A CASE STUDY OF LEADERSHIP TRAITS OF AWARD-WINNING MISSOURI
ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS FROM 2002 TO 2013

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ABSTRACT

The role of the principal has been complex since its origin (Rousmaniere, 2013). With the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*, accountability was placed on the principal for overall effectiveness of their school (Weiss, 1992). Reform would continue to have an impact on the role of the principal as the No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law in 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). All stakeholders in education were looking at ways to ensure students were achieving by exploring programs and resources to promote student achievement, close achievement gaps between lower socioeconomic schools and higher socioeconomic schools, and paying high costs for these efforts (Barton, 2004; Reeves, 2004; Rothstein, 2004; Whitaker, 2003).

These demands on school leaders did not reflect the traits of successful leaders on student achievement alone (Chastain, 2007). Identifying the traits of award-winning leadership at the elementary level provided school leaders and district administration a guide for selecting the best candidates possible for principal positions (McEwan, 2003). Eight Missouri Distinguished Principals were interviewed, provided documents, and took the Leadership Trait Questionnaire (Appendix D; Appendix E). The researcher triangulated the data from the participants and found the common themes among them: a) building relationships with all school stakeholders, b) communication is key, c) belief systems build culture, d) seeking the right traits in teachers, and e) the structured leader.