offer professional development in a variety of ways. The principals told me how it relates to the instructional improvements they see in the classroom. They reported a heavy emphasis in all six of their schools on relying on in-building expertise, rather than waiting for the outsiders to bring them answer (e.g., district level supports, textbook and other instructional resource vendors).

One principal, Principal Murphy, has used *Professional Development Mondays* for several years. On Mondays, teachers voluntarily stay after school and “some sort of professional development topic is covered.” He indicated that a lot of the topics come from his teachers, and are built into the yearly plan. However, because of spotty attendance, he has transitioned to a collaborative planning model and changed his school’s schedule to support teachers receiving training during regularly scheduled grade group meetings, during the school day.

Others principals discussed the importance of PLCs, book studies, lesson study and peer observation. Principals provided compelling examples of the power of lesson study. For example, Principal Robinson told me that at Wood Creek, school teachers
videotape each other and give feedback to each other on lessons, weekly. A recent lesson study at Wood Creek focused on mathematics, which had been an area of weakness for the school. According to the principal, the lesson study was used as a mechanism for the entire school to improve their mathematics instruction.

All six principals spoke of using peer observation in their school, saying that it is particularly powerful because teachers cannot complain that their students are different than those of presenters from other schools, or that commercial products are based on other types of schools (e.g., those serving other sorts of communities). Principal Ward explained to me that, at Summit Elementary School, peer observation is required for all new teachers. The principal selects the teachers whom new teachers observe. “I need to ensure that they are learning from the best models.”

All of these principals keep schedules of peer observations available in their offices. Although only some of these leaders use their school-based teacher leaders to model lessons, the notion of learning from a grade level partner was consistent across all six schools. Some of the peer observations were around specific skill instruction. “If I have a teacher who is really good a teaching fractions, and her outcomes are good, then everyone on the team needs to learn from that,” explained Principal Murphy.

Several principals in this study use professional learning communities (PLCs) with a specific focus for professional development of their teachers.

In the PLCs, we have three areas of focus. One was using formative data to inform small group instruction in math. One was student engagement. The third was nonfiction writing.
Principal Lee described how she is able to focus on three areas at once through PLCs. She has one teacher expert lead each focus area. This allows for differentiation of development of teachers based on student and teacher need.

These principals reported that teacher collaboration around instruction extends to opportunities for peers to calibrate expectation about student work. For them, this kind of calibration is an important part of professional development to improve instruction. Rather than simply condemning teachers who might be more lenient when providing feedback their own students, they have systems in place as a part of their professional development strategies to ensure this does not happen. In these schools, it extends to shared expectations for what students can and should know and be able to do. Principal Martin explained how it is natural for teachers to be generous in their evaluation of student work.

Well, we look at student work, and we evaluate it. We evaluate the work on grade groups, cross-grade. So the fourth grade teachers won't look at their own samples. They'll look at third grade, so they have a more objective eye. Because if you're looking at your own students, you're not going to be as objective. You're going to say, “Oh, I taught that. They know that. They meant to say that. They meant to write this.” We use that.

Calibration of expectations is important in maintaining high expectations for student work. By collaboratively reviewing student work the leaders in these schools can maintain similar expectations among their teachers.

Principals also reported using book study, in context. Specifically, three of the schools used a district-provided book about using data. They connected this topic to instructional improvement and a part of their schools’ overall strategy to build teacher focus on linking instructional strategy with assessment. Principal Martin shares how she
used the book study to promote the use of common assessments something she said she has been trying to do for years.

We used the book *Driven by Data* to focus our efforts. This year we built common assessments to focus our efforts. We looked at some strategies and then built common assessments to see how our students did. We learned that some students did better than others and had the teacher share exactly what they did. Teachers learned from each other. Some made excuses for their students but the data doesn’t lie.

Principals Murphy and Robinson discussed the need for teachers to understand that they have expertise, themselves. Therefore, from time to time, they lead professional development in their schools. These principals viewed this as a way to build teacher confidence in their principals’ instructional leadership and knowledge of sound instructional practice. Principal Murphy explained this to me.

I also think too that teachers will believe your feedback if they see you leading the PD and leading the conversation. You can't be the principal that leaves it to someone else to do. My teacher leader can't do all my grade groups with me. My teacher leader can't lead all my building professional development, because if everyone else is leading instruction and I'm not, then they can't believe in my instructional leadership, only in my ability to run a building.

For years principals, have been expected to focus building management, so this principal took efforts to combat that perception by regularly leading professional development in areas where they have particular expertise. Principal Murphy (a former mathematics teacher) and Principal Robinson (a former literacy coach and instructional specialist) demonstrate their expertise as professional development leaders.

These leaders used a variety of strategies to develop talent in their schools from PLC’s to principal led professional development to book study in an effort to build more skilled practitioners among their teaching corps.
Structural Components of Instructional Planning

Principals in this study told me about the occasional need to provide some structural changes in their schools’ schedules, and in some instances instructional approach, in order to improve instruction.

Collaborative planning time is one example. All of the principals told me about creating a schedule that allowed for collaborative planning, in every grade level. Although faced with obstacles (e.g., teacher absence, lack of additional staff), they created opportunities for teachers to plan collaboratively, at least one day a week. In many cases, collaborative planning time was structured through the use of protocols or minutes, and some principals attended these sessions as often as possible. Principal Robinson explained that even with the structures in place, however, it is still a challenge.

Common planning time is hard. It's just difficult, because it's always contingent upon everyone being at work every day. If you have one person, it doesn't work because then you don't have the coverage. If that happens, it falls like dominoes.

Principals told me that they view collaborative planning time as a resource. As with all scarce resources, principals were protective of this time – making sure it focused on instructional practice and not allowing managerial concerns to infiltrate these meetings.

Principal Murphy was emphatic about how to do this.

I built a schedule last year to make sure that teachers have time for collaboration with each other. It goes more beyond common prep, [with] a protocol about how do you use that time. You can't tell teachers to plan together if you don't create a schedule that allows them to do that. You can't tell teachers to be reflective in practice if you're not able to share what it is that you see them do every day to be reflective. I really built a schedule around that.
The principals in this study also made sure that teachers understand the purposes of the structure. They were clear with me that they invest great intentionality into how this time is structured and monitored, and that they underscore this through their own attendance. That is, teachers do not plan together for its own sake. Rather, it is purposeful, with a protocol and monitoring. Furthermore, they follow up with their teachers through observations.

Another major structural change to support instruction elements has been the move away from *pull-out* provision of support services for students to *more inclusive* practices. Principal Ward spoke of being frustrated by students getting to the next grade having missed a whole set of skills. She discovered that pulling them out of the classroom for instruction to go to a specialist teacher cost them large chunks of content from their regular classroom. Despite expectations that teachers of ESOL and special education align their instruction with classroom teachers, it was difficult for them to maintain the same pace, because considerations for their instructional planning were different. Principal Ward related this to me, as though she was speaking to a student, “Why didn't you get it last year? Oh, because you were getting pulled out to do some ridiculous intervention during key math time.” She quite clear that this was unacceptable to her.

That's crap. That's not happening anymore. We knew that we were on the right track with having redone schedules. Now I have grades run through for 1 grade. Each grade has one ESOL, each grade has one Learning Support [LS] Special Education teacher, we're co-teaching. Full inclusion for LS and ESOL students next year.

By eliminating one of the basic structures of her school (i.e., pull out) in the interest of instruction, Principal demonstrated how seriously she takes this practice.
Principal Murphy said that at Eastview Elementary School, he decided to departmentalize his upper school after success with one grade. This was based on his belief that it is difficult for teachers to be content experts in several subjects.

Last year we started departmentalizing our 5th grade, because what we were finding is that everybody can't be a master at everything. But each teacher can take a content area and really go deep into that particular content area. We said, “Let's try it.” Our benchmark scores are really high in the 5th grade, because it just worked. We took a chance, we took a risk, and looked at our data and it's working. Moving forward next year, we're having discussions now about doing the same thing with my 3rd and my 4th grades.

Control of scheduling is one of principals’ biggest tools, but it takes real skill and mindfulness of goals to use it well. These principals were willing to change these basic structures in their schools (e.g., prep time scheduling, provision of support services, departmentalization) to improve instruction for students in their schools.

**Students’ Experience of Instructional Delivery**

Perhaps the most thought provoking theme about instruction that emerged from in this study is the degree to which these principals focus on student feedback as an integral component of their approach to leading instruction. In my experience as a supervisor of principals and as a senior district office, this has not been common, *at all.* Others may use student feedback from time to time or in passing, but these principals report systematizing the way they gather both feedback on teacher feedback to students and student feedback about the instructional practice of their teachers.

One principal gives teachers feedback on their feedback to students and insists that teachers conference with their students regularly for goal setting. Another asks students questions about the lesson as a part of his teacher observation, and includes it in both his written and verbal feedback to teachers during post-observation conferences.
This use of students’ perspectives was both refreshing and eye-opening to me. This strategy provides greater opportunities for principals to gain even more intimate knowledge of the impact of their teachers’ instructional practice – understanding that is not simply based on quantitative data, but rather that quantitative data layered with qualitative feedback on how the student is doing.

I really think the best feedback or the best way is just really get into the classrooms without the technology and the computers and talking to children and talking to teachers and asking kids, “What are you learning and how do you know?” Listening to the types of questions that teachers are asking children and making sure that the children are able to build connections with the learning and giving that feedback in a way that's not threatening. (Principal Murphy)

Give good feedback, even if it's quick. If you’re looking at the writing samples. I take home writing samples every two weeks, for one grade. I might take – one weekend – all third grade. Then I'll go and I'll read over the teacher's feedback, and then I'll write my own feedback. I want to make sure they're giving positive feedback, and not just putting, “Good,” “Great, “Excellent.” You have to say, “Through your writing, you did a great job with your details,” or “You really explained,” or “The characters came alive,” or “I really liked your ending,” or “I liked your catchy beginning.” Something to really encourage the students to continue writing. Not just, “Good, Great, Excellent.” That doesn't tell you anything about the student and their capabilities, and it doesn't help them with their progress. (Principal Martin)

I always impress upon them that you need to always meet with students. Find a day of the week where, when I was a teacher, Thursday was my day. Thursdays, I made sure I gave each student at least fifteen minutes of good quality feedback time. You, of course, want to give feedback all week, but really intensively sitting down, having their folder in front of them and saying, “You really did good on these skills. This is a strategy for next week, we're going to work on. Here's your goal for the next two weeks.” (Principal Martin, Redwood School)

Many educators will say they are child-centered. None of these educators did, nor did they have to. Their leadership actions speak for themselves, in that the consumer (i.e., the child) is factored into how they lead for instructional improvement. Their intentional efforts to make sure that their teachers do as well spoke volumes to the indirect
relationships they have with students through monitoring the frequency of feedback and quality of instruction and feedback they get from their teachers.

Instructional leadership in the schools in this study is characterized by a strategic approach that encompasses many aspects of instruction. Frequent feedback that is relevant and timely grounds the efforts of these leaders. Professional development opportunities include opportunities for teachers to learn in small groups based on interest and need. Finally, student feedback on their teachers and a focus on feedback to students sets these leaders apart as these are routine expectations in their schools as a manifestation of student-centered leadership.

**Organizational Management**

The Effective Schools movement challenged the old view of the principal solely as the organizational manager of his school, as forces encouraged the transition of principal from being the *keeper of the keys* and the school manager to becoming the instructional leader (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton & Luppescu, 2010; Horng & Loeb, 2010; MacNeil et al., 2009). However, principals still set the conditions of teaching and learning in their schools through strong organizational management – including establishment of systems/procedures, management of teacher talent and use of data-based decision-making for school improvement (Childers, 2012; Copland, 2003; Horng & Loeb, 2010). The principals in this study are no different in using these three strategies to enact their *organizational management* leadership practice. During interviews with participants the following themes emerged from their responses regarding on how they enact organizational management. They are systems and procedures, management of
teacher talent and the use of data-based decision making for school improvement. Similar to climate the predominate themes were strikingly similar to research.

**Systems and Procedures**

Principal Russell summed up the intentionality his leadership practices – like all of the principals in this study – when he told me, “Everything is structured!” Similarly his colleagues discussed schedules, planning, creation of systems and ways of doing business that are consistent throughout each school. For example, Principal Lee described how things work at Riverbank Elementary School.

A system is clear and people know and they understand that. Even when I have new people in the building who don’t understand that at Riverbank School we don’t randomly send kids to the bathroom unless it’s an emergency. As a class, the teacher is expected to line those students up and supervise that so that we don’t have a lot of hallway traffic. At Riverbank School, the expectation is that when a class is lined up in the hallway, they are reading something, reciting something, or still being stimulated. Because that system is in place, when new people come in they are able to just get on board with the system that’s in place.

Principal Lee not only thinks that systems make for smoother functioning in her school, but that systems actually make it easier for new students, faculty and staff to adjust to her school.

All six principals talked about how their systems and people’s expectations are connected. Several spoke to the special need to have these systems and clear expectations because of the neighborhoods/communities their schools serve. These principals said that the regular cadence of their schools’ activities have to have built into them contingencies for the emergencies of their challenged urban communities. As discussed above (in the Climate section), it is not unusual for Summit Elementary School to use lock down procedures – not just drills, but actually use them because they are needed. Because these
systems and procedures are in place, instruction can continue with the least disruption possible because everyone knows what to do. This predictability allows student to not be alarmed because their teachers know what to do and have protocols to ensure their safety. This kind of preparedness and procedure is the leaders in this study mean by “structure.”

Principal Lee explained how system help her to manage the border between her school and the wider community.

But I see that in the school and the community, an area like this, if you don’t have those strong systems the community will just overtake your school. I’ve had it out with parents who are determined to come in and go up the steps, and I’m like, “Mom, you know that’s not how it works.” And then a parent in the hall will be like, “Oh, let me tell you. Not in this school.” And parents will do some of the work for you. Systems is kind of everything in your school.”

As she also mentioned above, systems help veterans – in this case, veteran parents – to help new people to learn how things work in her school.

Principal Russell also worries about needing systems for parents.

It may not seem like a big deal, but even down to how we have our children enter in the school, we need structure or our parents will take over and bother the teachers before school gets started with petty concerns.

He explained this his systems allow each day to start efficiently and support each teacher, because they can focus on their students, as professionals.

Principal Ward explained how important systems and structures are important for her students.

Nothing happens by chance here. We know what we are going to do for every contingency. If people are guessing about what the systems and structures are, then I am not doing a good job. It’s, by nature, chaotic in an urban setting. And this is a place where, for the most part, how their day is going to go for the kids is predictable.
Students from these challenged communities particularly need the regularity and predictability that school may offer, that perhaps only school offers them.

While having consistent systems and structures in place is important, these principals also discussed how important it is to adjust systems, as needed. For example, Principal Ward told me about how she needed to change schedules in her school after observing two chaotic weeks at the beginning of the school year. She used the term “tweak” – a term used with me by at least three of the principals in this study.

By 10:30, the first thing happened, which was me moving preps around. 202 and 211 cannot have their kids go to lunch in prep, because it was disorganized in the hallway. It was noisy, it was chaotic… The prep teacher couldn't control them coming from recess – which is usually when a lot of things happen. I'm even thinking that for next year we're not going to have a class, have a lunch and a prep back-to-back. It's going to have to be maybe the prep teacher. It's going to have to be someone else and it's going to be difficult, because I can't turn it around for everyone. We used to have fourth grade come from lunch straight into a prep. That was a big no, so we moved it to second grade this year. It's still a big no for these two particular classrooms. By the end of the day today, my prep schedule was changed, tweaked.

Using systems well requires these principals to monitor their schools, and then recalibrate their systems to improve the functioning of their schools.

This monitoring includes paying attention to even the smallest detail. Principal Martin detailed how “constant motion” resulted in lost instructional time, so she switched classes to different classrooms to diminish the “constant motion.” This allowed her to have flexible grouping, where students would move to different teachers in the same grade level for targeted instruction.

They all had different lunches. Every two seconds, people were coming in and out. It was like constant motion all day long, so I moved all of the third grade.
It may seem like a no-brainer that all principals would do this but as one who has observed and evaluated them for several years, I can tell you it is not. Principals take on risks when they confront practice and the status quo. Changing the lunch schedule of students can lead to parent complaints, complaints from cafeteria staff and complaints from the students themselves. It certainly will lead to complaint) and changing the lunch schedule of teachers will definitely lead to teacher complaints. Principals trying not to upset parents and staff often choose to allow the status quo to continue rather than confront the situation and make changes that actually better for students.

Additionally, tweaking systems requires principals to be willing (and able) to articulate the reasons they are making the changes and to allow input from others – simply to ensure buy-in and effectiveness of the new system. Further, a principal may change a policy, however, she/he has to depend on implementation by others. Each of the principals in this study, as well detailed above (see Distributed Leadership), involve others in decision making. They were clear that they cannot make changes to school operations unilaterally. Rather, teachers and other stakeholders fully participate in the process, with opportunities to safely make suggestions that will improve conditions.

As with their indirect responsibility for instruction in the classroom, principals are often only indirectly able to enact their leadership practices in their schools. As such, the standardization of expectations, consistency and input from others can go a long way in moving from their policy intent to implementation with fidelity of the school’s policies and procedures.
Data Driven Decision Making

Using data to make decisions was a recurrent theme in this study. The principals use all kinds of data to make decisions, in areas from instruction, to placement of staff, to climate, to school operations. Principals gathered data from many sources to include district and state available data, to data collected at the school level, to anecdotal data received from students and parents. One such example is how Principal Russell used attendance data to inform and motivate parents. He believes that in elementary school, parents are at fault for the poor attendance of their children. Therefore, he addresses attendance problems with parents, and not with students.

We also use the early warning indicators. It’s really critical, too, and not just for academic data. You get the attendance there coming on there. Again, in trying to be as candid as possible, because I actually have letters that I send out to the parents myself about their kid’s attendance, and how critical it is. It is trying to educate the parents in this particular age level about their responsibility to get their child to school.

He uses the available data (e.g., district provided attendance summaries) to figure out which parents to work with on attendance issues. He also detailed that sometimes he does need to see a report.

If I see a parent bringing their child in late every day…I don’t need a report. I grab them and ask them to come in to see me for a couple of minutes, or talk to them outside. Not in a way to make them feel bad, but to press on them that their kid is developing habits and we need to help them develop the best habits about regular attendance.

Though it is less formal, Principal Russell can gather his own data observationally, and use that data – anecdotal as it may be – to direct his attention for attendance issues.

All of the principals detailed reflecting on and studying quantitative data to inform professional development for their teachers and (in some cases) support staff.
Some have *data protocols* to ensure that each group of teacher discusses the same thing and to keeps grade-group meetings focused on the data in front of them. Principal Lee spoke about adoption of PVAAS changed her challenges in responding to student achievement data.

I guess consistent reflection on what the data says. It's been a hard process, because you don't want to see three or four percentage points of growth every year, and then the next year you take a percentage back. So when PVAAS came into play, and we started looking at the growth model, it was invigorating for us because we could see, “Okay, we didn't meet that outright target, but we grew these students and they made a year's growth.” So that helped. It was exciting last year to know that 60-some, I think 69% of our students, met the growth target. This year it was, “Okay, what do we do so that 100% of our students meet the growth target.”

This principal uses PVAAS growth data to affirm the efforts of the teachers and students in her school. She raised the complicated issue of bifurcated conversations, celebrating growth scores on the one hand and lamenting overall achievement on the other. “Growth is not enough, but it’s a start and it is good for morale. However, I don’t want the teachers to celebrate when children are still scoring [at the] Basic [level].” Overall achievement levels are still very low at Riverbank School, and she has not used PVAAS to forget that.

Principal Murphy discussed how ubiquitous quantitative data is in his school and that it is as important as student grades to his decision-making. “I think, even in my weekly bulletins that I do with staff, there's some sort of data component.”

Principal Martin looks at the different data sources at Redwood School with a critical eye, and leads her teachers to discern if the data they are using to measure a skill is the best one.
..being able to look at your data, and use that to inform the instruction. But also to
decide, [whether] this a good tool to use for measuring reading, for measuring
math, for measuring science, or whatever else you're measuring at the time.

Because so much data is available, she helps her teachers be critical consumers of data
and data sources. She spoke of “skill crosswalks” between data and content standards as
being very important at her school.

Principal Robinson recited the axiom, “In God we trust, all others bring data,”
when we began to talk about how they use data at Wood Creek Elementary School. She,
too, spoke of anecdotal data, but regularly cautions her teachers about the overuse of
anecdotal evidence to make sweeping changes in the classroom. She said, “If my teachers
are telling me about this child or that child and have not drilled down into the data then
they have not done a thorough enough job for my school.”

Principal Ward goes further to talk about looking for patterns in the data that
relate to the teacher’s ability to teach a particular content. She acknowledged, though, it
is difficult (at times) for teachers not to blame the kids. This is a consistent issue at
Summit Elementary School, especially because her students live in such deep poverty
and have complex needs.

We [the leadership team] want to see what some of the patterns are and then we
open up that same data to the grade group leaders. Then we unwrap it to the team,
to the 1st grade, to the 2nd grade team and so on. For the most part, some of the
conversations that come out of that are hard, and I open every meeting with,
"We're not finger pointing, we just want to know how we can make this better."

Principal Ward does not want to blame teachers, just as she does not anyone blaming
students. Rather, she uses data to drive decision-making about how to her school can
improve its efforts.
All of these principals appear skilled in creating databases, reports and/or finding ways to sift and sieve the large amounts of data available to them from the district to fit the needs of their schools.

**Managing Talent**

The principals in this study have interesting ways of managing talent and finding ways to ensure that they recruit and retain the best teachers. As principal Ward said, “I have to make sure I have the right people on the bus” – a reference she says she frequently makes to the Jim Collins book, *Good to Great*. She discussed ways of using district processes to counsel teachers out of her school, but refuses to knowingly pass a *lemon* to a colleague.

Some of my [peers] never call to find out if a teacher they are selecting is any good. I have sent so many teachers with active paperwork that is the beginning or middle of the process for terminating them, simply because no one called, and by the time I find out, the transfer has been done. I would rather keep them another year and get rid of them forever. Some of them are so bad, they shouldn’t be with children in any school.

These principals’ management of talent includes finding opportunities for leadership, changing assignments from primary to intermediate grades, and selection of staff. All of these schools use a *site selection committee* (i.e., a group of teachers and school administrators who collectively interview and vote on whether to extend an offer to a candidate).

Principals in this study told me about having a written profile of the dispositions they believe a teacher will need to have to work in their schools, a common practice (in my experience). These profiles often mentioned an excellent work ethic, positive references, child-centered thinking and being team player.
Three principals (i.e., Russell, Robinson and Martin) offer prospective teachers an opportunity to perform a demonstration lesson with real children. For each of these three principals, refusal of this opportunity disqualifies them from further consideration.

(Candidates brought in during late hiring that occurs in the summer when school is not in session are obviously except from this process.) Principal Robinson described his approach as “strategic.”

I tend to be very, very strategic. I am constantly thinking about all the moving parts, where people need to be, the deployment of teachers – really kind of building on the organization. I feel like I'm strategic in everything, from how teachers are assigned, how they’re partnered, how they’re paired, the way support staff is assigned to support students.

All six of these leaders spoke of changing grade assignments when teachers are not successful, contingent upon high degrees of success in other areas (e.g., work ethic). Like Principal Martin, each seemed very pleased when they changed a teaching assignment and the teacher improved.

When I hire, I would like to think my judgment is fairly good. Although I have a site selection team, I ultimately am the one who makes the final decision about whether to hire a teacher. When a new teacher comes in and is not at all what I thought they would be I say, “Oh my God. I made a mistake. You're not good. You're not this.” And then, I'll move them to a different grade and voila they became a superstar overnight. You have to be able to see that potential in someone else, and you have to be able to recognize that skill, and move your staff about.

Though they pay close attention to student outcomes, they are careful about removing teachers. Teacher success is so complex that they often trust their initial judgment and try to place the teacher in an opportunity where they may be more successful.

Each principal uses a site-selection process for hiring staff (as discussed above). Some prospective teachers may do demonstration lessons, but every principal has a series
of questions that they use that are specific to the needs and vision of their school. This gives them an opportunity to gauge whether prospective new teachers will be committed to the vision and direction of the school and school programs.

These principals the decision to hire a teacher as more important than anything else they do. Choosing the right staff receives painstaking attention from these leaders, who also involve their staffs in the selection of talent. Similarly, once a staff member is on board, these leaders use a variety of strategies to ensure that each is appropriately placed and supported. When a teacher is not meeting expectations, these principals make the difficult decision to counsel teachers and to do what is required so that they are no longer teaching at their schools.

Organizational management is enacted by the principals in this study with precision and attention to every detail. Systems and structures are created to support teaching and learning. Data is used to drive all kinds of decision making from teacher placement to instructional delivery models. All of the schools enjoy an organized and predictable set of routines that create conditions conducive to the best possible student outcomes.

And What about Self-Efficacy?

As I detailed in Chapter 1, I strongly believe in the importance of self-efficacy for principal leadership. This belief in one’s ability (Bandura, 1977) – for these principals, belief that they can lead under the challenging circumstances of insufficient resources and high stakes accountability in schools full of so many children with complex needs –
requires an individual that thinks they are superbad. Further, Bandura’s explanation gets to the heart of the self-efficacy themes that emerged in this study.

People make causal contributions to their own functioning through mechanisms of personal agency. Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than peoples’ beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that effect their lives (p. 118).

Unlike the five practices discussed above, I intentionally did not ask questions directly about self-efficacy. Because of my belief in self-efficacy, I hoped that this theme would be apparent throughout the interviews – because it is such a foundational aspect of effectiveness leadership, and therefore would not need prompting. I believe I was proven correct. The principals in this study each repeatedly spoke in terms that are consistent with Bandura’s explanation of self-efficacy.

I found two themes in this study that tied to self-efficacy: reflection and personal qualities. In this section, I briefly share responses from participants elucidating these themes and confirming my belief that it takes more than technical strategy (those detailed above, in this chapter). As I noted in Chapter 1, I reject the idea of charismatic leadership as a leadership style that can be effective without high degrees of skill in the other leadership domains. The responses below illustrate how the personal qualities of these leaders amplify the effect of enacted strategies and that absent the enacted strategies these personal qualities would not likely have the desired effect.

**Self-Reflection**

Principal Murphy discussed his use of reflection as a practice that he regularly uses himself understand why things are or are not working. He stated, “I think I'm naturally inclined to want to know why something happened and how could I have done
something differently or what did I do well and make sure that I'm able to mimic it.” He went on further, saying that at one point, he wondered about his (in)effectiveness and was frustrated with not being able to support staff who struggle with classroom management. He told me that he finally realized that because it came naturally to him that it was hard for him to understand why others find it so difficult. Knowing this about himself, he is now more open about some of his own challenges, because he thinks it helps them understand and accept his critical feedback. His premise is that he is not perfect, and has growth areas, as well.

Then about being honest, too. When I first came to this school, we were doing a lot of work around the Danielson framework and the four domains and everything else. I told my teachers when we were going over that work I said, “I struggle in the area of providing feedback in classroom environment, because I’ve never had that challenge as a classroom teacher. So, I’m going to work this year to really get strong in my feedback that I’m going to give to you in that particular domain, because right now that’s not my best area to give feedback.” People appreciate that you know what your weaknesses are and where your strengths are.

“I really wanted to get feedback… was always very important to me, what am I doing well, tell me. I also needed to know how to create a form for teachers to be able to share and not feel that they would be penalized for telling me where I needed to grow. That comes with building good relationships. I’m learning better now how to formalize feedback, so created a form for teachers to share, feedbacks and I do more surveys of staff now”.

For Principal Murphy, reflection appears to be an important leadership practice. Reflecting on his weaknesses, and even doing so openly, is a testament to his belief in his own self-efficacy. He believes so strongly in his abilities that he is confident that he can improve on his weaknesses and therefore does not have to hide them.
Personal Qualities

Similarly, Principal Martin’s belief in her ability to perform at a high level is tied to her self-identified personal qualities. Those include lack of fear, organizational skills and people skills.

You also have to not be afraid, which is sort of difficult in Philly. You have to not be afraid to make the strong decisions… I think a lot of whatever you do comes from the inside. I don’t think everything is necessarily a learned skill…. I came with good people skills, because I was that way as a teacher.

She further describes how important the unique individual is in leadership.

I could teach you everything I know, but you’re not me, so it may not necessarily work for you. You can give people the skills, but I’m not sure that they can actually affect them and have them work as well as they would for the person who was showing them.

Principal Robinson spoke of her childhood when explaining how she conceptualizes some of the qualities she associates with her leadership.

I was born with organizing things…. I remember being a little girl, my dad, I would ask him what his job was. My dad was a logistics specialist for the Department of Defense. I would say like, “What is logistics, Dad?” I remember being a little girl asking him what logistics was. I don’t know that I knew at five or six, when I was asking him what it meant. I definitely see, I think I picked that up from my dad…. I see everything through the lens of logistics…like when I think we need professional development, I immediately start thinking, how, when, who what, where.”

All of the leaders discussed qualities that could be considered personal characteristics in many of their responses in this study. However, these three leaders really emphasized how they felt these are indeed personal qualities and skills that they perceive you cannot necessarily teach and that they feel add value to their leadership.
Conclusion

Leadership practices are inherently intertwined (Hallinger, 2011). Although I have described them separately, when the principals in this study spoke of any one of them, invariably they would touch on another. When they described their leadership strategies for enacting distributed leadership, they spoke of using it to support instructional improvement, organizational efficiency, managing climate and how it connected to their visions for their good schools.

Throughout this chapter, I have barely mentioned anything about test preparation or high stakes testing, despite the fact that I selected these schools based on their growth scores in state testing. But this is because in our interviews, none of the leaders spoke of testing in any significant way. That could have been a function of my interview protocol, which did not include of questions emphasized testing. But I believe that the structure of these interviews, focusing as they did on how principals set the conditions for success, had plenty of room for these leaders to discuss their use of these practices in the context of testing. This suggests, in fact, they do not focus on state testing or growth scores as their goal. Rather their success in these areas are a byproduct of their intentional and thoughtful enactment of strategies that have visionary and aspirational views of providing students an exemplary education in their local neighborhood schools.
Chapter 6

OTHER FINDINGS

In this chapter I discuss all other findings from this dissertation study. First, I discuss the perspectives of the teachers and assistant superintendents participants who work with the principals who are the focus of this study. Second, I present what the principals shared with me regarding how they learned the strategies associated with these evidence-based practices. Last, I examine the recommendations that these principals made for the development of their colleagues, based on their experiences as effective elementary school principals.

Alignment

In this section, I discuss the overall alignment of teacher and assistant superintendent responses with their corresponding principal responses. This analysis examines whether the teachers that the principal supervises experience their principal’s leadership practices as they are described by the principal, and whether the individuals who supervise the principal describe the principal’s enactment similarly. Because of the convergence of themes for each group, it extends to an analysis of teachers and/or assistant superintendents as cohesive groups. This is also due to the overwhelmingly convergent responses from the assistant superintendent group and teacher group.

To maintain confidentiality and respect for their context and role, and out of concern of the these principals’ relationships – both with their teachers and with their
supervisors – I do not even use pseudonyms for teachers or assistant superintendents in this chapter. Instead, I just refer to them as “a teacher,” or other similar attributions.

When I discuss alignment in this chapter, I refer to agreement between teachers and their principal, and between a assistant superintendent and her or his supervisee principal. This analysis synthesizes participants’ discussions of how they experience each of the five practices from their context, beginning with the assistant superintendent and concluding with the teachers.

Alignment with Assistant Superintendents

In this section I discuss the alignment of assistant superintendents and their supervisee principals on each of the practices. I begin with distributed leadership, and then examine vision, organizational management, instruction and climate. As much as alignment is the focus here, I also note the kinds of things the assistant superintendents focused on, in their responses. There is as much alignment between assistant superintendents in the kinds of things they highlighted as there is with their principals on their practices. This speaks to two things. First it reflects what they value as principals’ supervisors, and second it potentially reflects the evaluation framework used and how some of the leadership practices that are the focus of this study are reflected in that framework.

Distributed Leadership

The responses of the assistant superintendents tended to have an evaluative stance, perhaps due to the evaluation responsibilities of the supervisors in the School District of Philadelphia. Their responses mostly validated their principals’ responses. However, assistant superintendents shared clear examples of the principal’s struggle with
distributed leadership; a consistent theme across assistant superintendent responses was that their principals had difficulty with delegation. This stands in marked contrast to the principals, who did not speak of struggles with delegation.

One assistant superintendent said that his principal was “a bit controlling” and “a bit dictatorial.” He allowed, however, that this style “seemed to work” at his school, and that the faculty really liked the principal. “He will do anything for them. During teacher appreciation week, he goes all out making sure there are banners, food, letters from children and parents thanking them for their service.” This same assistant superintendent also told me about the leader’s growth in this area.

I think the part about him being more distributive and less dictatorial. We talked recently, about three months ago, about some choices needed to be made at the school and he said he’d leave it up to his team. He bit his tongue when making some decision. I forgot exactly what it was, but that sort of thing is really different than the way he used to run the school.

This reflects the evaluative stance of the assistant superintendent as much as it does the principal’s intentional enactment of distributed leadership. Was he doing this because he was told to improve in this area? In fact, the principal did share in his interview that the had discussions with his supervisor about his need for growth in the area and that he saw the value in “being better at sharing leadership.”

Perhaps because of their talent-spotting lens (i.e., they are the hiring managers for principals in the district), the assistant superintendents tended to speak of examples of distributed leadership as a way to identify future school leaders from the teacher’s corps. For example, one assistant superintendent shared how the principal he supervises is really good at it and grows leaders not just for her school but others (mostly due to the size of
Another explained that the principal focuses on a particular teacher leader to "groom" her for leadership.

I think that she’s really cultivating talent. I think that’s really seen this year. She had a lot of vacancies pop up at the very end, because other schools now were taking her teachers to become leaders in their school, which is also a challenge for her building. Because she’s so small, there is not much opportunity for growth within her building, unless you take on something additional to being a teacher. I believe the SBTL [School Based Teacher Leader] is the one she’s molding and shaping to be an administrator. She allows her to take on many of the roles you would expect of an assistant principal except evaluating teachers and it has made for more effective school operations.

The assistant superintendents all spoke of how their formal evaluation ratings were consistent with what they shared during the interviews. It seemed to validate (to them) their statements about the leadership practices of the principals. To me, it is another data point about principal’s use of best practices and effectiveness.

**Organizational Management**

Most of what the assistant superintendents spoke about concerning organizational management focused on how principals used data, structure and systems, on and how that affected areas of instructional leadership. This matched what the principals told me. One assistant superintendent described a principal’s organizational management, as it relates to instruction.

So I think you want a roster that is not about the adults, it’s about the kids. She would have her block of literacy time, and her block of math time, and she directed that information that…. It goes back the intervention period, and when that was going to happen. It was definitely a student-driven, data-informed roster. It wasn’t because this person needed this or that person…. It was very explicit that I recall, that she was just really explicit. Not giving so many choices, but to really … and to also dictate, because she has two and a half specialists. She had to decide, I forget which one, but I know it was explicit in her thing of whom they were, and how that also is going to complement her entire program for academic success.
This is similar to how this principal characterized how she changed and adjusted the roster to be more student-focused and less focused on the adults.

All six assistant superintendents focused on using data to inform instruction. One assistant superintendent spoke about how the principal used data to make the case to deal with teacher pushback on lesson planning.

He does have Google Docs set up to give feedback to teachers on plans, so he can really track what’s happening for planning when it comes to teachers. For the data, he does do a very good job and really making data the factual focus point of teacher time together, because you can’t fight with that the data says. It’s a good job really incorporating data in those conversations.

In addition, this assistant superintendent referred to his evaluation of this principal and how she noted how much progress the students made. (This principal also highlighted his students’ progress and the swings in growth and that data that were a motivator for him and for his staff.)

He holds data conferences. Let me just pull up his evaluation. [She pauses to pull up this evaluation on the computer.] He did made tremendous growth, and when we talk about data, I always look at the progress component. He went from a 3 to a 62, which is phenomenal. The year before, on SPR though, he was 26 and dropped to a 3. There was significant decrease and I think that’s what kind of motivated him to really use data more strategically.

This quote reflects the value of the data trajectory and of using it to make instructional decisions. It is representative of the responses of all the assistant superintendents, and aligns with how principals characterized their leadership. However, the focus on specific quantitative measures, in this quote, is significantly stronger that most of what others said.

Last, their assistant superintendents share the intentionality of practice that principals discussed. Assistant superintendents were clear in their view that these
principals leave nothing to chance, and that their management of people, data and processes reflects that. One assistant superintendent’s comments is representative the views of the entire group of assistant superintendents.

The principal runs a very highly structured place, and it is really working. Everything is structured about it. She has a contract for every kid in that building, where they sign. It’s their academic and behavioral contract. She’s communicating with parents daily via that or phone calls. She leaves nothing to chance. There is a system for everything. When you walk in the building, the sign in process, there’s a procedure that the building secretary needs to follow. When I walk with her throughout the building, her guiding students and correcting them, she is a no-nonsense, takes no nonsense, person. Some of her colleagues pick on her about this, but.... It really works, though, for that building.

Vision

Supervisor responses about vision focused on the principals’ stance as the person in the school shaping the direction of school programming. During the interviews, some assistant superintendents used terminology similar to how the principals described how they enact vision and there was general agreement on how principals connected their schools’ activities to their visions. There was no focus on the ritual that all principals had mentioned. In fact, not one assistant superintendent mentioned rituals.

Principals’ supervisors mostly focused on the principal as the driver of school activities and the connection of school programming to the school’s direction or vision. In Chapter 5, I shared how one principal described her own drive as that of “a dog with a bone.” Her supervisor’s views of her leadership are akin to hers.

I think she’s just driven to succeed and she realizes that, “If I’m crystal clear, there’s no misunderstandings around expectations.” Also, she’s really big on accountability, too. So, “I need to be clear with this. I need to give you feedback, but then I’m gonna to hold you accountable to it.” I think that that goes back into her vision. She’s just obsessed with all kids need to move. That goes back to the logistics, like, “What do I need to do to help the adults get better to make sure that all kids can learn.”
This shows that the principal and assistant superintendent agree that all of the principal’s actions lead back to the kids doing better. He even mentioned her strength in logistics, something that she also highlighted.

This connection of a principal’s leadership actions to instruction can also been seen in how principals set up their school rosters to support their vision, and ultimately instructional models and activities. One principal’s supervisor spoke about how the principal constructs the school schedule to support inclusionary practices. The principal also mentioned this as enactment of vision.

She definitely has a very passionate vision for all students and a very inclusionary model. At her school, she has set up co-teaching models for ESOL and special education. Her goal is to make sure that all students are included in the general education environment. When you walk into her building, there’s a sense of embracing all learners, all walks of life and all economic backgrounds.

This intentionality of effort is further confirmed by the principal’s supervisor response about resource allocation.

Her strategy has been to align her resources and her funding above and beyond what the district allocates, in terms of special education and ESOL teachers. She uses finances to make sure that that model of inclusion and co-teaching continues for all students. I would say her strategy is resource allocation to make sure that it’s an inclusionary model.

It makes sense that assistant superintendents, school district mid-level managers, would be concerned with the connection of vision to resource allocation, consistent with the principal’s vision. If these two areas do not alignment, principals could potentially waste funds on initiatives that will not move the student outcomes needle.

All in all, as described by assistant superintendents, the enactment of vision took on a concrete quality. They were more concerned with what principals did (consistent with school goals and vision) than what the vision was, and – in fact – none talked about
the actual vision or mission statements. Rather, they described enactment of principal’s vision in relation to getting things done that connected to school goals.

Climate

The alignment of responses on school climate was similar to that of the other practices. Assistant superintendents’ responses around creating and managing a climate conducive to teaching and learning aligned with the principals’ responses. They spoke of the consistency and intensity of principals’ efforts in this area, how climate affects instruction and the intentionality principals’ work in the enactment of climate.

Assistant superintendents highlighted consistency and intensity of effort in everything, from safety to instructional practice.

When we think about [safety], and we think about the framework for leadership and safety, this is an area where she did rate distinguished [in her formal evaluation]. Not just because of what’s done in word, but in deed. She is very, very serious about keeping all children safe. She has engaged the community. There’s a respect for the school, within the immediate, even if it’s just the four square block, the area. These are students. Whatever is happening in the neighborhood, there’s an understanding that there’s a school that exists here.

This assistant superintendent highlighted all of the things that this principal had done to ensure student safety, underscoring that the effort extends beyond the school’s walls, because of neighborhood safety concerns and how they impact school operations. Intensity is reflected, in terms of the four square blocks surrounding the school, and the principal’s effort to ensure that all neighborhood stakeholders are aware of her expectations.

In another case, an assistant superintendent spoke about how the climate and principal’s consistency impacts the entire community.
So consistent. Completely. That’s like her thing. She gets 100 out of 100 for consistency, with everybody and everything, how she talks with teachers and how she talks with parents, how she talks with students, and what she expects of everybody. She’s the mayor of that little area up there. She’s the education chief and mayor of her community. Everybody knows her. Everybody’s trying to get into that school. She has to beat them away with a stick. It is that bad [i.e., demand is that great].

This principal created a climate so good that she has unusual enrollment issues, and she spoke of needing someone to verify addresses during her interview. This is reflected in the assistant superintendent’s experience with the intensity of her enactment.

The enactment of leadership of climate reflects an emphasis on how climate impacts instruction for all of the principal’s supervisors. A principal’s supervisor discussed how a climate of support was made possible through distributed leadership, thereby affected instructional practice.

Coupled with the climate, was to make sure that her teachers had support. She has a fully released school-based teacher leader. She made sure, specifically this year I know, through the office of academic support, there was a professional development specialist. She made sure that she tried to ensure that both the environmental conditions were safe and secure, but also she made sure that the climate within the teaching force was conducive to learning.

In this instance, the school-based teacher leader was available to support teachers daily, and the assistant superintendent found the practice particularly helpful.

Similarly, another assistant superintendent’s comments were not only aligned with the principal, but also support climate as a mechanism to ensure that instruction has a chance at being successful.

I think part of what she’ll talk about with the climate that I’ve seen myself is...it’s a pretty small school, so she has a limited budget. She relies on creating partnerships, and getting them to support her. One of the things that she has been [is] an advocate for is getting this dean of students. I think she goes at climate by, “If I improve my teachers and their practices and how we engage students, then a lot of our misbehaviors will go away.”
All of the assistant superintendents could name very specific enactment strategies for their principals. Whether it was working with a homeless shelter to support a large homeless population, implementing PBIS, lesson study efforts, facilitating more student voices, partnering with specific community organizations. Their responses were all framed around climate as a means to end, to support instruction and not climate as the end itself.

**Instruction**

The assistant superintendents’ responses regarding instructional leadership focused on their formal observations of teachers, and (as with the other practices) had an evaluative undertone. Unlike the principals, who shared a range of responses on their enactment of instructional leadership, assistant superintendent’s responses were mostly about observation and feedback, including recalibration of teacher ratings needed by principals and compliance issues (e.g., the number of observations to be completed weekly). A supervisor of two of the principals spoke about the quality of instruction quite similarly to the two principals’ discussion with me.

The assistant superintendents’ stance and tone of comments were evaluative of principals, while the principals shared feedback in terms of wanting to improve instruction. So, while principals talked about a teachers needing to improve, it was not accompanied by how they were rated. Rather, it was just that they need to improve to improve outcomes for students. One assistant superintendent spoke about feedback he gave to a principal on inflated teacher ratings quite differently.

That’s helped him give better feedback. I’ve looked at some of the observations he’s done and of his AP’s, and at least the ratings have gone down. Not in the negative sense, but in the sense of if you’re providing feedback and suggestions, it
certainly means they’re not *distinguished* [in this dimension of the evaluation rubric] and just really just to have no supervision, whatsoever. I’ve seen that concrete evidence in just looking at his observations.

The “concrete evidence” he referred to was the observation of instruction itself, not the student outcomes that improved as a result of a recalibration of ratings. This could indicate that the focus for assistant superintendents on compliance is unlikely to have an impact on improving instruction, due to the lack of an explicit connection to student outcomes.

In some instances, where assistant superintendents shared responses that reflected other aspects of instructional leadership, the connections were to the feedback cycle. For example, one principal’s supervisor wanted her to always make the connection as a cycle of feedback and another noted how good the principal is at providing the feedback – that the cycle is so extensive as to include lesson planning.

They turn in their lesson plans. She gives them written feedback on their lesson plans. She provides feedback on the assessments that they’re going to give their kids related to the lesson plans. I think that her number one strategy for improving the teaching and learning at her school has been through her observation and feedback to teachers.

Here, the assistant superintendent understands that the enactment of her instructional leadership is focused on improving instruction in several ways, from review and feedback on lesson plans, assessment and reviewing how students do on assessment in a meaningful and comprehensive cycle of feedback.

Instructional leadership responses from principals and teachers focused on the cycle of feedback. Student outcomes were connected but not to the degree that I expected, rather there was a focus on ratings of teachers and a disconnect from what the assistant superintendent gleans when visiting schools and the principal’s observations.
Assistant superintendents have a specific focus when working with principals. They are the evaluators and are responsible for instructional leadership for the region of schools they supervise. As principal managers their lens is focused on their leadership and how it manifests in the schools they lead. The assistant superintendent responses in the interviews reflect a narrow focus on orderliness of schools and instruction. Perhaps widening that lens to include the things that principals mention that really matter is a way for these principal’s supervisors to move from an evaluative to a learning stance that will benefit all of the principals they lead.

Alignment of Teacher Responses

In this section, I discuss the alignment of teacher responses with the responses from their principals about the practices. I begin with distributed leadership and will then examine, vision, organizational management, instruction and climate. In general, the teachers’ responses reflect a lack of depth in how teachers were able to talk about their principal’s leadership practice. I felt that teachers were earnestly trying to make meaning of their principal’s leadership practices and strategies, but perhaps the one-time meetings/interviews did not create sufficient opportunity for them to optimally construct and share the entirety of their experiences. (Of course, I have not judged these teachers negatively for their lack of detailed knowledge about their principal’s leadership practices and strategies.)

Distributed Leadership

Teachers’ descriptions of principals’ actions mirrored the principals’ characterizations of their own practices. In general, both reported that teachers have opportunities to lead in a variety of ways, that principals encouraged them to take on
leadership responsibilities, promoted collegiality through distributed leadership and that
the difficulty with sharing leadership that assistant superintendents noted was not
apparent to the teachers at their school.

Teachers overwhelmingly were able to point to opportunities to take on leadership
at their schools.

If you have an idea, you can come in and say, “Hey, I have this idea,” you know. There’s just, I think she encourages.... I don’t think that anybody could possibly feel like she’s calling all the shots. If somebody’s not involved in the decision-making process, it’s because they choose not to be. It’s the best way that I could put it.

Several of the teachers note that collegiality (by way of distributed leadership) was a way to improve outcomes for their students in meaningful ways that they felt they could measure.

I was on the leadership team for the first time this year, in many, many years. It was just a great experience. I just think that it’s such a difficult balance in any kind of staff development to really make what we’re doing engaging. Stand and deliver is so easy, but I think that those conversations across the year in leadership team about starting with data, like how can we bring the work and really have people look together. What is it that we’re bringing back to our classrooms? It didn’t just help me in like a big picture kind of way, but it really, really, influenced what I did with my students, and how I related to my colleagues this year.

She also noted her principal let other lead, even when the principal was well suited to lead.

My principal has a lot of expertise in literacy. Where we were receiving development, but [she] was comfortable being out of the limelight and allowing others on the team to lead the session. It was good to see the expertise of our colleagues.
This intentionality of practice is evident to this teacher, and she continued, talking about how it helps others grow and makes the school stronger because, “There are many experts here and that expertise gets to our students and helps them perform better.”

Vision

Teachers’ responses about enactment of vision practice did not differ from the principals and confirmed much of what the principal shared. All teachers were animated in their reports of how “this school is different.” One such example is a teacher who talked about the way the entire school starts the day.

Hmm, shaping a vision of academic excellence or success for all students, it makes me really think about how we start our day, here at my school and how we end. The way that we start the day and we end the day is by reciting the creed, as a group, with not only the staff, but also the students, which seems to start us off all on the same page, which seems essential to the student’s success. We didn’t do that at my old school.

Academic success for our kids seems to be very, very closely connected to a consistent way of doing things. This seems to be one of the things that I’ve seen at this school the most, in comparison to the other schools that I’ve seen in Philadelphia. The message that’s passed down from our leader stays the same in the classrooms. If there is kind of a concern or question about that, it’s brought up and it’s talked about, and it’s talked about often, and in an open format.

Some teachers also pointed out that they worked on the visioning. A teacher describes working on the vision with her principal on the school’s redesign initiative.

We’ve really been working with that hands-on this year in the re-design, and taking a look and coming full circle with what we see for the students. We recognize that teaching from that vision is important, and he says it all the time.

School pledges, which exists in some form in all six schools, were something that teachers highlighted as well. One teacher described how teachers use the school pledge to reinforce expectations and how the principal’s involvement is central to the utility of the pledge as it reflects the school’s vision.
We have a school pledge and all of the students know it. Even the scholars who you would think don’t even pay attention when it’s time, but they know it. But we also live by it, so we teach them by it. Would a scholar do so and so and so and so? If they’re struggling in class, we say, “What’s the last line of our [school] pledge? We are scholars we will succeed. Okay, so what do you need to do to succeed?” And then the principal also has this big push for college. Throughout our building we have all the different pennants hanging up in the building from different colleges. You can go to college. We know college isn’t for everybody. Everybody is not going to make it. Everybody may not even need to be there. But you can do that. It is a vision. It is something that we’re trying to strive for. When we say this pledge, we do practice all of that in there. We never give up. You just keep trying. And even when we’re providing feedback to our scholars we’ll write this sometimes, “Keep trying, keep trying, and keep trying.”

This teacher, who has been in the school prior to the principal, also described the visioning as important because the player’s change but the message needs to be the same. She spoke of seeing people come and go but that the core message of the school has remained because, “The principal stays focused on the main thing.”

Last, the teachers experience with the enactment of vision was through principals’ ability to share their vision with others. For example, one teacher shared how the principal gets not just the teacher’s to share their vision.

I’ve never seen so many partnerships coming into a school, or actually giving to a school, so that the school can be successful. I think that comes from not only building partnerships, but sharing your vision for the school, and having other people buy into your vision for the school.

This teacher never mentioned the dirty work of having to tell partners “no.” This speaks to the mere surface knowledge of the partnership work that teachers may be limited to, rather than more detailed knowledge of the principal’s enactment of practices.

Organizational management

Teachers responses about enactment of organizational management practice did not differ from the principals and confirmed much of what the principal shared. Teacher
responses focused on how the organization of their schools promotes a good climate, consistency of effort and principal’s use of data to include participation in data meetings. Eight of the ten participating teachers spoke of firsthand knowledge of the principal using data to inform instructional leadership and decision making, efforts to improve attendance and how principals insist that students and parents be aware of student data.

Organization and predictability of school processes was important to the teachers in this study. For example, one teacher talked about the principal’s use of a Friday meeting to ensure that everyone knows what is going to happen the following week.

You bring your bagel and your coffee in. You sit down. I guess I’m the note taker, because I give everything to Ruth, the secretary that needs to go on the calendar. It’s an open-forum.

This teacher values being able to know and contribute to what is going to happen in the school the following week. This example also illustrates how the best principals include other practices, as this also reflects shared leadership opportunities for teachers. Another teacher talks about how the consistency of an atmosphere of open dialogue helps the teachers with being able to do what is needed to help their students.

Academic success for our kids seems to be very, very closely connected to a consistent way of doing things. This seems to be one of the things that I’ve seen at this school the most, in comparison to the other schools that I’ve seen in Philadelphia. The message that’s passed down from our leader stays the same in the classrooms. If there is kind of a concern or question about that, it’s brought up and it’s talked about, and it’s talked about often, and in an open format.

The predictability of school processes and flexibility demonstrated by the principal also emerged as a theme in this study. In one case, a teacher explained that the principal makes adjustments and mid-course corrections for the sake of student and teacher match.

Rostering is an important process, especially for our school. If students are placed into a classroom where the learning style of themselves, and the teaching style of
the teacher they’re assigned to, is something that needs an adjustment, in this school, we are able to make that adjustment. We have enough support in the staff to accept those changes. We’ve had a couple students that have had unfortunate peer-to-peer conflicts, and in response to that, we’ve been able to make a switch, and some students have really soared from that.

Teachers felt their principals’ hands on style in school rostering benefited the school and reflected enactment of the principal’s organizational management.

The use of data for a variety of purposes was also an enactment of this practice mentioned frequently by the teachers. All reported that the principals regularly attend data meetings during collaborative planning sessions and that they high levels of engagement during these meetings. They also reported that – like in other areas of enactment – it was different at this school, compared to the others where they had worked. Principals not only examined the data at these meetings, but they connected to instructional practice and there was a real cycle of feedback from instruction to observation to data and then back to instruction.

The data in grade groups is different here. The principal told me “That’s what we do here. We examine the data.” See where students are. If you said such and such is not making progress, well what have you done? What happened before? I would say we are definitely data driven. It’s not talked about in some places. We talk about it. You collect it and it’s done. No. She constantly reviews, sees if it is being followed up in classrooms and then how do children do on our common assessments.

Classroom data displays are a feature in all six of the schools as reported by the teachers and the principals. The intentional involvement of the children is evident by what one teacher shares.

We look at their data from the year before and we create goals. Then those students sometimes change because you know sometimes the kid will do better with you or a new kid will come in and things like that. Then we have data binders, and in the data binders we keep benchmark scores, things like that, but also more like teacher assessment. Our goal in my class this year was that we
started graphing our data, so this was our first time. The principal insists to get the kids more involved so they can truly see it. Because it’s great for us to see it but for the kids to see it is something else.

In this example, the values of the principals have influenced how the teachers use data in their classrooms.

**Instruction**

Teacher responses about enactment of instructional practice did not differ significantly from the principals’ responses, and confirmed much of what the principal shared. Teachers largely spoke about enactment of instructional practice in two areas: how much their principals participated in instructional planning sessions and the manner, depth and quality of instructional feedback from their principals.

Nine of the ten teachers said that their principal gave feedback differently than other principals, in terms of the level of detail. One even commented that, even though it was the last week of school, the principal was still giving feedback. “The last week of school. He was still going. He wanted to see follow-up and see if teachers took the criticism and his suggestions.” Her principal commented on the importance of the feedback cycle, the importance of going back, and how he sets a date for returning before he finishes the post-observation conference, worried that if he doesn’t it might never happen.

Another teacher spoke about a time she was observed and it went poorly.

Last year when he observed me. It was…everyone has a bad day. It happened to be my day he was coming in to observe me. He came in. I was teaching a lesson to my fourth graders about fractions. It just didn’t go well. I could have stood on my head that day. It just wasn’t going well. I was mortified, because I knew it didn’t go well. He sent me my feedback. Of course, he sent me a note that said, “Be relaxed. Don’t be stressed-out. We’ll talk.” When I came in for my follow-up, I let it all out. “This had happened. This had happened.” He was, “Okay, do
you feel better?” I’m like, “No. What I need to know is, how you would have
done it differently.” He has a special end background, and he was, “Maybe next
time...are you teaching it again today?” I was, “Yeah, I need to go.” There was no
checking or understanding. There was no understanding. He showed me. He said,
“You should try this. Try this. Add some manipulatives.”

This teacher pointed out that the principal’s stance was one of helping her improve, and
she was inspired and encouraged to do so, for it. The teachers talked about their schools
being “different” because of their principals’ leadership. This example illustrates how this
group of effective principals enacts instructional leadership in meaningful ways that will
lead to improved instructional practice and outcomes for their students.

Although they have to complete a certain number of formal observations each
week, the teachers did not talk about their experiences as part of perfunctory
organizational routines, but rather as meaningful exchanges focused on engaging them in
an inquiry stance about their teaching practice.

Climate

The teachers’ responses around creating a climate conducive to teaching and
learning did not differ from the principals’ and confirmed much of what the principal
shared. The teachers focused on rules articulated by the principal, consistency and clear
expectations for students characterized by positivity, a welcoming attitude, PBIS, caring
and nurturing of students and collaborative opportunities for teachers.

Eight of ten teachers mentioned promoting a culture of a positive stance. The
positive stance could be as simple as the principal welcoming students to a daily PBIS
program at the school. In each case, the teachers spoke of the intentional efforts of their
principal to ensure that children and staff feel welcome. One teacher talked about an
effort that they undertake at their school: writing positive notes to students and to
teachers. She feels that this really makes a difference.

Yes, filling your bucket. It’s for the students and for the kids. The whole idea is
that we give other teachers positive feedback, and she also gives us drops in the
bucket that we collect. I think that helps to create a more positive atmosphere and
[a more] kind environment. Also for the kids, giving them a lot of positive
feedback and reinforcement when they’re doing good things and working hard.
Another thing she does is, “Caught Being Good.” If I would see a classroom
doing well or walking in the hall or working hard, we give them a caught being
good coupon, and at the end of the day she’ll announce the caught being good
coupons for all of the school. Another thing, the teaching environment is...she has
all of these different little reward things. For example, for attendance. If teachers
have perfect attendance for the month, she puts all our names in a bucket and
sometimes we get different little gifts cards and things for perfect attendance.

Teachers pointed to consistency and a void of surprises as principals’ enactment
of creating climate conducive to teaching and learning.

There are expectations. Teachers were given a handbook with expectations and
rules that it’s expected that we follow. We have to make sure those kids are safe
first. That’s our number one priority, because if they’re not safe and comfortable,
they’re not going to learn. I mean, [the principal], he talks about it at every staff
meeting. There’s norms, and we’re down to even....the Dunkin’ Donuts cups can’t
be in our hands. He does not want Dunkin’ Donuts, hot coffee, around the kids.
It’s a danger.

This level of detail about expectations is unusual in my experience. This teacher spoke of
norms and expectations for teachers and how these expectations trickle down to students.
Although, one might say that the level of detail borders on rigidity, the teacher
contextualized the expectations around student safety.

Teachers said that their principals are firm-but-caring, no nonsense, and that they
are clear about their expectations.

She’s no nonsense but in a...it’s not in a harsh way. It’s very child friendly, but
firm.... It starts with the uniform. Very strong. We don’t do dress down days,
because that’s one of her philosophies.... If you ask the students, they’ll tell you,
“We’re here to focus on the serious business of learning and a serious business of
learning. You have to come in ready to learn. Learning begins right away and goes until the end of the school year.” I mean she has high.... We all have high expectations and it starts with her. She has very high expectations. If something is brewing, we stop it right away…. Not just what happens here at school but if student’s are on their way home or coming to school and we hear of anything in the neighborhood, the principal is quick to….If she does it or can we get these parents together. All of that leads to a climate that’s conducive to learning.

Teachers mentioned the importance of clarity of expectations and the firm stance of principals as contributors to a calm, welcoming climates. They feel that they are appropriately supported both when there are discipline challenges and when parent complain. They also reported that these principals hold everyone to the same standard, something many had not experienced in other schools.

Teachers in all six schools also reported various opportunities to collaborate. Collaborative planning sessions which include the principal are a part of the instructional planning for each of the schools. These planning sessions include opportunities for cross content expertise – which is unusual in elementary schools. Teachers described this as a way to plan for instruction for students and also a way to improve their teaching practice, because they learned from their colleagues.

Within each grade level, the teachers work together amazingly. We’re all able to pool our expertise and things like that. That’s in there. We have common planning time; every grade has a common planning time, so they’re able to plan together and things like that. Within our classrooms we have a specific special ed classroom, a specific ELL classroom, and then a specific, it’s general but it’s becoming more of another ESL classroom at this point, but with that, we’re able to have the push-in, so the special ed teacher or the ESL teachers are able to come into the classroom and really give their expertise.

A lot of schools, you don’t get the opportunity to talk to your co-workers in a positive light. Sometimes, it’s like, “Oh, we’re just ranting. We’re being negative.” That’s not her focus. It’s like, “Well, if there’s a problem, what can we do and solve it?” We can work together. We do lesson studies, so it’s also another way where you’re constantly learning. It might be something that you go to another classroom, and you see, say, “Oh, I could try it that way, to try and improve my teaching.”
This is important because research shows supports that these kinds of collaboration opportunities help improve instructional outcomes for children. In addition, the modeling of learning by the principal, participation and attendance at the meetings adds value these meetings.

Teachers in this study were very supportive of their principals’ efforts and were able to identify enactment strategies. They identified the same kinds of enactment strategies as principals. However, they were not able to speak about them in the same level of detail. This may be because they are too busy doing their work in classrooms, and perhaps take for granted that these activities are being planned by their principal to support them teachers. Finally, their perspective and the things that they value converge around a few strategies that are more likely notice, due to their direct impact on the conditions for teaching and learning in their schools, and the support for their teaching in the classroom.

**How Principals Learned the Strategies**

*Where do principals learn to be so effective that the indirect effects of their work show up in strong positive educational outcomes of their students?*

In this chapter, I explore how the principals in this study described how they learned the enactment strategies I discussed in Chapter 5. These principals discussed five major sources of their learning how to enact leadership practice: mentors, experiential learning, formal pre-service leadership training, informal/self-directed learning, and district-provided professional development.
Experiential Learning

Leaders in this study pointed to their prior experience as teachers and assistant principals for the development of their leadership strategies. Learning from prior experience dominated responses among all five practices, with specific examples from throughout their experience as educators. For example, Principal Russell pointed to his past as a teacher, “This is also about working smart and not hard kind of thing, which goes back to my Amy Harvey School days.”

Principal Martin pointed to the direct parallels between her concerns as a principal and her old concerns as a teacher.

A lot of the things that we do as principals are...it’s still some of the same things but just at a different scale…. It’s still the same thing. Climate, safety. I made sure my kids were safe in my classroom. I made sure all the kids I had, we’d rotate all those kids, were safe. And I created a safe environment where they could learn, and a respected environment where they could say what they felt like they needed to say without any repercussions.

Principal Martin sees very little difference in what she does as a principal from what she did as a classroom teacher. Her leadership of children was similar in scope to her leadership of teachers. She views her school “as one big classroom” where there are multiple teachers.

Principal Lee cited an initially unhappy experience that she had early in her teaching career.

I think it started my second experience as a teacher. The school lost a second grade position, and I was transferred to Diamond School and the principal said, “Okay, you’re going to be the gym teacher.” And I think I cried, and had a tantrum all at the same time, and did some negotiating, and said, “I can’t teach Phys Ed every day, all day. But, maybe I can do health and Phys Ed.” But, being in that position really put me in a place to get to know everybody in the building really quickly. I learned the value of relationships and got to see when grade teams were working together, and when they weren’t.
Flexibility is not just important when you become the principal. Principal Lee demonstrates that the experience of having to teach something for which you are completely unprepared was not dissimilar from being a new principal. She spoke of having to build relationships in her role as a gym teacher, because she worked with an entire school of children and with all of the teachers. She gleans many needed lessons that she applies to her current leadership practice as a principal.

_Learning from Negative Experiences_

As principals discussed learning effective strategies, some also identified compelling counter examples. They accounted for many of their leadership strategies by pointing out that they did not want to repeat things they experienced as teachers or assistant principals. This time, Principal Ward was the most succinct, “I just saw so many things wrong and I knew I couldn’t do that.” She shared how she learned that distributed leadership is not something extra, but rather is essential to being able to effectively run a school.

Principal Ward had a negative experience earlier as a school leader.

I’m like, “Oh my goodness, I need to know who can. I can’t be the only leader.” The building was too big, too many issues. I learned from a negative, in that situation. But it has been a practice that has proven fruitful since. Like, you really do need to know who your people are, what they know, what is their level of dedication? It’s not what they say, it’s in the what they do. That’s very important for me. From a negative situation regarding that I learned so much.

It is possible to learn what _not_ to do. This leader learned many lessons from watching poor leadership. She learned the importance of staff relationships and selecting dedicated and talented staff. She also learned the importance of shared leadership and building a
cohesive team coalesced around a singular vision. Each of the practices discussed in this study had been negatively implemented in the counter example to exemplary leadership.

These principals did not limited their valuable prior experiences to their professional lives. Their examples extended back through their childhood experience, particularly for two leaders who talked about things that they would not do. Although they did not identify specific things they do or do not do, they pointed to how they felt as students and to experiences that were not provided (which they attribute to principals’ leadership) as negative models for them.

Principal Ward spoke about her deeply personal experience with tracking in her high school.

I had no business taking parenting at [age] 15. I just feel like whoever it was in the rostering chair, didn’t talk to me, didn’t talk to my mom, didn’t really get to know me…. If you don’t have high expectations for them, you’re not even going to shoot toward the sky. You’re going to shoot into the ground. I’m sorry, that makes probably no sense at all. I guess what I’m trying to say is that the high expectations, I don’t think were given or I wasn’t afforded any of those high expectations. Frankly my mother didn’t have them either. Her thing was graduate high school and that was it. That was back in 1984. My kids experience that here with their parents and my job is to teach parents high expectations if I need to.

Somehow, she overcame those low expectations – from both her family and her school. From that negative experience, she knows that her job is to have high expectations for students, and even to teach parents to be better than her own mother was. “I just feel that educators need to have a vision and high expectations for their children,” she told me.

Principal Murphy also spoke of negative experiences in school growing up.

The district where I first became a principal, I was also a student in that district, and then I was also a teacher in that district. There was a lot of history in there, and so I knew what made me feel good when I was a student and what didn’t. I knew what things were said to me from adults who were in charge of me that made me feel good, and what didn’t. I always vowed that if I had ever become in
a position where I get to lead in that particular district, I would remember those things to – kind of – help me shape me schools.

Children are always watching and learning. Experiences, however early, shaped who these two girls become. The notion of emotional and purposeful leadership is reinforced by this example, which gets to the heart of how leaders sustain themselves around a purpose that is meaningful to them for a host of reasons.

The value of these examples is that – despite a lack of strategy to learn – there is power in not repeating poor practices. These leaders consciously engage in practices that support children in ways that they did not experience when they were in school.

Successful teaching experience has been invaluable to the leaders in this study. Along the way they subtly picked up many leadership skills. These include management skills, soft skills of working with a variety of people, organization and instructional tools. They each taught for at least five years prior to becoming school administrators and have been principals for more than five years. This accumulation of experience provides a well for them on which to draw and apply to handle the challenges of leadership.

**Mentors**

The leaders in this study described mentors in many way (e.g., influential supporters of their careers, trusted individuals, wise counsellors), but mostly they described mentors as people they have observed and now mimicked/copied/stolen leadership strategies from – strategies they saw as particularly effective. Although two principals pointed to *official mentors* (i.e., assigned by the district), all of them spoke about other individuals whose leadership they admired and learned from. These *informal mentors* include some of the teachers with whom they had worked previously, and even
some whom they were now supervising. Learning from informal mentors is particularly
evident in the leadership practices of vision, organizational management and instruction.

Each of the leaders in this study identified at least one formal or informal mentor
as key to their learning what vision is and why it matters. The principals in this study
reported having had many opportunities to learn from others and seem to have carefully
studied and subsumed what they thought works into their own practice.

I asked Principal Murphy where he got his saying, The students come first, the
school comes second, and adults come third. He shared that he learned it from one of his
principal, back when he was a teacher.

I learned as a teacher under a principal I admired. I have to say, and I’ll give her
credit for it, Leslie Michaels. I remember that was one of the things that she said
to me, is that you always put the students first, then you never have any regrets
and you always make your decisions based upon that. So I would have to give her
that credit.

Principal Lee at Riverbank shared a similar story, from her experience while she was an
assistant principal.

And I had an opportunity to work under some extraordinary educators. Brock
West, a really strong principal. And he would say, “You know, Anna, is that in
alignment with the vision?” And I’d say, “But I think kids would really...” [He
would interrupt,] “Is it in alignment with the vision?” And I’d say, “Well, not
really. But we could tweak the vision.” He would say, “Okay, so what’s the
relevance” or “What’s the importance?” And it taught me to look at things in a
linear way and to really stay focused, because you have a lot of things that happen
in school that can take you off track. And if you don’t have something that keeps
you focused you’ll find yourself in too many different places.

Many of the principals specifically cited these kind of formal, informal or implicit
mentors when explaining how to they learned about the importance of vision to school
leadership. Principal Robinson went further. When I asked her about how she learned
about vision, she expanded her answer, saying that everything she knows about leadership she learned from watching others.

But I would say, and I’m probably going to say this for many of the things that you ask me about, mentorship. Mentorship either directly, direct mentorship with other leaders, or indirectly watching people.

Principals also cited mentoring and watching the enactment strategies used by others when discussing organizational management, and leadership in general because of their belief in the importance of being particularly good at this practice and the way it influences the school as a whole.

Principal Lee mentioned a former principal who was instrumental in her building skills in organizational management.

All of the principals in the northwest area were principals that had been principals for a long time. They would be like, “Little girl let me tell you...” And I would sit there and take notes and listen. Bob Barker, I don’t know if he’s still around. He would come here twice a month, and he taught me how to do a tickler file, and all these things that really enhanced management skills. Because management is a lot around organization. If you’re organized then you can manage things and you can manage people. But he also taught me that when you have good rapport you can do more than manage people, you can actually lead people.

Principal Lee learned from Barker not just particular tools or skills, but actually developed her understanding how organizational management fits in with other practices. She also learned the importance of softer skills (i.e., building rapport with other adults) from him.

Principal Martin also cited an old supervisor.

I was a part of the leadership team, and she [a former principal] expected certain things. The leadership team met religiously, once a week. There were certain documents that you were to bring, and everybody needed to have a copy, because her feeling was if no one else knows what you’re doing you’re not doing anything at all. She was really big on communication and I just watched. We operated as a team, as probably the most effective team I’ve ever been a part of.
Like Principal Lee, she learned both specific techniques (e.g., the importance of particular documents) and more general views/strategies (e.g., communication) from her old mentor.

Principals noted the importance of learning from colleagues in schools with similar demographics, as principal Martin described when talking about where she learned about building a shared vision.

It’s good to learn from your peers, because a lot of times it might be something that they’ve already tried that was successful. Maybe it was something that didn’t work, or maybe if they did try it, they can give you some ideas on how to take baby steps towards moving in their direction.

Principals frequently talked about not reinventing the wheel. Above, principal Martin described the “respect she has for colleagues who have done it.” She further explained that she is only “stealing the good stuff” and how, when principals receive professional development, sometimes the presenter is not familiar with their challenges. The importance of learning from those with similar populations of students was important to her, and this was noted by other leaders, too.

In addition to their peers, these leaders also reported learning important strategies from the teachers they supervise, both in organizational management and in instruction. Principal Ward described how her own specialization in the middle grades made her best early-grade teachers especially valuable for her.

My reading specialist and [reading] coach has taught me so much about how to create a schedule where you maximize time in the early grades, and how to do transitions. I was an intermediate grades teacher and I admit I needed to learn the early literacy stuff.

Principal Lee had the converse situation. She knew elementary school, and needed to learn about middle grades.
I had no idea how to create a middle school schedule, and in my first assistant principalship we were being changed from a K-5 to a K-8 [school]. My principal told me to create the schedule. I told her I had no idea, and she told me that I would figure it out. After crying, I went to one of the experienced teachers I knew who was in middle school, and they taught me how to do a middle school roster in a night. My principal thought I was brilliant. I guess my brilliance was in asking someone who knew and being resourceful.

For both of these principals, their more senior position did not keep them from looking for help from teachers they respected. They knew that mentorship can come from many directions.

Mentors in this study were more likely to be informal than formal. The term mentor casts a wide net, from formal principals that these leaders worked under early in their careers, to current colleagues whose leadership they admire or have learned from. The leadership context of the mentor was also important in that they focused on the leadership of those with similar contexts or demographic challenges as the most valuable.

**Informal/Self-Directed Professional Development**

Principals also identified informal or self-directed professional development (e.g., self-selected professional development, academic reading, self-selected conferences, National Institute for School Leadership courses) as ways they had learned to enact leadership practice.

Principal Murphy identified several books that have influenced him and even used one as a book study for his entire staff. He also spoke of going to conferences to “sharpen his tools.”

Principal Ward has taken several NISL courses, which she identified as honing her skills on observation and feedback. NISL courses are required to maintain certification. Principal Ward said, “Rather than choose any old ones, I try to choose ones
that will help me.” They are typically perfunctory workshops for principals and other schools administrators required to take them to maintain certification. However, she tries to “choose one nugget” that helps her leadership.

The value of life-long learning is espoused in all fields of education. These educators model it for their staffs by honing their crafts through continued education.

**District Provided Professional Development**

All six principals identified district-provided professional development, especially as it related to discreet technical skills (e.g., particular system for providing timely feedback to classroom observation, understanding the components of early literacy).

For example, Principal Russell told me about participating in a year-long district induction program, *Aspiring Leaders Program for Student Success (ALPSS)*. In this program, he was assigned a mentor principal, for a year He pointed to the inclusion of writing weekly reflections as a positive of the program. Although this program has been discontinued (due to lack of funding), he still counts that principal mentor as someone he learned from and mentioned her in his responses.

Still others recalled a New Principal Induction programs provided by the district. Principal Martin explained how it worked.

The district, at the time, had a week-long [program]... We had the introduction classes, but then…throughout the year, you would come and they would train you on different things. They taught us how to write 21’s [expulsion requests]. They taught us the disciplinary records. They taught us how to document Act 26. They also taught us how to write up teachers, that whole process of if you have to write a teacher up. They told us about attendance and how to monitor…. You actually learned how to do that. I don’t know if that’s still done anymore for these new principals that are coming up. We actually went and we learned, we got in groups, we had to do mock conversations with each other, and we would role play. One person would be the principal, one person would be an irate parent. It was helpful.
Others shared that they learned how to refine feedback processes and learning to use a new framework (Danielson) for observation from district mandated formal PD programs. Principal Murphy further detailed that he really had to pay attention because as a teacher he was really good at classroom management and struggled to write feedback.

When I first came to this district we were doing a lot of work around the Danielson framework and the four domains and everything else. I told my teachers when we were going over that work I said, "I struggle in the area of providing feedback in classroom environment because I've never had that challenge as a classroom teacher, so I'm going to work this year to really get strong in my feedback and I'm going to give to you in that particular domain because right now that's not my best area to give feedback."

Principal Murphy said he went to additional training that was provided by the because he knew he needed to get good at it.

Two principals complained about the quality of district-provided professional development. The same two leaders went on to suggest other ways of delivering professional development and professional topics that they believe should be included for themselves and for new principals (see Chapter 7). I actually expected more complaints, even though I did not specifically ask for them. (My position as the Chief Academic Support Officer may have limited their responses in this area.)

**Formal Pre-Service Leadership Training**

All of the leaders in this study have had formal leadership training. While some received a certificate and others completed a full master’s degree, all went through university programs in order to become certified as principals. I noticed that they used their university training to fit their current assignment.
Principal Murphy directly applied a lesson he learned from his graduate school training.

One book study I did with my one school was called, *White Teachers/Diverse Classrooms*. It was a really good book, and it was a really good study because it kind of opened up a lot about people’s beliefs and their expectations weren’t so high as they thought they were, when it started having dialog. That work was very helpful, and I learned the importance of discussing books and work with my teachers through my coursework at St. Joe’s to really creating professional learning communities, and so forth, like that.

Principal Murphy noticed that his teachers were having a difficult time connecting with the students and that their expectations were low. His teachers, who are mostly white, experienced his leadership as an African American male as “preachy.” So, he used an academic/theory-driven resource to take his “personality” out of it, as he believes, “the message [is] more important than the messenger.”

Other examples of formal training illustrate how principals learned how to leverage their training in their schools. Principal Lee told me that she first learned about vision in school, “Part of my college preparatory training was we had to design and create a school enterprise and set a vision.” She described in great detail the plan she did for the school and that when she became an assistant principal she was charged with the expansion of the K-6 school into K-8 school. “I took out that plan, dusted it off, and took some of the things and applied it to it. My principal thought I was a genius.”

The theory they learned in the formal programs has been affirmed through their practical experience as principals. For example, Principal Robinson shared “one time something happened in an interaction with a teacher and I chuckled to myself at how I used a confirmatory paraphrase, something I had learned in graduate school to respond.”
Of all of the methods for learning enactment strategies, formal pre-service programs were cited least. All of the principals pointed to them as being valuable, but their day-to-day utility was not at all apparent in what they told me. Interestingly, however, they used this experience as a repository. They called it up when needed. Its value is in having it to draw from when needed. Like many of the other enactment strategies around the practices, knowing when and how to do something has proven just as important as knowing what to do. These leaders use their formal pre-service training as another item in their toolkit, available and ready when needed.

I discovered in my analysis of the interviews with this set of leaders that they have been accumulating strategies for leadership since the beginning of their careers, and – in some cases – since the beginning of their schooling. Although they jokingly complained about the quality of some of the required professional development opportunities, it is apparent in their responses that they are constantly adding to their leadership toolkit. Though they often learn from other leaders and their peers, they often view their leadership journey as co-constructed with the people they come in contact with in their daily work.

**Principals’ Recommendations**

The best people to make a recommendation on how to do something may be the people who are doing that very thing well. In this study, I asked these six exemplary principals for recommendations for the development of their colleagues. In this section, I examine the range of recommendations these principals offered for training and selecting
principals. First, I describe their recommendations for mentors for principals. Second, I address formal leadership development training (in form and function), discreet skill development, opportunities to learn from colleagues and differentiation of development. Finally, I examine their recommendations on prior experiences essential to success in the principalship.

Mentors

As I discussed in Chapter 5, the principals described many forms of mentors. Most said that the ones that they learned the most from were informal mentors, although many also said that they had had a district-assigned mentor, and (in some cases) have served as a formal mentor for less experienced colleagues. Each of the principals identified at least one individual (although most mentioned several) that they had learned from along the way, and thusly recommend that new and novice principals be assigned a mentor.

They also identified the importance of having time and space set aside to do this mentoring work well. Principal Robinson mentored a new principal last year, who was new to the district and young. She spoke of struggling to have time to support her mentee, and for the principal to absorb all there is to learn.

I would love to see a different kind of mentorship program for principals. Right now, I mentored a new principal, but there is so much, you really don’t have time. You don’t have the kind of time to really [supply] that nurturing piece that I talked about. You can be there to respond, if they have a question. Sometimes I feel like I’m helping her to put out fires as opposed to really [think about her practices].

Principal Robinson was not only talking about not having sufficient time, rather she was also concerned about the kind of leadership she wants to model for her mentee.
She knows that helping with putting out fires – however important – is not likely to move her mentee’s leadership development forward. She wants to be able to do more and model more, and does not believe that the current mentoring structure takes advantage of the most valuables things she has to offer.

Having enough time for the mentor principal to really be able to truly nurture and help develop that first year principal. Then you can kind of scale back, but I think there’s so much that’s needed by a first year principal.

Principal Martin stated the consequences of not having support for new and novice principals, and how she thinks mentors can help. Principal Martin had been a mentor a few years ago, when time was created for veteran principals to help the new principals. She has seen both sides.

Without their support for us going in, it’s difficult. So, people either decide to go, or they flounder the whole year, and they end up quitting. Or, they end up getting demoted, or they end up getting written up. It doesn’t have to be that way. I really do think having that person…you could ask [my mentee]. I think that first year having me as a mentor…I went to her school, I made her come to mine. She watched something I did. I went there. I watched what she did. After, we debriefed. “What do you think?” I even went to some of her night meetings, to see how she presented herself in front of the parents, what she said, how it worked. That really made a difference. I think the years that we’ve had that, we’ve had a lower turnover of people, of principal turnover.

These recommendations around mentors were centered on the impact that mentors made in the success of these leaders, what they learned as a result of those relationships, and the lasting impact on their leadership practice.

Principal Russell at Maple Ridge shared that one of the other principals in the study had mentored him.

I learned so much from [my mentor]. Even though she wasn’t a formal mentor, teachers who think they may want to become administrators one day should be encouraged to have an informal mentor. And a person who encourages them but tells them the truth.
Principal Lee said that principals need comprehensive support around everything, and they need support from someone with expertise in every area involving the principalship.

People think it’s corny, but sometime you really need, like you said earlier, to sit with somebody and talk things through. Because, what we intend to come out doesn’t always come out. Sometimes you need some practice and training with that. I would also suggest something around researching, in terms of community. Because to be a good principal I think you need to understand the community that you work in and you need to be really good at communicating and tapping in to resources that are available to you from families and any community organization. I think that would be a start. Certainly, there are a lot of technical things around building and rostering, using the SCN [student information system used by district]. I think some of the basics are around setting your mission and vision, being a good communicator, and making sure that all stakeholders have a role in what you’re trying to do. Don’t take it all on your own. Don’t be a dictator. Collaborate. Be clear. But hold people accountable.

She illustrated that principals need to be good at many things and spoke about the disposition they need to have while doing it. This example includes each of the research based practices, from organizational leadership (in building a roster) to climate and culture leadership (in communication and relationships with families) to inclusionary visioning practices. She sees the mentor as a one-stop shop for receiving that breadth of support.

**Leadership Development**

Leadership development, in form and function, also emerged strongly among principals’ recommendations. Leadership development themes included training around leadership skills (e.g., those that entail the five research-based practices), as well as change management, and particular pedagogical skills (e.g., expertise in literacy).

The leadership skills most mentioned as being need of development involved organizational management. Principals suggested learning them through traditional in-
service professional development sessions (workshop format) that are coupled with collaborative sessions with other principal’s sharing promising practices. They also suggested that sessions be differentiated, based on principals’ expertise. They further pointed out that experienced principals need to grow, but need something different then newer principals. Principal Martin suggests that,

Then, learning about how school needs to run for the day. How should you do grade reviews? How should you do your lunches? Should you do four lunches, as opposed to five? How do you do your mixed groups? I never do K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. That’s a disaster. You need to have an upper and a lower, each year. That was year three. It took me till third year to say, “I’m pulling out my hair.” I sat down [and] I said, “What are the problems at lunch time?” “These problems are affecting the afternoon and instruction.

She also spoke about the operational “stuff” that must be done that takes up a principal’s time, and how it can get in the way of the important stuff if a principal does not manage it correctly.

I would say [novice principals] need to learn the whole doing a budget. You can’t just give a principal a budget and say, “Here, do the budget.” They need to know how, that this money has to last you the whole year. You need to make sure that you put enough in this place and that place, so that by February you’re like, “Oh my God, I need to buy paper for the school, but I have no money in my operating budget.” They need to be trained on that. They need to be trained on observations. What you look for, what you look for in the mini-observations, what you look for in the informals, what you look for in the formals. They need to learn organizational skills. “Here’s what you need to do for the month of September. People say instruction all of the time, but if the teachers have no paper than you will be dealing with another issue. It’s a balance. I have to order paper at 10:00 a.m. and then start observing at 10:05 a.m.

Principal Martin recalled a two-week summer induction session for new principals, which she took part in. This session covered all of this, but she said, “It wasn’t in context, so I had to relearn it during the school year, when I really needed it.”
This speaks to the need – as principal Martin named it – to have these principal training sessions throughout the year, rather than just in the summer. She called them, “Just in time” training sessions, where principals could meet monthly and ask, “What do I need to do next?” She feels those would be very helpful for principals, so that they get the most out of their time. She even suggested that they could be virtual (i.e., online), and feels that all principals could benefit – not just the new ones.

I would say creating more space for principals, across all experience levels to collaborate more frequently. We have some of those times, but as I said, I feel like I pick up a lot anytime I have the opportunity to interact with other principals. Even if it’s an informal setting, there are things that you just hear people informally talk about that will inevitably deposit something that says “Oh, I can try this,” or, “I can tweak this for my context.” Just more opportunity for principals to really talk.

Two principals highlighted the necessity for principals to have technical expertise in literacy. Principal Robinson (a former literacy coach), who leads a K-4 school, highly values her expertise in literacy and considers it critical to her ability to lead and guide teachers in this area. She wove together the issues of managing staff and dealing with staff members who might not be very good literacy instruction. This, again, illustrates how these exemplary leaders intuitively understand the connections between the different aspects of their leadership in a way that ineffective or mediocre principals might not.

I would definitely suggest training around literacy, because I think when you’re leading a group of people around teaching students how to be proficient readers and writers, you need to have a certain content knowledge around that. I would also suggest something around working with people and supporting people and managing people, so that principals know how to deal with some of the most difficult teachers, the teachers who are easy to deal with but aren’t good at their craft.

Besides workshop-style development and collaborative sessions, principals mentioned more formal leadership development programs offered by the district,
Aspiring Leadership for Philadelphia Schools (ALPS). Two of the leaders in this study went through the ALPS program and (as discussed above) they credit much of what they learned and their effectiveness to the ALPS program.

Bringing that back the [ALPS] program. I think principals really need to see what good instruction looks like. I don’t think that they do. I will say that I really know what I’m looking for in a classroom, and I don’t think everybody gets the opportunity. They many times jump from “I’m going to stay in an effective school,” and now I am a principal, I’m somebody telling them what the instruction should look like. They need training and experience. That has to be the case.

Principal Russell explained the impact that the opportunity to participate in a year-long program under an effective principal (so deemed by the district) had on his own instructional leadership practice. All of the leaders mentioned this notion of learning from the best practice of others. Principal Russell even said that learning from others should also include principals from other districts. That is, inter-district principals learning opportunities would be an opportunity to share.

This is the best practice you could do. Show some of your gems again. It doesn’t have to be us, but other places. Maybe we should have principals meetings in some of our buildings.

These leaders recommended leadership development based on constructs that they value and skills that they believe are really needed to be an effective leader. Some are also based on deficiencies they have noted in their colleagues. Last, they see proficiency in some technical skills (e.g., district business processes) as skills that allow principals to focus on the more important issues of teaching and learning.

**Experiences Needed Prior to becoming a principal**

Each of the school leaders in this study had been an assistant principal prior to becoming a principal, and this was reflected in their recommendations. All of them
indicated that it is essential for new principals to have experience as assistant principals, prior to assuming the principalship.

I would love to have had the opportunity to work fully released under a principal for six months (or a year) before having taken on that responsibility. I was fortunate to be a AP first, and I can’t tell you enough how having that principal to go to and get that advice, how helpful that was. [Laughs.] I feel bad for people that come straight from the classroom to being a principal. I feel like that’s hard.

Above, Principal Lee referred to the large number of candidates the district places in schools as principals who have never had any administrative experience. They go directly from peer to supervisor, and not just supervisor but to the big chair – where the principal is responsible for everything that happens in a school. Principal Lee underscored how difficult (or impossible) this is for someone without administrative experience. She understands how difficult it was for her, even with her prior assistant principal experience.

Principal Martin similarly described the need to be an assistant principal. Her comments reflect the need for experience with all five of the research based practices before one is ready to take on the role of principal, and how her experience as an assistant prepared her to be effective. She also mentioned how her broad experiences as an assistant principal prepared her.

My true belief is that every principal should first be an assistant principal. Even, at minimum, one year. They need to be, within that one year, exposed to everything. The budget, discipline, parental involvement, instruction. Not just take your AP and make them do all the discipline and grunt work. They need to learn [it] from the top to the bottom.

As a result, then I learned all the other things. Parental involvement…. I did the budget, one year. Of course, under her, I would do it and show her. But, I was given carte blanche to do all of that. She treated me like I was an equal, and not really reporting to her. The other two, they wanted me to do just the list that she gave them and that’s all they did.
This also illustrates how effective leaders can reinforce effective leadership practice, in this case through distributed leadership. The effective principal she worked under was able to leverage the work of her assistant principal to move forward school goals and train/model good practice for her mentees future leadership practice as a principal, herself.

Principal Ward worried that people who are good teachers will not necessarily go on to be good principals. She feels that there is “natural progression.” She also worries about the trend for people to teach for a very short time. This sentiment was shared by all six principals. All are concerned with the reform movement principalship, where people teach for two or three years and then are thought (by themselves and by “reformers”) ready to be principals. Principal Ward described an experience with a colleague in a class.

I was sitting next to someone who was in her second year of teaching, and she’s already sitting right next to me doing her Principal Cert classes. I’m thinking, “How do you know you want to do this? You haven’t even been a teacher long enough to know that this is where you want to go?” Then you start asking more questions and it’s like, “Oh well, you know, I just want to be ready.” You get this like, “Getting ready for what? Because you’re not going to be a great principal, in my opinion, at this point in the game, because the stuff you should be focusing on should be teaching, improving your craft.” Because I think you need to be really damn good at it, have the heart for it to take it to another level. To say, “Yeah, I could probably do a much better job of being a leader.” I think its arrogant and foolish.

It is hard to tell whether these principals really think these fast-tracked educators will not be good leaders, or whether they lack the imagination to think they can be good leaders simply because their experience is so different from their own. Either way, however, they have strong opinions about the need for principals to be effective assistant principals before assuming the principal role.
The principals’ recommendations are largely based in their own experiences. They hold strong opinions about what it really takes to be an effective principal. All can be viewed as traditional path principals and their recommendations reflect that. Their recommendations reflect a deep understanding of the complexity of the principal role and a focus on the importance of principals being strong leaders of instruction in their schools.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the findings of the alignment of the responses from teachers and assistant superintendents of the schools in this study. While there is consistency when comparing principals, teachers and assistant superintendents the focus of and convergence of the responses is what is more interesting. For example, teachers tended to focus on things that likely impact their day to day experiences as classroom teachers such as school organization, support for enforcing behavioral expectations and feedback on instruction. Assistant superintendents tended to frame responses from an evaluative and talent development stance focusing on evaluation ratings, school organization and talent development.

Principals identified mentors as critical to their development and credit them as strongly impacting the way they enact their leadership practice. Mentors were usually informal and included those whose leadership these principals admired and learned from and those with whom they have more defined relationships. Other forms of learning were important and added value to the principals experience to include formal principal
preparation programs, district provided induction programs and experiences prior to becoming principals.

Participants recommendations for districts for preparation of principals ranged from induction programs to experiences. These recommendations largely mirror their own experiences and thusly what they value about the preparation they had and professional development that has been meaningful to them. The district would serve itself well to use these recommendations to contribute to an overall strategy. These recommendations and others will be further viewed in Chapter 7, in the conclusion and implications section of this dissertation.
Chapter 7

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I discuss the findings, review the implications of the study, recommendations and implications for further research. Next, I then discuss the limitations and present a conclusion and personal reflection on this research study.

The findings of this study are split into two main groups. The first set is comprised of the details of how the principals enact the leadership practices in their work. The second set include explanations of how principals learned these strategies, districts planning for professional development of principals and their recommendations to help their peers, and other future school leaders.

Each of the leaders in this study shared detailed discrete strategies about the enactment of the five research-based practices, as laid out in Chapter 4. Each felt that these practices have been important to their leadership, and articulated why they are important by linking their enactment to student outcomes.

The principals spoke about how their enactment of vision is tied in with how they choose to engage in initiatives and – just as importantly – how they say “No” to those that do not align with their visions. Everyone in their schools seems to be aware of their principal’s vision for the school. The virtual cliché of shared vision actually happens in these schools, because these vision make sense to others, are actionable and all stakeholders can see the vision realized in front them by how these principals runs their schools.
Principals in this study enact strategies that align with the school vision, lead to overall school improvement and allows colleagues to share their expertise. They use distributed leadership to do this. The principals do not view themselves as the only leaders in the schools. Rather, they see everyone as a leader and that everyone has specialized expertise that can support school efforts. The distributed leadership enactment supports instructional leadership by allowing grade level chairs, school based teacher leaders and others to lead their teams with guidance from the principal. The principal acts as the guide on the side allowing others to share their opinions and make decisions about school programming.

Children are at the center of each of the enactment strategies for the evidence-based practices. It is not something that these principals say often or keeps repeating. Everything, from the roster to the focus on positive behavioral supports, is focused on nurturing young people, making school a place they want to be. The climates of their schools are conducive to teaching and learning because of their fundamental belief systems, reflected in how the schools enacts expectations for students based on high expectations from a positive stance.

Instructional feedback to teachers, the roster of the instructional day and collaborative planning sessions are based on a cycle of collective inquiry of the teachers and school administration. Teachers receive frequent and high quality feedback that is connected to student outcomes. Teacher expertise is leveraged through lesson studies and non-conventional development of teachers such as peer observation. Moreover, professional feedback is tied to what teachers need to improve the outcomes of their current students through the use of formative common assessments and other strategies.
The principals in this study detail and carefully consider organizational management. Although not micro-managers, they have systems for monitoring processes and pay extra attention to those who have the closest connections to student outcomes. They collaborate with their teachers on hiring the best staffs, have clear and consistent expectations and highly developed and inclusive communication systems. Their macro/school-wide systems are reinforced through classroom routines that foster a single school culture.

Self-efficacy and personal characteristics of leadership were not an original focus of this research. I did, however, find self-efficacy to be an important issue in this study. Although I focused primarily on enactment of strategies, self-efficacy (i.e., the belief in one’s own ability to carry out a task) plays a role in how these leaders approach their leadership and how they choose to enact the leadership practices. Self-efficacy seems to mediate the practice of these leaders in a way that amplifies their effectiveness.

Leaders identified mentors, informal and formal, as a major influence on how they learned and understand the enactment of leadership practices. These leaders reported that they have accrued strategies for enactment of leadership practices for many years, even all through their careers. These exemplary leaders have learned practice enactment strategies through their experience (both positive and negative) watching others lead, talking to trusted mentors and/or or from their formal training.

These principals shared that those who get the opportunity to lead schools should be carefully selected based on previous experience. They particularly pointed to prior experience as a school administrator (e.g., as an assistant principal) as an important factor in readiness for the position – and ultimately effectiveness in the position.
The recommendations of these leaders are based in their experiences. All served as assistant principals prior to becoming principals and all said that it is essential for principals to have that experience prior to leading a school. They also recommended differentiated instruction in formal professional development programs. This differentiation is important to them because – though they are highly skilled – they wish to continue to grow and develop as principals. Yet, these programs are planned for those in the middle or (more likely) the lower-middle end of the continuum.

**Discussion and Implications**

In this section, I discuss the implications I see, based upon the findings in my study. I first discuss the notion of the overlap of practices and how they cannot truly be isolated from each other. Second, I discuss the intentionality of practice that underscores all of the practices. Third, I discuss how self-efficacy and personal qualities influence the enactment of practice. Fourth, I discuss how teachers experience the practices, focusing on their (lack of) awareness of what principals do. Fifth, I discuss the evaluative stance of the principals’ supervisors and the implications of an evaluative versus a supportive stance. Finally, I discuss the implications of where principals learned the strategies and how this might inform district practice for principal induction and support in the future.

In this dissertation, I have separated the research-based practices, each into its own silo. However, that is not what these principals do in their enactment strategies. For them, the practices are linked together and cannot be isolated. They leverage one or more practices to increase the effectiveness of other practices. They use one practice to drive
(or as a vehicle for) the other practices. For example, one principal in this study employs her vision to guide work with school partners who support instructional activities to ensure that any work the partners perform in the school is aligned with school goals. She may work to build a shared vision of what the school wants for its students with partners. Individual practices are not ends unto themselves, and they work together to support each other and the real ultimate goal – improved student outcomes.

I see a high degree of intentionality how these leaders lead their schools. As part of this intentionality, they consider how a decision may influence others, in the future. Rather little happens by chance, for these leaders. Rather they carefully consider, consult with others and think about details. They appear to live by the old adage, *the devil is in the details*. They believe that by modeling this intentionality of effort, they may fairly expect to see intentionality and detailed planning by their teachers, and this intentionality may become a part of the climate of their schools. Indeed, this intentionality is foundational to creating a climate conducive to teaching and learning. Intentionality and attention to detail are critical to how they carry out many of the strategies through distributed leadership. These leaders to do not abdicate their responsibility to others, rather they stay in the loop and have monitoring systems to ensure that strategies are enacted as they intend, regardless of who is nominally responsible.

Intentionality – particularly when married to a commitment to a school vision – creates predictability in a school. This predictability, especially in high needs environments (with their inherent chaos), contributes to the overall sense of purpose and mission for those who work there. It manifests in these schools in educators knowing know why they are there, what they are there to do and having plan(s) to accomplish it.
None of the principals in this study presented as charismatic leaders. Rather, they were pragmatic and focused on getting things done. Not just any things, but the _right_ things. As one leader described it, “We like to focus on the main thing, so that everyone knows that we always keep the main thing, the main thing.” The buzz around charismatic or dynamic leaders – which has always struck me as misplaced – does not exist around the leaders in this study, even though this was not a factor in my participant selection criteria. Rather, these principals present as _competent leaders with high levels of self-efficacy_. They regularly reflect and recalibrate their leadership practice. Their recalibration does not come through grand announcements. Rather, they use subtle nudging, and (in some cases) insistence that the schools is going in a particular direction. Their self-efficacy presents as confidence, and is reinforced through reflective practice. Their reflective practice comes as self-reflection and reflecting with others (e.g., teacher teams, informal and formal mentors), and prior experiences.

Self-efficacy is reinforced by positive outcomes when they occur and can be built through reflection of lack of success and adjustment that leads to positive outcome. Self-efficacy acts as a mediator between knowing about a practice, knowing strategies and being able to enact them effectively.

I included the teachers and principals’ supervisors in this study to triangulate the data through a perspective study. However, this did not work out as I planned. The teachers in this study are not really aware of what their principals do. Their awareness of how their principals enacted these research-based practices is limited to a handful of strategies (that likely most directly impact their ability to teach), at best. Instead, they felt supported by their leaders work with student discipline and that their schools are orderly.
The spoke about the feedback that they receive from their principals, and how it is both frequent and valuable.

I am a little concerned that these teachers seem only to be aware of this small fraction of their principals’ work, particularly because so much more of it contributes to a climate conducive to teaching and learning. Teachers are potential future school leaders, and it would be helpful for their own leadership development for them to be more aware of the exemplary leadership work going on around them. After all, during their interviews, these principals shared that watching others enact leadership and gathering enactment strategies throughout their careers was simply critical for their own development.

The principals’ supervisors were also more limited in their awareness of these principals’ leadership practices than I originally expected. Instead, they seem consumed by an evaluative stance that seemed to get in the way of taking on a learning stance. As we consider how we can leverage the knowledge of exemplary leaders, I wonder how much more principals’ supervisors could learn if they were to approach their supervision of principals from a learning and supportive stance.

These principals supervise teachers, and they are focused on improving teacher practice. In this study, they rarely (if ever) shared how they rate their teachers. Perhaps this topic was all implied, but their explicit focus was on how much they learned from their teachers. I believe that a learning and growth stance can be communicated to those one leads. Unfortunately, the principals’ supervisors appear to be missing opportunities to learn from the incredible practices of these exemplary leaders, and to model a growth and learning stance with their other supervisees. Of course, I do not believe this is intentional,
and well could be a result of the large number of schools that each oversees (and a function of limited time). However, I am concerned that this might may be a result of a lack of a learning culture in the district – in my district. While SDP is fortunate to have these exemplary leaders in these schools, I would like to see their kind of leadership at all levels of administration.

The recommendations of these leaders are based on their experiences. All served as assistant principals prior to becoming principals and all consider it essential for potential principals to have that experience prior to leading a school. They all recommended differentiation in formal professional development programs. This differentiation is important to them because they are highly skilled and, as in all learning opportunities, instruction is aimed at those in the middle or lower-middle of the continuum.

**Recommendations**

Though bulk of my findings detail what exemplary principals do in their leadership and how they think about the research-based practices, my recommendations all focus on the development of school principals. The kind of leadership that these principals demonstrate every day is the goal, and what we need to do a better job of helping more educators to get there, too.

Aspiring school leaders need mentors. They need successful school principals, as models, as informal mentors, and perhaps even as formal mentors. The district can benefit from having a cadre of effective school leaders who are willing to mentor, as well as working with all of its employees on the value of leaning in to learn from others. This
underscores the importance of being a learning organization (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith & Dutton, 2012). The organizational stance would not just benefit today’s students, but also even more students in the future, as the best leadership practices and strategies are replicated across cohorts and generations of school leaders, and more and more schools in SDP.

Many of these exemplary leaders learned much about what to do from the counter-narrative. In fact for some it was motivator for pursuing school leadership. This reinforces the need to ensure that poor examples of leadership do not remain in schools. While I would like to believe that all people who end up in leadership know the difference, a principal who is praised because the school is orderly but lacks instructional leadership or has bad instructional leadership can do long-term harm if these practices are replicated by others.

Highly effective principals need learning and development programs and opportunities that are targeted at taking them from good to great (Collins, 2001). Currently, development is targeted towards mediocre and/or low-performing principals. Opportunities for professional development should include some built around highly effective principals sharing their enactment strategies with each other, something they already try to do when they can. We (i.e., the academy, researchers and school districts) must consider how much we have to learn from effective and exemplary leaders, particularly when we can contextualize their practice in their districts and use their expertise locally to help other principals to grow – including other high performing leaders.
How to present professional development for school leaders is a huge problem, and not just because of the challenge of differentiating it for different levels of principal performance. Leaders practices need to be presented in an integrated manner, rather than the all too typical focus on just one at a time. These practices simply cannot be presented as standalone modules, as the whole of leadership is far greater than the sum of its parts. Those who research, consider, plan and/or implement professional development for aspiring and/or current schools must be careful to think about and present these topics in ways that reinforce that kind of integration, and thereby truly boost school leaders towards real effectiveness.

The reality is that you cannot create fast track to the principalship, if you want truly effective leaders in our challenging urban schools. The leaders in this study are all experienced educators, lifers who took a traditional path to the principalship built of significant experience as teachers and assistant principals – though I did not select them for that. They all have had several years of teaching, experience as assistant principals and have held additional roles through their careers, where they have refined and honed their leadership skills. There are several programs (e.g., New Leaders, Philly Plus) built upon a foundational belief that high-potential-but-relatively-inexperienced teachers can be recognized and put on a fast track to the principalship. But these fast tracked candidates lack the experiential learning they need to truly understand the complexities of how students learn, how teachers develop, the intricacies of community leadership, the non-educational requirements of facilities management, the challenge of parental relationships and so on and more and more. This knowledge cannot be learned in a year, even in intensive development programs. Rather, this breadth of knowledge, expertise
(and even mastery) is cultivated through a desire to lead and the accumulation of a tool-kit of leadership strategies that takes many many years to build up.

Furthermore, meaningful self-efficacy – which mediates all enactment of practice – is reinforced through success and failure and through thoughtful reflection – all of which take time. To think that one can learn how to do all of these things in one year of training (built on, perhaps, just a just handful of years in the classroom) is not only arrogant, it is ignorant. It ignores a simple fact: you need to know something well in order to have a chance of leading it well. To put it simply, leaders need to have enough experience to learn the various and myriad things they need to take on this incredibly complex role.

Last, of course, school leaders need to assume a continued learning stance with regard to their own practice. Those who think that there may be shortcuts or that their learning and developing can come to an endpoint are not appropriate for the principalship, and should not be hired to lead in our schools.

**Implications for Research**

As I engaged in the work of this study, many further questions occurred to me, questions that I hope others make take up.

One key question that this study did not address is why these leaders stay in their challenging schools, in their challenging district. Principals like these certainly have opportunities to lead in schools anywhere. However, they choose to stay in some of the most challenging conditions that a principal could face. Future researchers should study why these leaders choose to stay, at what makes them want to stay. This may be related to
why principals choose such schools in the first place, but those with a demonstrated record of success continue to choose to work within these schools. Understanding what motivates leaders to lead in urban environments and to stay far past the national and local averages for principal tenure may help districts to better select from among potential principal candidates, and even to recruit those truly best suited to this work. Perhaps knowing more about this could help to we encourage this kind of commitment in other leaders.

This study, as discussed above, generally separates these difference research practices into their own silos. While it was clear in the principals’ responses that this is not an accurate view of how these leaders work, this study could not uncover how practitioners learned to integrate the practices into their integrated leadership style. What is the learning path, from introduction, through conscious practice to real mastery of the practices, and what is the learning path for integrating them together? Researching these issues could illuminate ways to improve professional development for principals. By, seeing into the unconscious/masterful enactment of (integrated) practice, we may also be able to learn more about their decision-making, and build that knowledge into our recruitment, development and selection of potential leadership candidates. This kind of research doubtless would entail intense long term observational and other approaches, but it could yield invaluable learning that might inform development of school leaders in all types of contexts.

When I started my research I designed the 360 so that I could see how much common understanding their was between the three groups, principals, teaches and principals supervisors. What I learned was less about the common understanding of the
role and job of the principal and more about the wrong assumption that a 360 perspective will give us different views of the same experience, in this case the experience and enactment of leadership practices of the principal. While I thought teachers would be able to detail the practice of the principal, what I learned was that many of the practices are invisible to teachers, likely because they are consumed with their own work. Similarly, the principal’s supervisor has a broad scope of responsibility and little time to evaluate principals. Therefore the scope of their work is limited to a narrow band of the principal’s work associated with what is associated for evaluation as required by the bureaucracy.

Moving forward, it would be helpful to have additional research of the effectiveness of this methodology for providing feedback to the principal.

**Limitations**

This is just one study, and – like all studies – has always been limited in what it can reveal by decisions I made in designing it.

This study focused only on the enactment of leadership strategies that contribute to student achievement in one large urban school district. Therefore, one must be careful when generalizing from this study and applying its findings to other kinds of school districts. Furthermore, this study focuses exclusively on the *public elementary school* principals from a large urban school district, making it uncertain whether its lessons apply to leadership of high schools, or other school types and contexts (e.g. suburban, rural).

This study only focused on principals with high growth scores, and did not address the counter-narrative. Therefore, this study could not explore how principals with
low growth scores enact their leadership practice or compare their enactment to that of principals with high growth scores. Note that this study only used one measure of effectiveness (i.e., growth scores), while other reasonable measures (e.g., student attendance) are also available. Of course, there are other less quantitative ways to recognize effectiveness in leaders, and it could be that differently effective leaders would yield different lessons.

Of course, even if one does not question the idea of using quantitative measures based on student test scores, there is an enormous debate on the validity growth as a measure of school effectiveness. Settling for growth may make teachers and staff feel good (or at least, less bad) about their efforts, but that may ultimately be bad for students because educators do not push hard enough for high levels of achievement from their students – and therefore make growth scores an inappropriate metric to recognize effective leadership. To the extent that this use of growth scores may be inappropriate, the principals who participated in this study may not be as exemplary as I think them to be.

In addition, many are concerned about using standardized assessments as the sole means of evaluating teachers and schools (Baker et al., 2010). The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania uses its School Performance Profile (which combines growth measures, achievement measures for 3rd grade reading, attendance, climate and other measures) to provide a more holistic view of schools. The school district of Philadelphia uses a similar method with its own School Performance Report (SPR) (Chief Performance Office Report, School District of Philadelphia, 2016). Again, to the extent that other principals
may be more effective than these leaders, this study could be limited in the validity of its claims.

I did not anticipate teachers’ inability to discuss in detail how their principals enact leadership practice, and teachers’ convergence around just a handful of practices was a limitation of this study. In addition, the convergence of data from the principals’ supervisors was similarly problematic. I hoped to triangulate from these three perspectives to get a full picture of principals’ leadership, without time-consuming observations that would burden the schools and their leaders. I cannot know what my study did not uncover for my not being aware of events or issues that a more robust data collection procedure may have uncovered. While I do not think that my data is incorrect, I understand that it is likely incomplete, as I could not know everything to ask about, and it would be foolish to think that the participating principals would offer everything that they might volunteer.

Of course, the greatest limitation of this study is that I chose to study my own district, one in which I am invested and in which I have great positional authority – authority of which all of the participants could not help but be aware. Although, I believe the responses I received to be accurate, I was left with some amount of doubt. I am highly aware of the effectiveness and/or perceived effectiveness of the individual participating principals. This has mostly been based on my opinions and not actual experience with them. It was powerful in one way in that I likely would have only predicted that one of the schools would be in the sample. Despite my efforts to be aware of my biases, the subconscious is powerful and human efforts to mitigate its power typically fall short.
Hopefully by using the emic voices of study participants I allowed their lived experiences to be the focus of this study.

**Conclusion and Personal Reflection**

This research study was important to me for many reasons. In July 2000, I became the principal of a large elementary school in the Maryland suburbs, outside of Washington D.C.. On the first day on the job I found out I had 31 teaching vacancies, out of just 45 classrooms. A rookie, I had little to draw on. I had been a high school assistant principal for just a year and a half. One hundred percent of my students – all of my students! – qualified for free and reduced meals, fully half received English as second language services, and the surrounding neighborhood was filled with violence associated with a gang that preyed on the immigrant population in the community.

I had no idea what I was doing. I called on friends who were principals to help me and key staff that remained gave me invaluable assistance. The district had over 250 schools and there were many veteran principals who could have taken on that assignment, however, I was chosen. And, in my youthful naïveté and bravado, I accepted a position for which I was totally unprepared. I was somewhat successful, but after four years, I left the district for another district with comparatively fewer challenges and that allowed me a healthier work-life balance – including the opportunity to watch my own child play sports after school.

To be honest, I could not hang in there, in those conditions. I admire those principals – such as the ones in this study – who do.
The sacrifices of school leaders are too often unimaginable. School leaders in challenging urban contexts – such as the one represented in this study – make daily sacrifices to lead. Their overall achievement scores are less than impressive, but their growth scores are excellent. Nonetheless, when the public thinks of them, it does not understand the context, the sacrifice and the daily victories in their work.

Hopefully this study honors the impressive technical skill and leadership expertise of the leaders in this study. I intended this study to do just that, to understand how they make meaning of the task before them, make it work, and lead not just schools but entire school communities. I am grateful for the participation of each and every principal in this study, as I am for the participation of their teachers and supervisors. It was an honor to meet each one and to learn from them.

Hopefully, what I have learned from this study will contribute to refocusing how we support and allow principals to lead, to district offices getting out of their way (so to speak), so they can focus on – as principal Robinson puts it – “the main thing.”
Appendix A

Consent Form

April 1, 2016

Cheryl J. Logan                                      Dr. Jonathan Supovitz, Chair
(215) 713-7728

Research Study:
The Leadership Qualities of Successful Urban Elementary School Principals and Their Roots

Informed Consent Statement

Purpose of the study:
As you may know, I am in a doctoral program at the University of Pennsylvania. Within my coursework, I need to complete a dissertation as part of fulfilling my doctorate degree. The purpose of this study is to find out what principal leadership qualities are present in urban elementary schools with a positive growth score trajectory and where they perceive they acquired those qualities. The findings can be used by urban districts to inform professional development practices and programing for novice and experienced principals.

What will I be asked to do?
As a participant, your involvement would consist of three interviews. The first two interviews will last 45-60 minutes and the third interview will be 30-45 minutes and the ability to follow up with you as needed. Interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed for analysis later, and notes will be taken as well. Interviews will take place at your school site. If you have a preference for an off-site interview I will accommodate. I am respectful of your time, and therefore, will work around your schedule.

Voluntary Participation:
Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to, and there will be no penalty or impact on our work or personal relationship as a result. If you decide that you want to participate now but change your mind later, just let me know and you can stop participating at any time. If you have questions or want to talk more about the study before deciding whether or not to participate, please call or e-mail (valjalo1@gmail.com) anytime. If you choose to participate, I’ll ask you to sign two copies of this consent form, one for you to keep and one for me to have for my records.
Confidentiality
Any notes and audio-recordings of observations and interviews will be stored on my personal laptop, which is password-protected. The program I use to collect and store all information is only accessible by me and is password-protected. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the study to keep participant names and school names as confidential as possible.

How will I benefit from the study?
Your participation could help our district leadership team to understand more about what we believe are the leadership qualities of principals that have positive growth score trajectory over at least two consecutive growth cycle measures. This may help improve the quality and impact of professional development programming for novice and experienced educational leaders. You do not have to participate if you do not want to, and there will be no penalty for not participating. If you decide that you want to participate now but change your mind later, just let me know and you can stop participating.

What are the risks and inconveniences to participating in the study?
There are minimal risks for participating in this dissertation study. There may be some minor disruption to your schedule and a demand on your time. Also, some interview questions could potentially make you feel uncomfortable as they might stimulate memories from the past or feel intrusive. Should that occur, you reserve the right to skip answering a question, ask to revisit the question at a later time, or stop the interview entirely.

When you sign this document, you are agreeing to participate in this research study as described. If you choose to participate, please sign and return one copy of this form to me. If you choose not to participate, there is no need to reply; you may simply discard this document. Thank you for your consideration!

Please print your name: _______________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

Signature                                           Date
Good Afternoon, Cheryl:

I am writing to you regarding the research you wish to conduct within SDP. I know that you are aware of the Research Review Committee, which is run through the Office of Research and Evaluation. While the Research Review Committee typically reviews research proposals through a formal review process, after reviewing your abstract, our office has decided that you are exempt from formal review, which involves the submission of a complete proposal.

That being said, we would sincerely appreciate if you could send over any instruments, protocols, tools, consent forms, etc. for our review. We will conduct an expedited review of these elements of your study and provide you with feedback as soon as possible.

Thank you in advance! Please let me know if you have any questions and have a wonderful holiday weekend.

Best,
Kelsey

Kelsey Weir
Program Coordinator
Office of Research and Evaluation
The School District of Philadelphia
440 N. Broad St.
Philadelphia, PA 19130
P: (215) 400-6417
E: ksuloman@philasd.org
Appendix C

Principal Survey

Thank you for participating in this survey.

Which if any of the following research practices do you engage in at your school (Check all that apply):

1.) Shaping a vision of academic success for all students
2.) Creating a climate conducive to teaching and learning
3.) Cultivating leadership in others (Distributive Leadership)
4.) Improving Instruction thru a cycle of continuous and timely feedback
5.) Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement (Organizational Leadership)

For the items that you selected, please rate your effectiveness in each of these areas using a scale of 1-10

1) 10 – Exemplary effectiveness  1- Minimally effective  Rating ___N/A____
2) 10 – Exemplary effectiveness  1- Minimally effective  Rating ___N/A____
3.) 10 – Exemplary effectiveness  1- Minimally effective  Rating ___N/A____
4.) 10 – Exemplary effectiveness  1- Minimally effective  Rating ___N/A____
5.) 10 – Exemplary effectiveness  1- Minimally effective  Rating ___N/A____
Appendix D

Principal Interview One Guide

Prior to the interview (a minimum of ten days before) participants will receive an abstract of the research proposal, an informed consent form to sign. Participants will receive information regarding their selection into the sample (high growth scores).

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about James Logan School. Tell me about your work background. What experiences you had prior to being a principal, how long have you been a principal; how long have your been here and any other relevant information regarding your background that you feel comfortable sharing.

2. Do you have any questions about your participation in this research study? What would you like to know about my interest in this topic? What would you like to know about my background?

3. What are leadership practices that you perceive contribute to the high growth scores of your students. Please name at least three but you can name as many as you like.

4. For each of the leadership practices you mentioned, tell me how these are enacted at your school? Please provide as much detail as you can to include others who participate in the practices, if applicable.

5. You have been asked to participate in this research study because of your high growth scores. I am going to share the five leadership practices identified in the
research associated with effective practice (some you mentioned in the prior question). Tell me how you rate yourself on those?

For the items that you selected, please rate your effectiveness in each of these areas using a scale of 1-10. (10 – Exemplary effectiveness – 1 – Minimally effective)

- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students
- Creating a climate conducive to teaching and learning
- Cultivating leadership in others (Distributive Leadership)
- Improving Instruction thru a cycle of continuous and timely feedback
- Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement (Organizational Leadership)

6. Now that you have heard those associated with the literature would you share how you enact those that you didn’t include when you identified the three or four practices that you identified for me earlier? Please provide as much detail as you can to include others who participate in the practices with you if applicable or any other pertinent information. Are there any more that you would like to share?

7. Do you have anything else you would like to share about your leadership practice?

8. I am going to interview two teachers in your school. I would like to interview one that was hired after you came on board and on that was on staff prior to your tenure. Could identify three of each and I will select from the three?

In the next interview I am going to ask you to activate your memory about where you learned the skills and strategies that you spoke about today. I will be back in a week in our scheduled interview time for our second and final formal interview.
Appendix E

Principal Interview Two Guide

*Interview Frame/Warm-Up*

In the last interview you shared your ratings on several qualities associated with effective principal leadership. I will review with you the ratings you self-selected and then ask a series of questions. Ready to begin….

1. How is the end of the school year going? Do you have plans for the summer?

2. During the last interview I shared that I would be asking you to take a trip down memory lane to recount where you picked up the strategies and skills that you attribute to your successful leadership. I will go through each one of the practices and strategies you mentioned. Please tell me about where you learned each of the strategies and skills you mentioned during the interview. I will review them from the transcript. Please feel free to mention names and positions (formal or informal) of people as well as programs and/or professional development you attended.

3. Hypothetically, if you were advising the district on professional development for principals what strategies, programs and training might you suggest?

*Member Check-In Principal*

At this time I would also like to review with you my preliminary data analysis and findings. I sent these to you about two weeks ago, however, realizing that you are very busy I have allowed ample time for you to read it now if you would like.
1. After reading the preliminary data-analysis and findings how do these sound to you?

2. Do you find anything missing or anything that you think doesn’t sound quite right to you?

3. Do you see your feedback reflected in the data?
Appendix F
Assistant Superintendent Interview Guide

The interview with the assistant superintendent will be completed after both interviews with the principal and the interview with the teacher. As such they will be customized based on the responses from the principal.

Questions – Assistant Superintendent

1. Tell me about your work background. What experiences have you had prior to becoming an assistant superintendent. Please include how long have you been an assistant superintendent and any other relevant information regarding your background that you feel comfortable sharing.

2. Tell me about the scope of your work as an assistant superintendent. How long have you worked with this particular principal? Did you know this principal in any other context prior to becoming his/her supervisor? Tell me about that if applicable.

3. During the interview principal ____________ provided feedback on the following strategies identified in the literature that are attributed to effective principal leadership.

- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students
- Creating a climate conducive to teaching and learning
- Cultivating leadership in others (Distributive Leadership)
- Improving Instruction thru a cycle of continuous and timely feedback
- Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement (Organizational Leadership)
Tell me about how you experience each one as their supervisor. If you don’t know, please skip. I will read each one to you. Tell me about how they are enacted by the principal.

What are the strategies that are employed by the principal?

4. During the interview principal ________________ provided feedback on the following strategies as well: TBD Tell me about how you experience each one as their supervisor. If you don’t know, please skip. I will read each one to you. Tell me about how they are enacted by the principal. What are the strategies that are employed by the principal?

5. Is there anything else you would like to share about your work with this school and this principal.

**Member Check In – Assistant Superintendent**

Two weeks ago I sent you the preliminary data analysis and findings. Hopefully you have had time to review. If not we can take as much as time as you need to read over.

1. After reading the preliminary data-analysis and findings how do these sound to you?

2. Do you find anything missing or anything that you think doesn’t sound quite right to you?

3. Do you see your feedback reflected in the data?

4. Is there anything in the data and findings that make you uncomfortable? If so, please be specific.

5. Do you think any information that you think is important for this study is not included? If so would you mind sharing.
Appendix G  
Teacher Interview Guide

**Interview Questions –**

1. Tell me about your work background; what experiences have you had prior to becoming a teacher at this school. Please include how long have you been a teacher and any other relevant information regarding your background that you feel comfortable sharing.

2. Tell me about the scope of your work as a teacher in this school? How long have you worked with this particular principal? Did you know this principal in any other context prior to him/her becoming your supervisor? How many other principals have you worked with during your career? Tell me about that if applicable.

3. During the interview principal ___________ provided feedback on the following strategies identified in the literature that are attributed to effective principal leadership.

   - Shaping a vision of academic success for all students
   - Creating a climate conducive to teaching and learning
   - Cultivating leadership in others (Distributive Leadership)
   - Improving Instruction thru a cycle of continuous and timely feedback
   - Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement (Organizational Leadership)

Tell me about how you experience each one as a teacher in this school. If you don’t know please skip. I will read each one to you. Tell me about how they are enacted by the
principal. What are the specific strategies that are employed by the principal? It may take some time to activate your memory so please take your time.

4. During the interview principal ________________ provided feedback on the following strategies. NAME THESE FROM INTERVIEW ONE. (These are not identified in the literature but were identified by the principal. – This question may not be necessary depending on the responses from the principal.)

6. Is there anything else you would like to share about your work with this school and this principal.

**Member Check-In - Teacher**

Two weeks ago I sent you the preliminary data analysis and findings. Hopefully you have had time to review. If not we can take as much as time as you need to read over.

1. After reading the preliminary data-analysis and findings how do these sound to you?

2. Do you find anything missing or anything that you think doesn’t sound quite right to you?

3. Do you see your feedback reflected in the data?

4. Is there anything in the data and findings that make you uncomfortable? If so, please be specific.

5. Do you think any information that you think is important for this study is not included? If so would you mind sharing.
Appendix H

Preliminary Code List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Code Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>B: Background</strong></td>
<td>Background of the participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Y Background yrs</td>
<td>Years of teaching of the participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: E Background experience</td>
<td>Kinds of experiences of the participant; (e.g.) how many schools how many principals they have worked for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: O Background other</td>
<td>Other kinds of background experiences related to their work in education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P: Practices</strong></td>
<td>Leadership practices of the principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P: R Practices from research</td>
<td>Five Leadership practices identified from the research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P: SI</td>
<td>Self-Identified practices; Practices that are not in the research that are identified by the participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P: Rating</td>
<td>Self-Rating of principals on the leadership practices from research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P: Practice Enactment</td>
<td>Practice Enhancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>L: Learnings</strong></td>
<td>Where principals identified that they learned to enact the practices/strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L:C Context</td>
<td>Where principals that they learned practices/strategies in context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L: M Mentor</td>
<td>When principals identified that they learned practice/strategies from a mentor/formal or informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L: PP Principal Preparation</td>
<td>When principals identified that they learned a practice/strategy in formal training (e.g. principal preparation program)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L: PD Professional Development</td>
<td>When principals identified that they learned a practice/strategy in a district provided professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L: CN Counter Narrative</td>
<td>When principals identified that they learned a practice/strategy by watching what not to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L:O Other learning</td>
<td>When principals that they learned a practice strategy in some other venue (e.g. professional conference-association)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R: Recommendations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: E</td>
<td>When principals recommended that prospective principals/novice have an experience/position (e.g. being an assistant principal prior)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: PD-I</td>
<td>When principals recommended that professional development be provided (in-service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: O</td>
<td>When principals recommended other interventions/programs for principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: PP</td>
<td>When principals recommend formal preparation programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Title 22, PA School Code.


