

AGAINST ALL ODDS: LEADERSHIP IN A
HIGH-POVERTY HIGH-PERFORMING
SCHOOL

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Doctor of Education

by
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**AGAINST ALL ODDS: LEADERSHIP IN A
HIGH-POVERTY HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOL**

presented by David K. Stephens

a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education

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AGAINST ALL ODDS: LEADERSHIP IN A HIGH-POVERTY HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that impoverished school districts face a unique set of barriers in regard to school achievement. However, according to statistics from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, there are schools that would be considered impoverished that are ranked in the top ten in regard to sustained performance on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) in the areas of mathematics and communication arts. This study examines the leadership characteristics of a building leader of a high-poverty, high-performing public school in Missouri.

A qualitative case-study model was implemented in this study, utilizing structured interviews of faculty and staff, parents of students, and the building leader. In addition, field notes documenting observations and reflections from the researcher's four day visit to the site were compiled and pertinent documents were reviewed.

Prominent themes were identified that described the leadership at the school. The emergent themes were presence, hands off leadership, golden communication, power source (through both personal and professional support), high expectations, hiring the best, students first, values individuals, caring and fairness.

A synthesis of those themes led to the identification of specific leadership roles embraced by the building leader. Those roles were human resource director, academic leader, and culture facilitator.

Implications for educational leaders and programs designed to train them were discussed. Some of those implications for educational leaders included the necessity to develop a vision for the school beyond yearly achievement test results and the impact of fully embracing the philosophy of developing life long learners. In addition, leaders must develop a culture within their school of high expectations accompanied by support.

Implications for programs designed to train educational leaders included the development of programs that more thoroughly prepared leaders in the area of personnel selection, induction, and evaluation.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beautiful, intelligent and talented wife, Kelly Marie

Stephens. Your love and support mean the world to me.

You are my everything. I love you.

And

To our sweet baby girl, Isabelle Diana Stephens, and baby number two, still waiting to

come into the world. I'm overwhelmed by my love for you both.

Never settle for less than your best and always reach for the stars.

And

To my mom, LaVada Ruth Stephens.

Your confidence in me has always inspired me and humbled me.

You've always believed in your boys.

To my brother, Alan Dale Stephens.

Your integrity, faith and courage in the midst of trials have

set a standard for my life.

I miss you.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

Background of the Study

Public school reform over the past thirty years has identified the quality and structure of leadership as one significant factor contributing to improving student achievement (Beaudin, Thompson, & Jacobson, 2002). With the advent and implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), educational leaders have been held responsible for encouraging higher standards of student achievement on standardized tests each year. NCLB was designed to change the culture of America's schools by closing the achievement gap, offering more flexibility, giving parents more options, and teaching students based on what works (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Foundational with NCLB is an increased emphasis on accountability. State assessment outcomes can impact accountability-based rewards and sanctions (Rabinowitz, 2001; Anthes, 2002). Under the act's accountability provisions, states must describe how they will close the achievement gap and make sure all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency. They must produce annual state and school district report cards that inform parents and communities about state and school progress. States are required to ensure that all groups of students make adequate yearly progress toward the state's proficient levels of achievement in reading and mathematics. Schools that do not make adequate yearly progress must provide supplemental services, such as free tutoring or after-school assistance; take corrective actions; and, if still not making adequate yearly progress after five years, make dramatic

changes to the way the school is run. No Child Left Behind mandates annual testing in reading and mathematics for students in grades 3-8, beginning in the 2005-06 school year (Cicchinelli, Gaddy, Lefkowitz, & Miller, 2003). Jackson (2005) stated that the primary mission of school districts in the United States is threefold. First, districts must ensure that all students meet state learning standards. Second, districts must close the achievement gaps among students of various backgrounds. Finally, districts must provide evidence that progress is being made in meeting the first two tasks.

The required level of accountability inherent in NCLB reinforces a significant shift in the roles and responsibilities of building leaders. Thompson (2003) stated that the implications for leaders in regard to school success are very serious. According to Thompson, critical success factors cannot be

plugged into an organization like a set of floppy disks. Without strategic leadership, the development of shared vision and ownership, and the thoughtful adaptation of the success factors to local contexts, they will either remain rhetorical declarations that do not translate into results or be forced into the system in ways that create new cultural dysfunctions. (p. 493)

Jackson (2005) also cited the added demands placed on school administrators as a result of new mandates. According to Jackson,

Along with accountability for student learning, school leaders are being called upon to redesign schools and districts to serve the learning needs of all children in their care. The creation of reform agendas that will lead to success by all children requires leaders who can learn from past lessons, heed the findings of current research, and rely on the wisdom of their own experiences. (p. 193)

Anthes (2002) stated that school leaders will need to acquire a deeper understanding of assessment instruments and what tests can and cannot tell them. In addition, there will be an increased pressure to succeed. According to Anthes,

The greater demands and expectations placed on school leaders to raise student achievement will undoubtedly make both recruitment and retention of principals and superintendents an even tougher job than it is today. Superintendents and principals also will have the added responsibility of maintaining staff morale and assisting staff in dealing with the stress and public scrutiny that tougher accountability measure are sure to bring. (p. 1)

Sergiovanni (1995) stated that principals are responsible for making sure that the school's basic requirements are met. They must ensure that their teachers "transcend competence by inspiring extraordinary commitment and performance" (p. 114). Goldman (1998) asserted that the school itself directly reflects the leadership and that "one can know the essence of the school leader...by looking at the tone and educational environment of the school" (p. 21). According to Fielder (2003), principals have an impact on every aspect of their school.

They affect the climate, the cleanliness, and the quality of staff. They affect the taste of the food in the cafeteria, the availability of extracurricular athletics and activities, and the general appearance of the building. They also affect student achievement regardless of the socioeconomic background of the students. It may not be too much of an overstatement to say that students succeed or fail because of the principal. (Fielder, p. 107)

Newton and Zeitoun (2002) stated that, “Educational initiatives such as testing and accountability measures and local governance structures further increase the number of hours principals work” (p.3). The researchers stated that the excessive time requirements reduce the number of qualified individuals willing to seek the position of principal and contribute to a high turnover rate. This increased pressure to succeed has created hard-to-staff schools. Lashway (2003) described “hard-to-staff” schools as schools often in search of leadership. According to the author, these inconsistently-led schools are characterized by high-poverty students, low test scores, high staff turnover, and unusually large numbers of teachers who are inexperienced, provisionally certified, or teaching out of field. According to Lashway, “No Child Left Behind is likely to worsen it. Schools with the most problems will feel the greatest performance pressure, making leadership positions even less desirable” (p. 2).

Schools located in districts with a low socioeconomic status face unique challenges. Often less is expected of the students and the instructors, resources are limited (Neill, 2003; Casbarro, 2005) and administrators place less significance on instructional leadership (Bickman, Hallinger, & Davis, 1996).

In spite of the barriers facing schools located in low socioeconomic status districts, there are some schools that seem to transcend the issues described above. In 2005, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education recognized the highest performing schools for sustained performance on the Missouri Assessment Program (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2005). Of the schools recognized, several had a free and reduced lunch participation rate of greater than 40%. Why do those schools continue to excel, while other high-poverty schools struggle?

Conceptual Underpinnings of the Study

Three concepts will be reviewed in this study. The first concept to be addressed will be the impact of building leadership style/characteristics on student achievement. The rigorous demands of NCLB and adequate yearly progress standards have placed an extraordinary amount of pressure on building level administrators to provide educational leadership that leads to high academic achievement. Delaney (1997) stated that, of the many factors to consider that affect the relationship between school-based management and school improvement, “none were as crucial to that relationship as the leadership style of the principal” (p. 110). Stiggins (2001) stated, “If assessment is ever to reach its immense potential as a force for good in schools, principals across the country must fulfill critically important assessment leadership responsibilities” (p. 14). Beaudin, Jacobson, and Thompson (2002), in describing the changing role of the principal, stated

The effective schools research of the 1970s and 1980s found that the building principal was central in providing the leadership needed to create high performing schools that were both efficient and effective organizations. The focus of effective schools evolved during the 1990s to emphasize accountability, in particular accountability for improving students’ academic performance. The shift in emphasis changed the nature of many aspects of principals’ work and how they deployed time to various managerial and instructional responsibilities. (p. 2)

According to Bainbridge and Tocco (2003), strong and visible leadership is a key component to insure high expectations for all students and an agreement among adults that “school requires compulsory learning, not just compulsory attendance” (p. 40).

A second concept to be addressed involves the dynamics of low-performing schools located in low socioeconomic status (SES) districts. The effects of poverty on student achievement are clearly identified in research (Corallo & McDonald, 2001; Acker-Hocevar & Touchton, 2001; Anfara, Brown, & Roney, 2004). Dr. Paul Houston, former executive director of the American Association of School Administrators (1997), stated that students in low-poverty schools (schools with fewer than 75% of students receiving assistance based on parents' income) score between 50% and 70% higher in reading and math than students in high-poverty schools. Students in high poverty schools also have higher transfer rates and larger classes (American Association of School Administrators, 1997). Low SES impacts resources available to students and students' expectations of their own abilities (Acker-Hocevar & Touchton, 2001; Neill, 2003) as well as the principal's expectations for student performance (Bickman, Hallinger, & Davis, 1996). Bickman, et al, indicated that principals serving in less affluent school districts are less likely to exercise active instructional leadership than principals serving in districts with a higher SES and are more likely to demonstrate reduced expectations regarding student achievement. Acker-Hocevar (2001) further stated that students in low SES schools are more likely to encounter language barriers and deficits and less parental support.

A third concept to be addressed is characteristics of high-performing schools. Thompson (2003) defines a high-performing school district as one in which the overwhelming majority of students in all schools are meeting high standards of learning regardless of their ethnic or socioeconomic

backgrounds and in which the district decisively and effectively intervenes in schools where student performance is declining. (p. 490)

Research has indicated that building leadership plays a significant role in the success of schools and the improvement of achievement (Thompson, 2003; Brownson, Kahlert, Picucci & Sobel, 2004). Thompson specifically identified two types of leadership styles that are necessary components of a high-performing school system – strategic leadership and authentic leadership. In addition, Thompson identified eight critical factors of a high-performing school system. According to Thompson, a high-performing school system must (a) be standards-based, (b) take as its purpose enabling all students in all schools to meet high standards, (c) exhibit a nurturing, supportive climate, (d) hold itself accountable for success, (e) provide effective professional development opportunities, (f) make sure that all resources support quality instruction, (g) collect and utilize data effectively, and (h) maintain effective two-way communication.

Statement of the Problem

Today's public schools face increased accountability regarding achievement and must focus on developing leaders with a leadership style most likely to positively influence student achievement. Educational leadership programs must consider the style of leadership that is most effective to increase students' academic success. Research has indicated that the qualities of an effective principal have changed over time. One significant change is the increase in the amount of public pressure on principals. Murphy's study (1998) stated that educational administrators are facing new demands for leadership from increased public expectations and educational reforms stressing higher standards for all students. These changes require a new kind of knowledge and skill set.

Snow-Renner (2000) stated that leaders, when considered as facilitators to improve the learning of all student to high standards, must assume the role of communicators and vision-builders.

Clark (2001) asserted that today's school leaders are capable, but have been trained for a job that "became obsolete thirty years ago" (p. 29). Clark further suggested that building leader training is in need of improvement.

The first rule of change is and always has been that it must begin with the individual. If we really are expecting sustained change in public schools and improved student achievement as the result, then it is imperative that we begin by developing the leadership skills of our building-level administrators in an organized, intentional way. To fail in this endeavor and still expect different results is indeed administrative insanity. (p. 29)

Traditionally, it has been assumed that schools in economically depressed or otherwise disadvantaged communities may demonstrate lower test scores, moving the focus from building leadership to available funds. Many low performing schools are located in economically disadvantaged communities. Often, circumstances exist which make it difficult for students to come to school adequately prepared. There is often a stigma attached to a economically disadvantaged school. The stresses brought on by this stigma may result in lower expectations and increased teacher absenteeism and turnover rates (Corallo, et al, 2001). Lorraine Monroe, director of the Lorraine Monroe Leadership Institute, described her quest for school improvement in terms of common assumptions. Ms. Moore stated, "We were up against an attitude – as assumption – that the geographic

location of a school could determine whether great education could happen there” (Checkley, 2004, p. 70).

However, some schools in the state of Missouri located in economically disadvantaged areas have been designated “Highest Performing Schools” by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2005). The top ten schools in percent of students scoring at the “proficient” and “advanced” levels were identified. The top ten list recognizes schools for sustained performance. Achievement level results were averaged for the years 2000-2004 for communication arts and mathematics. Schools with fewer than 10 test-takers or less than 90% participation for the specific subject/grade assessment were not included in the data set used to determine the top ten schools. Schools were grouped by size: (a) schools with fewer than 250 students, (b) schools with 250-500 students, and (c) schools with more than 500 students. In schools with fewer than 250 students, four out of ten schools had a free/reduced lunch percentage greater than 40%. Schools with between 250 and 500 students, and schools with more than 500 students reported two of the top ten schools with free/reduced lunch percentages in excess of 40%. The number of students participating in the free/reduced lunch program may indicate that the school is located in an economically disadvantaged area. These unique situations indicate that schools considered impoverished can succeed academically.

While statistics identify schools that seem to succeed against all odds, there is little research to provide information regarding what is actually happening in those schools on a day-to-day basis. What type of leadership exists in those schools? What impact does the building leadership have on teacher and parent perceptions?

The Purpose of the Study

It has been said that, at the heart of every good school, is a good principal. An effective principal will provide the necessary leadership to create a successful learning environment. Schiff (2001) stated that “without strong leadership, school climate suffers, good teachers become difficult to retain, and students fail to achieve consistently at the highest levels” (p.v). Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) defined “school climate” as “the enduring characteristics that describe the psychological makeup of a particular school, distinguish it from other schools, and influence the behavior of teachers and students, as well as the ‘feel’ that teachers and students have for that school” (p. 177).

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has designated “Highest Performing Schools.” Typically, these highest performing schools (HPS) enjoy an adequate community economic base, as well as many of the other factors that contribute to a strong school system (active parental support, community support, etc.). There are those HPS that do not fit the norm. These are schools that may be located in economically disadvantaged areas and that serve families from the lower end of the socioeconomic scale. The purpose of this study is to examine and to identify the characteristics of leadership that exists in a HPS located within a high-poverty environment.

Research Questions

The primary research questions are as follows:

1. What leadership traits are identified in a high-poverty, high performing school (HP-HPS)? Specifically, the following perspectives will be examined:
 - a. The building leader

- b. The faculty/staff
 - c. The parents of students
2. What impact does the leader or the evident leadership style have on stakeholders within the school? Specifically, the following perspectives will be examined:
- a. The faculty/staff
 - b. The parents of students

Limitations of the Study

In discussing limitations of the nature of case studies, Thomas and Brubaker (2000) stated

What the portrait by an outsider does not reveal is the subject's secret ambitions, motives, pleasures, fears, and ways of interpreting events. Furthermore...the researcher can, only at great risk of error, infer generalizations from the case and apply those generalizations to the lives of other people. (p. 103-104)

Because this study is a within-site, intrinsic case study, there cannot be an assumption of generalizability. The scope of this study simply describes what is happening in terms of leadership in a selected public middle/junior high school located in the state of Missouri. This study also is limited to a school that succeeds in two curricular areas – mathematics and communication arts. In considering single case versus multiple case studies, Creswell (1998) stated,

I am reminded how the study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the greater the lack of depth in any single case...What motivates the researcher to consider a large number of cases is the

idea of generalizability, a term that holds little meaning for most qualitative researchers” (p. 63).

Another limitation of this study is researcher bias (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Thomas & Brubaker, 2000). As a former building administrator in a Missouri school with a prior knowledge of MAP testing procedures, I had concerns about the validity of the test and the means of scoring items on the test. In addition, I had to acknowledge my own opinions regarding effective leadership styles and characteristics. Throughout this study I was cognizant of maintaining an objective distance. A qualitative researcher needs to be “open to being shaped by the research experience and to having [ones’] thinking be informed by the data” (p. 34). Although researcher bias is a potential limitation, it cannot and should not be eliminated. As Bogdan and Biklen further stated,

Some researchers and writers are so concerned about controlling their personal biases that it immobilizes them...Acknowledge that no matter how much you try you can not divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe and what you value. Being a clean slate is neither possible nor desirable. The goal is to become more reflective and conscious of how who you are may shape and enrich what you do, not to eliminate it. (p. 34)

Another possible limitation of this study may be observer effect (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The very act of asking for stakeholders’ opinions may have created opinions that did not previously exist.

The primary design control I implemented to offset the effects of bias and observer effect was the use of field notes. Field notes are a “written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting

on the data...” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 107-108). In this study, the researcher made specific notes regarding various aspects of each interview process, characteristics of subjects, and the researcher’s own thoughts/perspectives regarding interviews.

Definition of Terms

High Poverty (HP). High poverty will describe schools with a free/reduced lunch percentage of greater than 40%.

High Performing Schools (HPS). High performing schools will be middle/junior high schools identified by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as demonstrating the highest sustained performance from the years 2000-2004 in communication arts and mathematics as determined by MAP tests.

High Poverty-High Performing Schools (HP-HPS). High poverty-high performing schools are those schools with a free/reduced lunch participation rate of 40% or above who have also been recognized by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as a high performing school.

Free/Reduced Lunch. Free/reduced lunch refers to a Department of Elementary and Secondary Education program providing free breakfasts and/or lunches or breakfasts and/or lunches at a reduced cost to students whose parent’s/guardian’s income falls below a designated amount according to household size (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2005). All schools participating in the Federally-assisted National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs must make available free and reduced price lunches and breakfasts.

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). In 1993, The Outstanding Schools Act called for the development of a new assessment system for Missouri’s public schools

(Northwest MAP Regional Center, 1999). The Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) is the professional assessment system implemented in Missouri public schools to address the requirements of that act. The MAP is primarily performance-based. The MAP assessments incorporate three types of test questions in order to evaluate student achievement. The assessment utilizes three types of questions (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006). The first type of question, selected response, is a question or incomplete statement that is followed by answer choices. The second type, constructed response, is an assessment unit with a question or problem that requires a written response. The third type of question, performance event, is like the constructed response with the exception that it requires a pictorial or graphic response. Both the constructed response and performance event questions are open-ended. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) requires the administration of the MAP in all schools in the areas of math and communication arts (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2004). MAP assessment items are aligned with the Show-Me Content Standards (see Appendix A) and the Show-Me Process Standards (see Appendix B).

Math. As assessed in the middle/junior high portion of the MAP, math is defined by specific skills/objectives. Skills/Objectives include but are not limited to: placing integers on a number line, multiplication and division of positive rational numbers, working with exponents, solving two-step problems, use of variables to solve inequalities, calculation of totals involving percents, estimating the value of square roots, use of symbolic algebra, and the use of appropriate graphical representation of data (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006).

Communication Arts. As assessed in the middle/junior high portion of the MAP, communication arts is defined by specific skills/objectives. Skills/Objectives include but are not limited to locating and applying information in text, utilizing editing and revising techniques in a writing process, interpreting complex figurative language and vocabulary, inference of vocabulary meaning and cause/effect relationships, analyzing complex information and applying the rules/conventions of Standard English (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006).

Building leader. The term refers to the building administrator or principal. For the purpose of this study, the building leader must have served as leader in the selected school for at least three years.

Summary

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has encouraged the establishment of higher standards of student achievement on standardized tests each year. Because of NCLB legislation, student achievement in public schools can be tied to funding and sanctions of public schools. With this comes an increased emphasis on administrator accountability. School districts must ensure that all groups of students make adequate yearly progress toward the state's proficient levels of achievement. Because of NCLB, schools consistently demonstrating low achievement may be in danger of losing necessary funding.

As building administrators focus on improving student achievement, they must also consider their school's demographics and how those demographics impact student learning. A common perception is that schools located in economically disadvantaged areas are more likely to exhibit low achievement on standardized tests. However, some

schools in Missouri located in economically disadvantaged areas have been designated “Highest Performing Schools” by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. By examining the leadership characteristics that are prevalent in such schools, information may be obtained that may aide in principal training and professional development.

Leadership is an important factor in school improvement and success. Identifying the styles of leadership and leadership characteristics prevalent in HP-HPS, will provide important information in the area of school improvement.

A background of the study and conceptual underpinnings of the study are included in chapter one. Specific terms used throughout this study are defined in chapter one as well. A review of current literature pertaining to leadership, high-poverty/high performing schools, and high-poverty/low performing schools is provided in chapter two. The method of research is described in chapter three and results of the research are presented in chapter four. A discussion of the research results is provided in chapter five.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Since the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), national attention has been focused on improving the academic achievement of the nation's students (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). By 2014, public schools must ensure that all students are proficient in math and reading (Hickok, 2004; Cicchinelli, Gaddy, Lefkowitz, & Miller, 2003). Thus, public school administrators face growing challenges in regard to accountability and testing. Under NCLB, all schools must have highly qualified teachers, must meet adequate yearly progress requirements and must report attendance and test scores publicly (Pascopella, 2005). NCLB specifically targets schools receiving Title I funds, based on percentages of students receiving free and reduced lunch assistance. In these schools, Title I funds are tied to performance on standardized tests. Schools deemed "in need of improvement" must provide supplemental education services, such as tutoring (Pascopella, 2005). Neill (2003) voiced concern regarding the utilization of high-stakes testing on school reform. Linking high stakes testing to school funding may have serious drawbacks. As Neill noted:

Driving instruction with high-stakes tests will not improve schools. A large body of research demonstrates that high-stakes testing narrows curriculum and dumbs down instruction. It causes students to turn off, tune out, and often drop out; induces schools to push students out; increases grade retention; propels teachers to leave; and inhibits needed improvements. In the end, high-stakes testing will hurt students – particularly those students who most desperately need better schools. (p. 43)

Schools located in low socioeconomic areas must meet the same requirements as schools located in more affluent districts. Schools with a high proportion of English language learners or special education students are expected to perform as well as other schools (Casbarro, 2005). Concerns have arisen regarding the readiness of low-income students to perform at the same level as their higher-income peers. According to Dr. Paul Houston, former executive director of the American Association of School Administrators (1997), students in low-poverty schools score between 50% and 70% higher in reading and math than students in high-poverty schools. In addition, students in high-poverty schools have higher transfer rates and larger classes. Neill (2003) noted that low-income students enter school substantially less prepared to do academic work than their middle-income peers. They are also more likely to attend schools with limited resources. “Those who start with less, get less, and as a result they either fail to catch up or fall even further behind” (Neill, 2003, p. 43).

In a study of characteristics of effective middle school principals, Bauck (1987) noted that, of the principals surveyed, the effective principals’ schools were in larger communities, had larger enrollments, and higher per-pupil expenditure. Bickman, Hallinger and Davis (1996) stated that the effectiveness of a principal’s leadership was impacted by the socioeconomic status of the students. Their study indicated that principals in schools serving students of higher socioeconomic status exercised more active instructional leadership than their counterparts leading in schools serving students at lower socioeconomic levels. The authors further stated that reduced expectations have the greatest negative effects on students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. “Principals play a key instructional leadership role by shaping teachers’ attitudes concerning students’ ability to master school subject matter” (Bickman, et al., p. 534).

Expectations have changed at the national, state, and local levels with new emphasis on standards and high-stakes testing. Policy makers and educational leaders have unveiled a series of measures to ensure schools are held accountable to taxpayers (Schiff, 2001). The advent of federal mandates and accountability initiatives has underscored the need for specially trained principals who can lead low-performing schools to become high-performing schools. Building leaders play a significant role in the school improvement process and in the utilization of assessment as a positive force in schools (Delaney, 1997; Stiggins, 2001).

School leaders at the district level play a key role in developing building leaders. To ensure strong leadership, school districts must: (a) provide professional development opportunities for school leaders, (b) develop leadership programs for aspiring school leaders, and (c) establish a culture that encourages distributing leadership functions to members of the school and community (Corallo & McDonald, 2001).

In this case study, relevant literature has been viewed based on the following constructs: leadership theory, dynamics of low performing schools located in low socioeconomic status districts, and characteristics of high performing schools located in low socioeconomic status districts. The researcher has identified leadership characteristics evident in building leaders supervising high-performing schools located in low socio-economic areas. Leadership theories as well as definitions and descriptions of school leadership characteristics are cited in this review of current literature. The impact of leadership on school improvement and student achievement is also discussed. Descriptions of dynamics prevalent in schools located in low socio-economic areas as

well as leadership impact are presented. Current research regarding the development of high-performing schools is also presented.

Leadership

Yukl (2002) described leadership as “an influence process concerned with facilitating the performance of a collective task” (p. 19). The influence of the leader determines leader effectiveness and the “power...not only for influencing subordinates but also for influencing peers, superiors, and people outside the organization” (p. 12). Gorton and Snowden (1998) stated that leadership is not necessarily positional. “It is not the position that determines whether someone is a leader; it is the nature of that individual’s behavior while occupying that position”(p. 65). Schein (1992) discussed leadership skills in terms of “primary embedding mechanisms” (p. 230). These mechanisms are: (a) what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control, (b) leader reaction to critical incidents and organizational crisis, (c) observed criteria for resource allocation, (d) deliberate role modeling, teaching and coaching, (e) observed criteria for allocation of rewards and status, and (f) observed criteria for recruitment, selection, promotion, retirement and excommunication. Each of these six components provides the framework from which skills are developed and/or enhanced. The following sections will cite research that describes specific theories of leadership as well as practical applications of effective leadership techniques.

Leadership Theory

Management vs. Leadership

An important issue related to leadership theory is the distinction between management versus leadership. Schiff (2001), after compiling results from a National

Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) survey, found that the principal's role is changing. Not only does a principal have to be an effective manager, but also the leader of an instructional team. High school principals are increasingly called upon to be leaders of curricular change and innovative instructional strategies while they strive to implement accountability models for staff members and students. Poplin (1992) stated, "Since the days when we decided being a school leader meant being an instructional leader, we have added to this role the expectations of school-based management, choice, vision, and community involvement in schools" (p. 10). In a national survey of high school and middle school principals (n = 4756) respondents ranked specific roles of principals as follows: establish learning climate, personnel (hiring, firing, evaluation), curricular leadership, operational management, student services, strategic planning, community relations (Schiff, 2001).

Turner and Whitaker (2000) suggested that the difference between management and leadership may lie in the administrator's perceived priorities versus his or her actual priorities. While administrators' priorities may be, according to the leader's perception, very leadership oriented (teacher empowerment, shared decision-making, and emphasizing the nurturing of quality educators), the actual priorities indicate a more managerial orientation. Managerial priorities included staying abreast of current legal issues, getting better control over personal time and scheduling, and working to align curriculum with district and state standards. These discrepancies underscore the shift that can occur between a managerial orientation and a leadership orientation.

Formative Leadership Theory

Formative Leadership Theory (Ash & Persall, 2000) addresses this shift from management to leadership and provides guiding principles for school administrators. Formative Leadership Theory (FLT) is based on the belief that there are many leadership possibilities and many leaders within the school. Previously, the building administrator was the sole leader of the faculty and students. The FLT proposes that leadership is not role-specific, reserved only for the administrator. The principal is viewed as a leader of leaders. The task at hand is for the administrator to provide learning opportunities for the faculty and staff so that they can develop or enhance their own skills and become productive leaders. The formative leader must be a good facilitator of team building and collaborative problem solving. Additional formative leadership behaviors include the ability to imagine future possibilities, examine shared beliefs, ask questions, collect, analyze, and interpret data and engage the faculty in meaningful conversation about teaching and learning. Team learning and collaborative problem solving should replace control mechanisms and top-down decision making. Trust should be the driving force behind working relationships. These principles support what is described as a new paradigm for quality leadership.

Participative Leadership Theory

In addition to the Formative Leadership Theory, Participative Leadership Theory (Yukl, 2002) also provides a framework for administrators. In order to encourage and maintain participation, the leader should encourage stakeholders to express their concerns. For an administrator to be an effective delegator, he or she must be able to

include other individuals in decision-making, especially regarding those decisions that have direct impact on the members within the organization.

Transformational Leadership Theory

According to Yukl (2002), transformational leadership appeals to followers' morals and values. A transformational leader will strive to encourage followers to see their significant role in the big picture of the organization. When a leader is able to facilitate within the members an ownership of the organization and its vision and is able to move them from a self-centered perspective to an organizational perspective, transformational leadership has occurred. Transformational leaders empower followers and make them less dependent on the leader. Transformational leaders support followers by "delegating significant authority to individuals, developing follower skills and self-confidence, creating self-managed teams, providing direct access to sensitive information, eliminating unnecessary controls, and building a strong culture to support empowerment" (p. 261). Leithwood (1992) stated that transformational school leaders are in pursuit of three goals: (a) helping staff develop and maintain a collaborative school culture, (b) fostering teacher development, and (c) helping them solve problems together more effectively.

Charismatic Leadership Theory

Schein (1992) stated "the simplest explanation of how leaders get their message across is through charisma in that one of the main elements of that mysterious quality undoubtedly is a leader's ability to communicate major assumptions and values in a vivid and clear manner" (p. 229). Morgan (1997) stated that charismatic leaders can exert a decisive influence on how people "perceived their realities and hence the way they act"

(p. 189). Yukl (2002) also described charismatic leadership. Charismatic leadership can be viewed as the opposite of transformational leadership in that “ the essence of charisma is being perceived as extraordinary by followers who are dependent on the leader for guidance and inspiration” (p. 261). Charismatic leadership occurs when the leader is perceived as possessing exceptional and unique qualities. Often, the charismatic qualities or characteristics become evident in the context of organizational crisis. The leader provides a solution that leads to success and the followers perceive the leader as extraordinary.

Practical Application of Leadership Techniques

Effective Leadership

While a study of leadership theory may provide insight into various leadership styles, such a study does not address the question, “What does an effective leader look like?” Although ineffective principals have been described as individuals who avoid conflict, fail to listen and follow through on tasks and goals, and do not maintain visibility in their schools (Capelluti & Nye, 2004), current literature suggests many descriptors of the effective school principal. McEwan (2003) listed 10 descriptors of highly effective principals: (a) the communicator, (b) the educator, (c) the envisioner, (d) the facilitator, (e) the change master, (f) the culture builder, (g) the activator, (h) the producer, (i) the character builder, and (j) the contributor.

Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) described twenty-one responsibilities of a school leader and their correlations with student academic achievement. Of the twenty-one responsibilities described, the ones with the highest correlation to student academic achievement (average $r \geq .25$) were (a) change agent, (b) culture, (c) discipline, (d)

flexibility, (e) input, (f) knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, (g) monitoring/evaluating, (h) order, (i) outreach, (j) resources, and (k) situational awareness.

Duke (2004) presented certain assumptions about schools needing leadership improvement. First, a variety of explanations will be offered for low performance. The effective leader will hear all explanations, but will keep in mind that no single explanation will account for low school performance. Second, the staff of a low performing school will likely feel they have tried everything. They may be hesitant to receive advice from outside sources because they feel like they have tried everything. Third, the staff of a low-performing school will likely demonstrate a variety of emotions – frustration, anger, disappointment, and anxiety. The effective administrator will recognize this and encourage and assist staff to confront their feelings in an honest and open manner. Fourth, it is appropriate to assume that no school is a total failure. Every school has those students who will excel regardless of circumstances. It is important for the effective principal to recognize those assets and determine what factors have contributed to their development. Duke further described effective building leaders as those who: (a) value students and make sure students understand that they do not have to achieve first to be valued, (b) challenge their staff to examine their belief systems, (c) find the extra time for teachers who may need to provide additional assistance to struggling students, and (d) make sure that order is achieved in the school and also make sure that the perception of order is very clear to patrons.

Barkley, Bottoms, Feagin and Clark (2001) identified three strategies that effective leaders employed in schools that increased student learning. First, leaders exhibited the behaviors they wanted their teachers to display. They modeled learning.

School administrators shared with staff members professional readings they have valued and also asked staff about their reading. If teachers were required to submit growth plans, the administrator would also complete a growth plan and share the plan with teachers. In addition to modeling learning, effective leaders also created compelling reasons for others to learn and succeed. Finally, the effective leader created a coaching environment for continuous growth. Time spent coaching teachers is more effective than time spent evaluating teachers. Coaching teachers is more likely to raise teachers' expectations, effort and skills. The authors continued their description of effective leaders by stating, "The middle grades and high schools need strong, effective principals who encourage their teachers, help them plan and implement research-based practices, and provide leadership for improving curricula and instruction" (Barkley, et al, 2001, p. 13) and that administrators have "important modeling roles. Their responses to teachers, parents and students show whether they are committed to high expectations and student learning" (Barkley, et al, 2001, p. 16).

The Turnaround Principal

Duke (2004) discussed the concept of a turnaround principal. A turnaround principal is a pragmatic leader who can use a variety of strategies and approaches to reverse the downward spiral of a low-performing school. The turnaround principal concentrates on motivating teachers; assessing and refining their skills; increasing instructional time for struggling students; establishing and sustaining orderly learning environments; and using various data sources to continually monitor students' progress. Fullan (2006) further described the turnaround principal as one who attends to three basics: literacy, numeracy, and well-being of students. According to Fullan, "well-being

serves double duty. It directly supports literacy and numeracy: that is, emotional health is strongly associated with cognitive achievement” (p. 51). Burbach and Butler (2005) interviewed ten principals who were hired as turnaround principals; individuals charged with turning around academically low-performing schools. The authors found three common characteristics inherent in the subjects. First, the turnaround principal was someone who seeks the position for the right reasons. The subjects consistently responded that the “most compelling reason for taking their respective positions was a heartfelt desire to help raise the achievement level of academically low-achieving children and thereby enhance these students’ chances of success in life” (p. 24). Second, the subjects each demonstrated a “richly textured conceptual understanding of and an affective sensitivity to the unique challenges faced by academically underachieving children” (p. 25). Finally, the subjects interviewed were individuals with whom a superintendent could build a relationship of trust. The authors stated, “without trust a planning team cannot possibly deal with conflict” (p. 25).

Fox, Reavis and Vinson (1999) presented a case study of a low-performing high school in an economically deprived, rural area. After appointing a new principal, the school increased the average number of sophomores passing a state-mandated achievement test from 38% passing to 87% passing in one school year. In their study, the authors noted “early observations and inquiries revealed a school culture quite different from those of many schools with similar student characteristics (e.g. high-poverty, rural, isolated, history of low academic performance)” (Fox et al., 1999, p. 199).

Fox, et al. (1999) further identified the observed components of the high-success culture. First, it was noted that individuals (both adults and students) were recognized for

various accomplishments. The authors referred to this component as heroes and heroines. The school faculty and staff also recognized and maintained rites and rituals, activities that become commonplace in regard to academic performance. The authors observed that tasks such as preparing for state mandated tests transitioned from being a dreaded task to being a challenge embraced by the faculty members. A third component, stories, provided the means for the faculty to view the leader as human and approachable. The principal in this case study told stories about himself, including accounts of his own academic struggles. The principal also had a high energy level and continuously promoted the goals and ideas of the school. He was very democratic in his interactions with groups, whether faculty or students. He would ask his audience their opinion of his suggestions and then listen to their feedback. Governance and leadership evolved as a significant component of the school's high-success culture. As a fifth component, the symbols of the school became more prevalent. The principal also stressed personal appearance and conduct as representative of the school. The principal's consistency in enforcing expectations proved to be a significant component in creating a culture of success. In this case study, the principal, in his first year, fired the secretary and janitor and obtained the resignation of a teacher. During his second year, two more teachers were asked to resign. In a two-year time span, twenty students were sent to the alternative school, expelled, removed to home schooling, or encouraged to transfer to other schools. All participants were given the opportunity and support to embrace the school's culture. According to the authors of the study, neither teachers nor students complained about, were fearful of, or criticized the principal. Students interviewed stated that "he loves us and is just trying to get us to do what will be expected of us in the real world" (p. 201).

Finally, the principal was the bearer of the high achievement culture. The authors referred to this component as the high priest. “He had energy, was very competitive, was goal focused and positive, gave credit to others for successes that might have been due largely to his efforts, praised lavishly, was attentive to detail, and followed up on everything” (p. 201). The components identified in this study support the theory of transformational leadership.

Leadership and School Improvement

Current state mandates also demand that administrator preparation not only become a priority but that administrators are trained to assist educators to improve student achievement (Knipe & Speck, 2002; Kelehear, 2003). Bauck (1987) described effective middle school administrators as more committed to professional development and management. Building administrators are encouraged to take an active role in designing effective professional development activities for their faculty members. According to Knipe and Speck (2002), the effective building administrator must consider five issues when attempting to improve student achievement through professional development of teachers. First, what professional development activities/strategies can be implemented to maintain a desire to learn among faculty members? Second, what guarantees exist that the professional development activities will be respected? Third, considering various constraints (schedules, district priorities, etc.), how can the building principal develop learning systems/models that serve as a building’s foundation for teaching? Fourth, how can decisions regarding professional development by principals and teachers be aligned to be in the best interest of students? Fifth, how can a

professional development model ensure adequate opportunities to build a faculty's knowledge base?

Kelehear (2003) described another role of district leaders as that of mentor of teachers. Kelehear stated that effective mentoring of teachers helps them become more autonomous as professionals, reflective of experience, and more aware of students' needs. The mentoring relationship is ongoing, often involving at least six months of intentional coaching in order to bring about adequate change in adult behaviors. As an organizational mentor, the building principal may need to invest 3 to 5 years before authentic and significant change is recognized.

Bushaw (1997) suggested recommendations for school leaders hoping to implement school improvement programs. The author discussed several areas of consideration. Bushaw suggested that effective school improvement programs will not focus solely on scores on normed tests but should be broad-based and focus on student achievement, not particular scores. The author further stated that, "schools would be ill-advised not to use their normed test results as one measure of success, as long as that test fits the outcomes desired in a particular goal" (p. 424). Bushaw also stated that all new learning among all participants in the school improvement process, including the principal, staff, and parents, begins with the principal. The focus should be on collective learning.

Thomas (2003) cited seven steps for leaders to tackle difficult situations. Thomas stated that leaders need to reaffirm the core purpose of their position. "Our core purpose is students' learning and character development" (p. 8). Leaders also need to develop and maintain a fierce resolve and be prepared to stand strong in the face of challenges and

change. Leaders need to often rethink a particular position and have the courage to make an unpopular decision if it will move the organization toward a correct long-term outcome. Leaders also need to allow themselves some creativity and be willing to recreate systems already in place. Thomas asked,

Do we really need more than 100 categorical programs, or can we simplify in order to focus more clearly on bottom-line results? After 30 years of trying various approaches and seeing the achievement gap widen, are we unwilling to step out of the box and try a new approach? (p. 9)

Bolman and Deal (1997) presented leadership as viewed through the lens of human resource. According to Bolman and Deal, the organization exists to serve the individual's needs. The quality of fit between the organization and the individual will determine the success of both. In response, Bensimon, Birnbaum, and Neumann (1989) suggested that, when leaders "want to know how well they are doing, it might be more beneficial to ask themselves how they are viewed by their constituents rather than assessing themselves against an arbitrary standard like charisma, decisiveness, or courage" (p. 70).

Does the principal play a significant role in building and maintaining teacher morale? Hunter-Boykin and Evans (1995) studied the correlation between a principal's leadership style and teacher morale. The researchers selected 411 teachers and 40 high school principals from public high schools with enrollments of greater than 1000. Administrators completed the Leadership Ability Evaluation (LAE) to determine their leadership style. Respondents were identified as autocratic-aggressive, autocratic-submissive, democratic-cooperative, or laissez-faire. Selected teachers completed the

Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire (PTO). The PTO was designed to measure teacher morale. One area of morale measured by the PTO is “teacher rapport with principal.” This subscale addresses the teacher’s feelings about the principal’s professional competency, his or her interest in the teachers and their work, the administrator’s ability to communicate, and his or her skills in human relations. The results of this study indicated a low positive correlation between the principals’ leadership and the teachers’ morale. The researchers also found that a number of principals responding to the survey rated themselves as ineffective.

Emotional Leadership

Thomas (2003) discussed the emotional leadership element. Public schooling must be concerned with people and relationships. Implementing change in instructional practice is difficult for educators. An effective leader will be sensitive to their needs and “very aggressive with positive and upbeat communication” (p. 9). When dealing with stressful times or times of change in education, an effective leader will maintain a calm and thoughtful attitude. Thomas suggested implementing the same calm, team approach used when dealing with crises related to school safety when dealing with the current challenging times. Finally, the effective leader will rejuvenate his or her own professional development. It is imperative to maintain an attitude of openness to new ideas.

Teachers’ Perceptions

A study by Richardson, Lane, and Flanigan (1996) addressed teachers’ perceptions of principals’ attributes. The authors used a list of twenty characteristics that business managers thought leaders should possess, acquired from a Kouzes and Posner book, *The Leadership Challenge*. Results of the study indicated that teachers ranked the

following descriptors as the five most important attributes of a principal: 1) honest, 2) competent, 3) forward-looking, 4) inspiring, and 5) caring.

Blase and Blase (1999) studied teacher's perspectives in regard to a principal's instructional leadership and teacher development. Their study demonstrated that an administrator talking with teachers in and outside of instructional conferences was valuable and served as a cornerstone for effective instructional leadership. In these interactions, principals used five strategies in their communication with teachers – making suggestions, giving feedback, modeling, using inquiry, soliciting advice and opinions and giving praise. A second theme that emerged in the study was promoting professional growth in regard to teaching methods and collegial interaction about teaching and learning. In this study, Blase and Blase found that teachers described effective instructional leaders as those who emphasize the study of teaching and learning, supported collaboration efforts among teachers, developed coaching relationships among teachers, encouraged and supported redesign of existing programs, applied the principles of adult learning, growth, and development to all phases of staff development, and implemented action research to inform instructional decision making (p. 363).

Williams (2000) studied teacher perceptions of leadership attributes in Tennessee schools nominated for the National Secondary School Recognition Program. According to the study, teachers perceived principals in the recognized schools as providing better leadership in organizational development. They demonstrated greater insight in dealing with personnel in regard to goal setting, establishing expectations, and promoting appropriate changes. The principals were also perceived to nurture the on-going climate

of the school through development of positive interpersonal relationships among members of the organization.

Culture

An administrator's leadership style has a direct impact on the culture of the school. Cosner and Peterson (2003) defined school culture as "a set of underlying beliefs; norms and values held by members of the school" (p. 13). Schein (1992) described culture as "the result of a complex group learning process that is only partially influenced by leader behavior" (p. 5). Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) stated that "cultural forces included shared values, goals, and ideas about pedagogy, relationships, and politics intended to build covenantal community" (p. 56).

According to Morgan (1997), a focus on culture gives leaders a way of managing organizations. Goldman (1998) stated, "In a learning environment, leadership style says everything about the leader's deeply held educational beliefs – and these are mirrored in the culture of the school" (p. 20). A leader can create, change, or destroy cultures. According to Schein (1992), cultures derive from three sources. Culture begins with beliefs and values of the founders of an organization. As group members learn and grow with the organization, they further contribute to the culture. Finally, as new members and leaders enter the organization, they bring additional beliefs, values, and assumptions that impact the development of culture.

Clark and Clark (2003) also discussed school leadership in terms of school culture. "School culture can ...facilitate change. It can embrace new ideas and incorporate them into the values and beliefs of the school" (p. 58). Mandated standards, according to the authors, are not the problem. How the standards are interpreted and what

procedures are placed into action determine the standards' appropriateness in educating students. The authors contended that the culture found in many public schools, specifically middle level schools, often impeded the implementation and maintenance of developmentally appropriate programs. "Clearly, middle level principals must provide the stimulus and leadership to develop and maintain healthy school cultures" (p. 59).

In addition to impacting student learning, school culture can also influence teachers' perceptions as well as their effectiveness as instructors. The building administrator has an important role to play in developing and sustaining a culture that addresses the needs of adults. Cosner and Peterson (2003) stated,

Given the importance of school culture, it is imperative that instructional leaders build and sustain cultures that support adult learning. A learning culture exists when a school's beliefs, values and norms support adult learning. In these cultures, teachers believe they are life-long learners and value work that enhances curriculum and instruction. (p. 13)

In another study, Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) surveyed 1818 teachers and 6490 students in a large school district to study the effects of principal leadership and teacher leadership on student engagement with school. The results of the survey indicated that, while weak, the effects of principal leadership were significant, while the effects of teacher leadership were not significant on student engagement with school.

An understanding of prominent leadership theories of management vs. leadership, participative leadership, formative leadership, transformational leadership and charismatic leadership provides a foundation for the identification and description of

leadership characteristics, style and techniques. Springing from these theories, research describes practical application of leadership techniques.

Dynamics of Low-Performing Schools in Low SES Districts

Leadership in low-performing schools has challenges all its own. The characteristics of low-performing schools depend on the criteria used to define “low-performing.” In an environment of standards-based reform, “low-performing” often refers to those “schools that do not meet the standards established and monitored by the state board of education, or some other authority external to the school” (Corallo & McDonald, 2001, p. 2). Corallo and McDonald (2001) described common conditions that exist in low-performing schools. These conditions include a correlation between community poverty and stress on the organization of the school. The stress is evidenced by low expectations for student achievement, high teacher absenteeism and high rates of teacher turnover. The authors further stated that characteristics of schools that succeed despite community poverty include a strong focus on, and cohesion of, the instructional program, a strong planning process focused on improving student achievement, and a culture of collaboration among teaching staff and administrators.

Anfara, Brown, and Roney (2004) studied middle-level reform in high-performing and low-performing middle schools. Their research indicated a connection between socioeconomic level of schools and performance level of schools. In their study, only 3% of the students in the high-performing schools were identified as low income, while 88% of students in the low-performing schools were identified as low income.

In a study of low-performing, high-poverty schools in Florida, researchers identified the effects of poverty on schools (Acker-Hocevar, M. & Touchton, D., 2001).

According to the authors, effects of poverty were clearly indicated in the low academic achievement scores.

One principal interviewed stated,

What happens is, if you get into abject poverty and disparity and it's a matter of survival, the soul is broken. If the soul is broken and you don't have the idea that you are going to get out from under it, then that's the way you will probably be the rest of your life. You're not very optimistic about the future, and you don't give that to your children – to let them know there is a better future. (p. 9)

The effects of poverty on student achievement were identified in four areas: demographic patterns, language barriers and deficits, degree of parental support, and the cultural and socioeconomic value differences. A high percentage of free and reduced lunch exists in the low-performing schools studied. The mobility rates were also high in the schools identified, ranging from 40 – 85%. The low-performing schools were also made up of students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds.

According to the study, regardless of race or language, many students come to high-poverty schools language deprived. The majority of impoverished parents does not write or read proficiently in their native language. Impoverished students are not only behind in their language acquisition, but also in their repertoire of experiences.

They are coming to us with an experiential academic deficit. They may have many rich experiences in family love, and they're very loving and very caring, and we never measure those things. We measure the academics...they're not playing on a level playing field (p. 11).

In regard to parental support, parents of students living in poverty are seldom involved and provide little educational support for their children. Impoverished parents are limited in their ability to help because they have not acquired the language to understand how to provide educational support and lack the capacity to be of assistance. One principal interviewed in the study stated,

When parents are just trying to survive, and wondering how they are going to pay the rent, make repairs on the car, and pay for medical expenses, that learning about a new reading program or helping their children with homework, is not their top priority (p. 12).

Acker-Hocevar and Touchton's study further stated that living in poverty effects how one sees the world. The authors state that cultural and socioeconomic differences are evident in several areas. Regarding work ethic, one principal interviewed stated "so many of my homes, nobody gets up and goes to work everyday...they don't have what it takes to keep putting one foot in front of the other...like you would see in a middle class home" (p. 12). The principal indicated that this attitude translates to poor attendance on the part of the student. There are also different values in regard to cleanliness. Principals interviewed in the study reported that, often, students from impoverished families come to school dirty. When principals tried to visit with parents about their child's hygiene, they found the parents and the home were also dirty. Impoverished parents who have limited education may also have different views of the value of education for their child. If a parent is satisfied with his or her life, they may not understand why their children need an education. Another value difference in impoverished families compared to middle class families is the prevalence of aggression of parents and the violence that

children witness at home. According to the study, principals reported that it was not uncommon for poor parents to come to school and cuss out or threaten teachers. Principals then were presented the task of writing letters to those aggressive parents, notifying local authorities, and building the morale of teachers who have been verbally assaulted. A final value difference principals in the study noted is the failure of impoverished parents to read the newspapers or listen to the news. Often, the parent's primary source of information is television talk shows.

Downey (2001) asserted that moving toward improvement in low-performing schools is the responsibility of district administrators.

Admonishing principals and teachers to do better will not turn around low-performing schools. If they could, they would. Just as in baseball, you can be given a bat, step up to the plate, and the ball will be thrown to you. But without the basics of the game, you could swing and swing and never get a hit that will take you to first base. (p. 18)

Downey states that district leaders must provide the tools and knowledge necessary to move students to higher performance.

High-performing Schools in Low SES Districts

Thompson (2003) identified critical factors in place in a high-performing school system. In implementing these factors, Thompson described two types of leadership that must be in place, strategic leadership and authentic leadership. Strategic leaders are described as vision builders. They are skilled in balancing pressure and support. A strategic leader's success depends largely on "his or her ability to mobilize the system in such a way that the distance between current reality and a powerful future is significantly

diminished” (p. 493). Authentic leaders establish trust in their organizations. “What gives leaders trust-engendering authenticity is not simply rhapsodizing about such qualities and values but making them visible and credible through consistent action” (p. 494).

In a study investigating high-poverty schools in California designated as high-performing schools (Izumi, 2002), researchers interviewed the schools’ principals and asked them a series of questions related to areas such as curriculum, teaching methods, and professional development. Results of the interviews pointed to strong leadership.

The schools profiled in this report have beaten the odds and performed at a high level, not because of luck or the presence of a unique miracle-worker principal, but because they have had the courage to buck fashionable trends in favor of practical, effective, and proven methods of improving student achievement. The principals who head these schools are strong leaders who have a clear vision of what works and does not work in the classroom. They also have the humility to put their beliefs to the test (literally) and to base their course of action accordingly. Unlike the adherents of “progressive” education who religiously stick to theories and methods despite empirical evidence showing them to be ineffective, the principals interviewed for this report focused their efforts on what works in the real world. (p. 47)

Brownson, Kahlert, Picucci, and Sobel (2004) identified additional characteristics in high-poverty, high-performing schools. These characteristics included a common purpose, thoughtful school structures, and attention to individual students. Staff and students alike share a common purpose. The school structure includes student teams, common planning time for teachers, and the consideration of block scheduling. To meet

the needs of individual students, consideration is given to extending the school day, structured academic support programs and after-school programs are established, academic opportunities are expanded, and students are assisted in the transition from grade to grade.

Jorgenson and Smith (2002) studied two successful schools that previously had been designated as low performing. In one school studied, the district administrator implemented inquiry-centered learning in the area of science. Inquiry-centered learning utilizes hands on experimentation in lieu of passive observation of demonstrations. After four years of inquiry-centered learning in science, that school showed, not only significant gains in science test scores, but also dramatic improvement in SAT 9 mathematics and reading scores and scores averaging 90% on the district's writing proficiency exam. While the new instructional methods played a pivotal role in the improvement of scores, the district administrator's ability to convince principals and teachers new instructional strategies were needed was key to the school's success. At another school presented in the study, the building principal first had to build consensus around the state mandate to raise test scores. Although the principal initially met with resistance from teachers who felt they were doing the best they could,

After a month of sincere lobbying from the principal, and professional development and peer coaching devoted to preparing disadvantaged students for testing success, a majority of Harrison's teachers acknowledged that the state mandate was a fact of life. "What you must do, do positively and well!" became their motto as they committed themselves to studying options and making

instructional changes that offered the greatest promise for increased student learning and improved test performance. (p. 40)

Both schools in Jorgenson and Smith's study shared several key elements; a highly committed faculty, strong leadership, and incentives and recognition for progress. In a study of five high-poverty Texas schools that demonstrated marked improvement over a three-year span, Anderson and Togneri (2003) identified a similar set of strategies consistent across the districts studied. The districts acknowledged poor performance and sought strategies for improvement while they focused intently on improving achievement through improved instruction. A system wide framework of instructional supports was established, including a clear vision, outcome goals, district-wide curriculum and professional development strategies. Leadership roles were redefined and redistributed. Relevant and useful professional development was provided. Trimble (2002) described three common elements of high performing high poverty schools. First, the schools utilized a grant writer or a team of writers. These individuals know how to generate grant proposals to obtain additional funds to implement reform initiatives. Second, the schools determine goals and then focus on strategies to reach the goals. Finally, the schools utilize teams to do the work. According to Trimble, the use of teams maximizes individuals' talents and provides a more efficient means of utilizing time and other resources. Teambuilding works best when there is an interdependence among team members, established team leadership, common agreement among members to participate equally, and equal influence among members (Jamison & Reddy, 1988).

Anfara, Brown, and Roney (2004) studied high- and low-performing middle schools in the northeastern United States. The demographics of the two groups of schools

differed significantly. In the high-performing schools, 3% of the students were identified as low income while 88% of the students in the low-performing schools were identified as low income. Eighty-two percent of students in the low-performing schools were minority. Only 11% of students in the high-performing schools group were minority. The two groups of schools were studied in regard to the existence of eleven reform components: a standards based curriculum, an exploratory curriculum, varied assessments, varied teaching and learning approaches, flexible scheduling, a faculty made up of experts at teaching adolescents, team teaching, advisory programs, administrators govern democratically, a curriculum that promotes good health, and a move to involve families and communities. While the researchers hypothesized that the high-performing schools would have implemented more of the reform components, they found that both the high-performing schools and the low-performing schools implemented only six of the eleven reform components. Anfara, et al. (2004) found that “the similarities prove that outlining quick fixes and easy-to-follow reform initiatives is more difficult to put into practice than previously thought” (p. 158). The researchers further concluded that there is a need to investigate further to explain the difference between high-performing and low-performing schools’ student achievement and “re-evaluate minority and low-income students’ experiences in urban middle schools” (Anfara, et al., p. 158).

Lashway (2003) cited six practices evident in high-performing schools with low-income students in Texas. According to Lashway, principals of high-performing schools practice high-energy, hands-on leadership that articulates the vision and keeps the school focused on instruction. The principal engages in broad-based planning that sets clear instructional priorities and meaningful benchmarks for improvement. The principal

encourages focused, research-based professional development that is driven by identified instructional needs. The status of the school instructional program as well as the students' achievement is continuously monitored and assessed. The effective principal allows flexible grouping for instruction based on identified student needs. Finally, when struggling students are identified, the principal of a high-performing school will provide immediate intervention. "It seems evident that turning around a school requires leaders who nurture an educational vision, keep a laser-like focus on instruction, and work to build a professional learning community" (Lashway, 2003, p. 6). Belenardo (2001) stated that there is a strong relationship between the principal's leadership style and the school's sense of community.

A study by the Washington School Research Center (2002) identified four primary factors essential for a successful and effective school. First, a caring and collaborative professional environment must be established. This type of environment will include a sense of community among teachers and students. Second, there must be strong leadership. According to the researchers, leaders must be visionary and student-centered. Effective leaders are facilitators, supportive of efforts in the classroom. Leaders will be seen by staff as trusting, positive and flexible and can serve as mediators between the teachers and the district office. The effective building leader demonstrates knowledge of current research and shares that information with his or her staff. In describing high-performing schools, the researchers stated, "Whether by direct means or by more indirect approaches, such as the delegation of responsibilities, the leadership in the school has been strong and appreciated" (p. 23). The third factor essential for a successful and effective school is focused, intentional instruction. Focusing on the essentials,

maintaining high expectations, and assuring ongoing collaboration among teachers is necessary. Finally, assessment data must be used to inform instructional practices.

The National Conference of State Legislatures (2002) highlighted the positive aspects of being an educational leader. While some leaders have lost interest because of the perception that the job is undoable, many leaders excel because of the satisfaction derived from the job. Rewards cited in this study include the following: 1) working with teachers and students to create a culture in their districts and schools that cultivates learning at all levels, 2) implementing new programs that increase the level of student achievement, 3) being of service to parents, students and the community, and 4) the experience of being a proactive, hands-on leader. “The most effective school leaders find satisfaction in seeing students learn and succeed in school, in working with students, and in helping teachers develop and be successful in their work” (p. 2).

Summary

Leaders may be presented a myriad of journal articles detailing what a successful school and a struggling school looks like. Leaders have at their disposal a wealth of research regarding leadership theory. However, little research has been performed to address specific leadership styles/characteristics or teachers’ perceptions of leadership styles/characteristics that are actually in place in high-performing or improved schools located in low SES districts.

Each of the three constructs – leadership, dynamics of low-performing schools in low SES districts, and high performing schools in low SES districts – influence or is influenced by the others. Leadership is a common thread that can impact, positively or negatively, any school. Dynamics in low performing, low SES schools often dictate the

leadership style/theory necessary for successful improvement efforts. A study of high performing schools provides insight into what may be in place in regard to leadership.

A case study depiction of what leadership looks like in a low SES school with improving or high-performing status could assist school leaders struggling with low test scores and the requirements of NCLB.

In chapter three, the research design and methodology utilized in this study will be described. Included in this description will be a discussion of the population and sample, data collection and instrumentation and data analysis. Chapter four will describe the data collected.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The increased level of accountability of building leaders in public schools to meet the demands of NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2005; Rabinowitz, 2001; Anthes, 2002) provided the foundation of this study. Building leadership has been identified as a significant factor in increasing student achievement (Beaudin, Thompson & Jacobson, 2002). In addition, specific obstacles have been identified in high poverty schools (Neill, 2003; Casbarro, 2005; Bickman, Hallinger & Davis, 1996). Less is expected of teachers and students in high poverty schools. Administrators in high poverty schools tend to place less significance on instructional leadership. While this may be the norm, there are exceptions. There are high poverty schools in Missouri that have been recognized for their high student achievement (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2005; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006). In order to best study the leadership in a high-poverty high-performing school, a qualitative case study design was selected.

The foundation for the qualitative research design used in this study is best expressed through Creswell's (1998) definition of qualitative research. Creswell stated

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

Thomas and Brubaker (2000) stated “Case studies are intended to reveal the individualistic attributes of a particular person or institution...Case studies emphasize features that make one person or group different from others...” (p. 101-102). The specific design of this qualitative research was an observational case study, a detailed examination of one setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The observation was of a bounded system (Creswell, 1998) over time.

Within the context of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What leadership traits are identified in a high-poverty, high performing school (HP-HPS)? Specifically, the following perspectives were examined:

- a. The building leader
- b. The faculty/staff
- c. The parents of students

2. What impact does the leader or the evident leadership style have on stakeholders within the school? Specifically, the following perspectives were examined:

- a. The faculty/staff
- b. The parents of students

Population and Sample

A purposeful sample (Creswell, 1998) was selected for this study in order to allow for collection of information that would address the conceptual underpinnings of impact of leadership style on student achievement, dynamics of low performing schools located in high poverty districts, and characteristics of high performing schools. The purpose of

this study was to describe the building leadership characteristics evident in a high-poverty high-performing middle school (HP-HPS) in Missouri.

Factors considered in the selection of this case were a designation by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as a high performing middle/junior high school (HPS), designation of HPS in both the areas of communication arts and mathematics, and a free/reduced lunch program participation rate of 40% or above. In addition, the building leader had to have served in that position for at least three years.

In 2006, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education prepared a list of the top ten schools for sustained performance in percent of students scoring at the “proficient” and “advanced” levels on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP). Achievement levels were averaged for the years 2001-2005 for communication arts and mathematics. Top ten lists were created for three categories of school size: (a) schools with fewer than 250 students, (b) schools with 250-500 students, and (c) schools with more than 500 students. The sample selection was limited to those schools that were listed as highest performing in both mathematics and communication arts. The selection was further limited by considering only those high performing schools with a free/reduced lunch participation rate of greater than 40%. Of the 524 school districts in the state of Missouri, 494 have a free/reduced lunch participation rate of 40% or higher (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2005; Wooton, K., Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, personal communication, October 11, 2006).

Of the schools recognized, only two schools met the selection criteria. One of those schools was a school of more than 500 students, with the middle grades included in the high school. This school was located in an open school district where the students were allowed to select the attendance center. The other school was a school of less than 250 students with the middle grades included in the elementary school. Students at this school had no other attendance centers from which to choose. The smaller school was selected as the sample due to fewer variables to impact the enrollment demographics.

In order to protect the anonymity of the school studied, the pseudonym Red Oaks Elementary is used. Red Oaks Elementary School is a rural K-8 school located in a South central Missouri city with a population of approximately eleven thousand. Red Oaks Elementary School is one of five rural K-8 schools in the area that feed into the high school in a neighboring district. The Red Oaks R-1 School District pays \$5865.00 per student for tuition at the neighboring high school. The total student population of Red Oaks Elementary School is approximately two hundred and fifty. The school is 97% white, with the remaining 5% Asian, Hispanic, and Black. Fifty-five percent of the school's enrollment participates in the free/reduced lunch program. The seventh and eighth grade enrollment consists of fifty-six students. The seventh and eighth grades are staffed by eight certified teachers. The building principal, Mr. Maples (pseudonym), also serves as district superintendent. Mr. Maples has been the building/district leader for thirty-one years.

Within the case, the building principal, members of the teaching faculty, and parents served as volunteer subjects. Eleven certified teachers for seventh and eighth grades was selected for interview. Eleven parents were invited for interview from the list

of parents of all seventh and eighth graders. In addition, the researcher interviewed the building principal and shadowed him for a day.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) stated, “Two issues dominate traditional official guidelines of ethics in research with human subjects: informed consent and the protection of subjects from harm” (p. 43). Subjects must be assured that their participation is voluntary. They must also understand the nature of the study and potential risks of participation. The University of Missouri-Columbia Office of Research (2006) further adds that the selection of participants must be equitable and risks to participants must be minimized. Adequate preparation must be taken to insure confidentiality of participants. Finally, adequate provisions must be made to continuously monitor the participants’ welfare.

Each participant in this study signed a written informed consent form (see Appendixes C and D) prior to participation. The consent form described to participants the purpose of the study and the potential use of information derived from the study (Berg, 2001). The consent form also notified participants that the study had been reviewed and approved by the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board, explicitly stating that research procedures adequately safeguard the subject’s privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights.

To further protect the subjects from harm, the consent form stated: (a) that participation is completely voluntary and that subjects were allowed to cease participation at any point without penalty, (b) subjects need not answer all questions, and

(c) subjects' answers to questions will remain confidential. The form also informed participants of the duration of participation.

The researcher visited the case site multiple days and interviewed three groups: the building administrator, faculty members, and parents of students attending the school. The researcher used a semi-standardized interview format (Berg, 2002). The semistandardized format involved the utilization of a number of predetermined questions. The questions were asked of the participants in a systematic order. The interviewer, however, was free to digress and to probe beyond the answers provided. The interview process lasted approximately one hour per subject. Interviews were conducted individually. An interview protocol was used to ensure consistency in the interview process (Creswell, 1998). A separate protocol was used for each of the three interview groups (see Appendixes E, F, and G). In order to record each subject's responses, an audio recorder was used with the recordings transcribed verbatim later. Descriptive and reflective field notes were maintained throughout the interview process in order to clearly capture the participant's demeanor, tone, and body language. As stated by Bogdan and Biklen (1998),

The meaning and context of the interview can be captured more completely if, as a supplement to each interview, the researcher writes out fieldnotes. The tape recorder misses the sights, smells, impressions, and extra remarks said before and after the interview (p. 108).

The researcher also collected documents such as school newsletters, meeting agendas and memoranda from the administrator. Grade distributions were also collected. Documents can provide "rich descriptions of how the people who produced the materials

think about their world. Subject-produced data are employed as part of studies where the major thrust is participant observation or interviewing” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 133). Documents also provide records of activity that the researcher cannot observe directly (Stake, 1995).

In addition, the researcher also observed the daily routine of the school, including, but not limited to, staff meetings and class settings. The researcher also shadowed the building leader for a day. Throughout each observation setting, the researcher compiled descriptive fieldnotes to describe surroundings and behaviors observed.

The researcher compiled two types of fieldnotes – descriptive fieldnotes and reflective fieldnotes. The descriptive fieldnotes were the researcher’s best effort to objectively describe the details of observations and interview sessions. The reflective fieldnotes were the researcher’s impressions, problems and questions regarding a portion of the observation or interview process. Both types of fieldnotes were transcribed and relevant emergent themes were identified (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 1998). Relevant themes in the fieldnotes were identified through the use of open coding and focused coding (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). Open coding is the process of reading fieldnotes line by line to identify all ideas, themes or issues that are addressed, regardless of how disparate they may be. Focused coding is the process of analyzing field notes on the basis of topics that have been identified through the open coding process.

The researcher provided to each participant a typed transcript of their interview for their review. The participants were encouraged to look over the transcripts and provide additional comments/corrections as they deemed necessary. Each participant was also provided a self-addressed stamped envelope so they could return their comments.

Data Analysis

The foundation for the case study method of this research and the subsequent methods of data analysis was Thomas and Brubaker's (2000) description of a case study as "a detailed examination of a single person, group, institution, social movement, or event" (p. 102). Stake (1995) stated that a case study is the study of "the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). Thomas and Brubaker further stated that

a researcher can gather information by observing the subject directly, by interviewing other people who know the subject, by analyzing items produced by the subject, and by inspecting documents in which other people offer appraisals of the subject's behavior and traits. (p. 102-103)

In addition, Thomas and Brubaker described a data collection format in which the researcher started with no preconception of what to look for but, after examining interview transcripts, observations, field notes, and documents, began locating patterns and themes which emerged.

In order to analyze the data collected from the interview process, the researcher implemented categorical aggregation (Creswell, 1998). The researcher examined the transcripts from each interview. Specific interview question topics were described and responses were grouped according to theme. After identifying recurrent themes (for example, the leader's perpetuation or establishment of culture), the researcher identified emergent issue-relevant meaning.

As a means of triangulating emergent issue-relevant meaning, the researcher implemented the process of "member checking" (Stake, 1995). Each participant was

given the opportunity to examine a transcript of his or her interview responses. The participants were asked to review material for accuracy and palatability. In addition to “member checking,” documents were utilized to assist in the triangulation of data. Documents provided a substitute for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly (Stake, 1995).

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to describe building leadership characteristics/styles in a high-poverty high-performing school in Missouri. A case school was selected from a list of Top Ten Schools (based on academic achievement) compiled by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The case school was selected based on the following descriptors: (a) the designation had to be middle grades (grades 7 and 8), (b) the school had to be recognized in both communication arts and mathematics, (c) the school had to have a free/reduced lunch participation rate of 40% or above, and (d) the building leader had to have served in that position for at least three years.

The building administrator, faculty members and parents of students were interviewed to determine perspectives on leadership and leadership impact on student achievement. In addition documents were collected and observations were conducted. Field notes provided descriptive information regarding the observations.

Chapter four provides a presentation of the data. Chapter five provides a discussion of the findings as well as a summary of the research project. Implications of the study and recommendations for future study are also presented in chapter five.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to illustrate the leadership characteristics evident in a high-poverty high-achieving middle school in Missouri. Red Oaks Elementary School (pseudonym), a rural K-8 school, was selected as the case study site. Red Oaks Elementary has enjoyed a history of academic distinction, most recently recognized by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as a top-ten middle school for sustained performance in mathematics and communication arts, as measured by the Missouri Assessment Program (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2005). Red Oaks Elementary School has a 42 percent participation rate in the free/reduced lunch program. As the researcher, I spent a total of four complete days at the school interviewing faculty and parents of students as well as observing the functioning school and collecting documents for review. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

This chapter will provide a detailed description of results obtained through observation, interviews of the administrator, parents and faculty members, and the collection of documents. Descriptors of the leadership from the perspective of faculty and parent participants were identified (see Appendixes H and I). A review of the descriptors led to the identification of developing themes. Themes regarding the leadership in the school identified through the process of open coding of the interview transcripts will be presented. Open coding is the process of reading data line by line to identify all ideas, themes or issues that are addressed, regardless of how disparate they may be (Emerson,

Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Focused coding, the analysis of data on the basis of topics that were identified through the open coding process (Emerson et al., 1995), yielded primary themes of leadership. The primary themes will be discussed in terms of leadership roles and examples from interview transcriptions will be provided. In addition, examples from field notes and documents will be provided to substantiate the primary leadership roles. Data sources for examples provided from interview transcripts are identified as follows: eleven faculty interviews identified as F-1, F-2, F-3, F-4, F-5, F-6, F-7, F-8, F-9, F-10, F-11; eleven parent interviews identified as P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4, P-5, P-6, P-7, P-8, P-9, P-10, P-11; one building leader interview identified as L-1. Data sources from documents will be identified by type of document (i.e. field notes, faculty handbook, student handbook, etc.).

Description of Site

My visit to the site, Red Oaks Elementary School, spanned four consecutive days. While there, I collected field notes regarding the school structure, atmosphere, and history.

Red Oaks Elementary School is one of five rural schools that feed into a large high school in a neighboring city. The Red Oaks school district pays approximately \$5865.00 in tuition per student to the high school. The school enjoys a very low turnover rate in employees. Many teachers have been at the school for more than ten years. The head cook in the school cafeteria has been in that position for 32 years. According to Mr. Maples (pseudonym), the building administrator, the head cook began as a dishwasher. Mr. Maples himself has been at Red Oaks for thirty years. Every teacher I encountered

was very positive and demonstrated a very high level of job satisfaction. They also demonstrated a deep respect for Mr. Maples.

There was a loyalty in the community to the school. Historically, patrons have been very supportive of bond and levy issues. Mr. Maples remembered only one instance when a levy has failed. It passed six months later with a 67% majority.

I noted that there was a general atmosphere of calm, even during the passing periods. Students were very respectful and cordial. I spoke to several students in passing, asking, "How are you?" Each student responded, "Fine (or okay). How are you?" There is not an honor roll at the school. Mr. Maples commented that kids who succeed do not need the extra recognition and kids who do not succeed do not need to be made to feel worse.

There are no fund raisers at the school. Mr. Maples said that they do not want "just an arbitrary fund raiser." He added, "When we want to ask for something, we want it to count." According to Mr. Maples, with a big fundraiser, money goes out of the community instead of 100% of it staying at the school. Mr. Maples stated, "We try to pull people in instead of trying to rip them off. We would rather people raise taxes." Mr. Maples believed that when a community raises taxes to support the school, there is more accountability and ownership.

There seemed to be a great deal of pride in the school. According to Mr. Maples, each year about a third of the top ten seniors at the receiving high school are Red Oaks alumni. A bulletin board in the main hall of the middle school building displays newspaper articles documenting former Red Oaks Elementary students' successes in high school activities. In another hallway was a trophy case with a combination of athletic and

academic awards. Banners recognizing the school's top ten status on the MAP test over the years also adorn the halls.

The buildings were clean and well-organized. The original building was constructed in 1949. Additions were built in 1958 and 1973 with a cafeteria addition completed in 1981. The school district purchased a church building with land adjacent to the existing school property and converted it to an early childhood center and preschool. In 2001, a new library was built with an attached shell for future classrooms. After a significant rainstorm, major leaks were discovered. Due to dissatisfaction with the building contractor, the school district opted to finish repairs and completion of the additional classroom space themselves. The new building, with a library, science lab, audio-visual center, and classrooms for sixth through eighth grades was completed and operational for the 2005-2006 school year.

Descriptors of Building Leadership

Personal Reflection

As I reviewed the transcripts of interviews with teachers and parents and looked over my field notes compiled during my four day visit to the site, I was struck with the enormity of the task of describing the leadership in this very successful rural school. As I conducted the structured interviews, I was personally surprised at the candor of the participants and the ease with which each one described the leadership in their school. Each seemed eager for the opportunity to share with me their perception of the leader and his strengths and impact on the school. Without exception or hesitation, each participant, parents and teachers alike, described a leader who was nurturing, kind, caring and compassionate, while at the same time a holder of very high expectations and standards.

The colorful descriptions paint a picture of a leader that is a paradox – nurturing yet stern, ever-present yet appropriately distant, authoritarian yet a servant.

Faculty Interviews

In structured interview sessions, twelve faculty members were asked the following questions:

1. How would you describe your principal's leadership style/characteristics?
2. What do you feel are your principal's greatest strengths?
3. What do you feel are your principal's weaknesses?
4. What do you feel is your principal's most significant contribution to the academic success of this school in the areas of mathematics and communication arts?
5. What would the vision statement for this school be?

I noted that each of the faculty participants seemed eager to respond to the questions. It was evident that the participants were very loyal to Mr. Maples and demonstrated a great deal of respect for his leadership. An analysis of the faculty responses revealed prevalent themes that served to paint a picture of the building leadership.

Presence

Faculty members commented that Mr. Maples was very visible. He made his presence known throughout the day and was accessible by faculty members. "He is at every event, and sometimes he [comes into] classes." (F-3, p. 8, l. 21) Another teacher stated, "I think he is always here. A lot of times, he's always around looking at things and he's here and he sits and he watches and sees what's going on. He just gives a strong presence, I think" (F-9, p. 31, l. 20).

One teacher described Mr. Maples' presence in this way:

He is a very visible man all the time, very easy to get to, accessible, he will stick his head in the classroom. You may not see him for two or three days sometimes [in the classroom] but he is in the hallways then with the kids. (F-2, p. 5, l. 3)

The teachers indicated that Mr. Maples' level of visibility was important to them. As one teacher noted, "You'll see him here times when he doesn't need to be here or doesn't have to be here, but he makes that appearance. And that's encouraging to the staff and to our teaching team and even the students" (F-5, p. 17, l. 41). Mr. Maples' presence seemed to convey support and enthusiasm for what the teachers do. Their appreciation of his presence was comparable to how a child performing at a recital feels when he sees his parents sitting in the audience. From my observation, Mr. Maples had developed a unique and special relationship with his staff.

In addition to being visible and accessible, Mr. Maples was described as being approachable. One teacher said, "Whenever I've been in his office, he makes you feel like he's listening" (F-6, p. 21, l. 10) As another teacher stated,

I can go in there and I can tell him my ideas and he listens very carefully to them and sometimes he takes my ideas and sometimes he doesn't, you know. But, I feel comfortable going in there and talking with him and conversing with him on any type of things. (F-3, p. 8, l. 6)

Hands Off Leadership

Although faculty members noted Mr. Maples' visibility and presence, their responses indicated that they felt he trusted them and allowed them autonomy in their classrooms. Teachers commented that, "he makes the teachers feel like they are important

here – that he’s not running the show” (F-5, p. 17, l. 39) and “he doesn’t try to come in there and tell them how to do their job” (F-6, p. 23, l. 93). One teacher stated,

He trusts us. You have to earn his trust, but once you do, he really counts on you and you are pretty much independent...He’s as hands-on as you want him to be. That’s the way I feel about him. He will help you all you want or he will let you go all that you want.” (F-1, p. 1, l. 4f, l. 39).

Other teachers said,

When he comes in the classroom, it is kind of neat. He will stand and he will observe and listen. He’ll interact with the kids. But, then he also leaves you room to do what you need to do. It doesn’t feel like he is standing over your shoulders. (F-2, p. 5, l. 6)

If a parent had a problem with a teacher they would go talk to him and they would never come to us. Because by the time he got through with them, they were done, they were satisfied one way or another. And he always backed us. He always backed his teachers. Cause he trusts us. I mean, he’s the one who hired us, you know, so he trusts what we are doing. (F-4, p. 13, l. 38)

One teacher attributed the school’s success to Mr. Maples’ trust in his staff.

One of the things I like is that he lets us do our job. We don’t feel like we have to answer to him for everything. You know, he trusts us and he allows us to teach. He has many wonderful qualities, but, I think that is one of the things that make us great, that we just aren’t on a leash with him. He gives us some freedom. (F-8, p. 28, l. 6)

It seemed that Mr. Maples had found a balance between establishing his presence and providing the teachers with a sense of autonomy. Through trust, the autonomy he allowed lead to a greater sense of empowerment among the teachers. It was this demonstration of trust on Mr. Maples' part that facilitated a freedom for the teachers to own their instruction.

Golden Communication

The level of trust attributed to Mr. Maples and perceived by faculty as received from Mr. Maples was also related to Mr. Maples' communication skills. One teacher stated

I can go in there and I can tell him my ideas and he listens very carefully to them and sometimes he takes my ideas and sometimes he doesn't, you know. But I feel comfortable going in there and talking with him and conversing with him on any type of things...Listening is one of his major strengths. (F-3, p. 8, l. 6)

Another teacher stated, "Whenever I've been in his office, he makes you feel like he's listening, he understands fully and I think probably however he is with me in his office is how he is with anybody else in his office" (F-6, p. 21, l. 10). This teacher went on to describe at length Mr. Maples' use of communication skills as a conflict resolution tool.

As far as I know, whenever someone comes in to complain about someone else, or to share a problem, he doesn't join in. He takes that person's side and tries to understand it from their point of view, and he doesn't say you're wrong or doesn't [refuse to] listen to you but he helps you try to see things all the way around. But somehow when you leave there, he makes you feel like you were right or he understands exactly where you are coming from. And somewhere in the process

you may have been corrected, but you didn't even know that you were corrected. It's a phenomenon. But through that you know that when parents have trouble with you, when those parents go in, you know that they're going to have the same thing. They are going to present [a concern], he is not going to betray his teachers, bad mouth his teachers, join the parents so that he gets the parents on his side. What he's going to do is the same thing he did with you and that's see the whole picture, but somehow you know that when those parents leave, they are going to think that he knows them completely, that he understands completely. But the problem will have been solved without ever having to bring the two sides together. It's phenomenal. He is, I call him, the Golden Communicator. (F-6, p. 21, l. 12)

This participant brought out a very colorful yet poignant description of Mr. Maples. Her response depicted a sense of wonder, of awe, at Mr. Maples' communication style. Mr. Maples' communication style helped individuals develop an awareness of whatever the issue at hand may be. He was adept at leading people to see the big picture of an issue and how that picture impacted the school as a whole

Power Source

Mr. Maples appeared to be a source of power for the teachers (field notes).

Faculty participant F-7 stated,

He's such a well-respected and powerful force, but not at all in your face. If that makes sense. I'm sure that there are administrative terms for that kind of management. But, it's just been a great place for me to work, because you do feel

supported, you fell respected, I fell like the job I do is valued and he backs us up.
(p. 25, l. 15)

The power he provided stemmed from the level of support he offered the teachers. His support was in the form of personal support and professional support.

Personal support. Mr. Maples' personal support of teachers was described in terms of a caring attitude. One teacher interviewed described Mr. Maples' personal support when the teacher was enduring health problems. According to the teacher, Mr. Maples allowed her to work on what he called "flex time." Depending on the teacher's health status, it was understood that she could be part-time or full-time. During one year, when the teacher was undergoing a kidney transplant procedure, she was unable to work enough to maintain health insurance. Mr. Maples convinced the board of education to provide her the necessary insurance. As the teacher stated, "He just really was there for me and he just made it so much easier and better for me" (F-1, p. 1, l. 24). Another teacher commented, "He is positive and caring. You can tell it pains him to have to tell you bad news or give you a bad review. He will do it, but you know that it is not something that he enjoys at all" (F-1, p. 2, l. 24).

Mr. Maples' personal support of faculty members was also described in the manner in which he challenged teachers. One teacher described a time when Mr. Maples reassigned her to replace a teacher who had been removed mid-year. As the teacher described it:

It made me really nervous to do that, to just go into another classroom and pick up as the teacher in December. That really brought out the very best in me because I never realized before that I was capable. That I was really, really capable and I

could do it. He just said, “I know you can do it and I know you can pick up this problem and run with it and fix it.” It really made me have confidence in myself. It really changed my outlook as a teacher. I felt like then I could do anything. (F-1, p. 1, l. 30)

Professional support. Mr. Maples’ professional support of the teachers was described in terms of positive collaboration. One teacher interviewed described Mr. Maples as “being on the side of the students and the teachers” (F-10, p. 34, l. 8) When asked to note Mr. Maples’ most significant contribution to the academic success of the school, one teacher said

Just backing his teachers. True to believing in the teachers that have been here and passing on what we know and what we do to the younger teachers that come in to keep that going. He’ll listen to you when you have a concern about specific students that may hurt us on scores and this and that. He truly sits down and helps you find ways to deal with that individual student, so he changes from a general leader to a real specific leader for that one instance. He’s involved that deep with it and it’s nice. He totally backs what we push to the kids. (F-2, p. 6, l. 39)

Another teacher reported, “The things that I need him to back me up on, some things that are my ideas that I think we need to do, he has done that” (F-3, p. 8, l. 9).

Teachers also recognized that Mr. Maples’ professional support was often in the form of providing resources. “He has been very supportive in anything. He lets us do whatever we want to within reason...If we come up with an idea, he hardly ever told us no” (F-4, p. 12, l. 6). As one teacher put it, “He is open to giving help where he sees that help is needed. And just providing supplies and anything that a teacher needs. I honestly

don't think they are refused anything unless it is just extravagant" (F-10, p. 35, l. 38).

Another teacher added

Anything that I have asked for for the classroom, he's made sure that I get. For budget crunches, 5 or 6 years ago, when all schools were kind of cutting all of their programs, I went to him. Every year I would go to him and I would say, "You know, we go to a lot of [academic] contests and you let us do a lot of things and buy a lot of things. You let me know when that needs to stop." And every time he told me, he said, "When we cut the sports programs, we'll cut the [academic] programs, but that's not happening yet, and so do everything like you've always done." I have always appreciated that. (F-7, p. 26, l. 69)

One method that Mr. Maples used to insure that teachers had necessary resources was to protect the instructional time. As one teacher stated,

Mr. Maples is very supportive. He doesn't micromanage. He seems to have the philosophy that we need to be in the classroom teaching kids and doing it to the best of our ability...It's just been a great place for me to work, because you do feel supported, you feel respected, I feel like the job I do is valued and he backs us up. (F-7, p. 25, l. 2)

Another teacher added,

As far as in the classroom and stuff like that, he's been pretty much hands off and let us do what we want to do. If any instances have arisen where there's a problem with students and parents and teachers, he's actually handled them a few times on his own to where the student and the parents really never get to the teachers. So, the teachers get to teach. (F-9, p. 31, l. 3)

One teacher described Mr. Maples' philosophy as "to hire the best teachers that you can have and let them teach and don't weigh them down with a lot of stuff. Just let them teach" (F-11, p. 36, l. 23). Another teacher said

He keeps the paper work to a minimum for us. I know other schools and they have meetings all the time on this committee and that committee – just tons of paper work to do, and we don't. They don't pull us out of classes for things...we are in the classroom all the time. That's one thing that he has always said is important, that we are in the classroom and we are everyday. (F-1, p. 3, l. 71)

Mr. Maples' level of professional support also supported the feeling of autonomy and trust that was discussed earlier. It was clear to me that there was an atmosphere of mutual respect and professionalism directly related to how Mr. Maples made the staff feel about themselves and their role.

High Expectations

A very prevalent theme that emerged from the interview responses was that of expectations. Participants commented that Mr. Maples maintained very high expectations. One participant stated, "He's always made it really clear that he wants me here and he relies on me to work for him and to produce results" (F-1, p. 1, l. 25).

Another described Mr. Maples as "very strict with high expectations. He is not afraid to tell the kids what's wrong, he's not afraid to talk to their parents" (F-4, p. 12, l. 34). Still another participant commented, "He runs a tight ship as far as staff and students. He expects a lot" (F-12, p. 40, l. 5). One teacher stated that Mr. Maples' greatest strength was his high expectations. This teacher, participant F-7, colorfully described the

expectations as addressing much more than achievement test scores. The response indicated that the expectations were long reaching.

His greatest strength I think is his high expectations. High expectations for the teachers that he hires, high expectations of the students' behavior. He expects us to do our best on the MAP scores but, more than that, he expects us to do our best teaching kids. Our MAP scores are wonderful. They have been really since MAP started. But, never once has there been a MAP testing rally. Never once has there been a "we've got to do good on this." It has always been, we teach kids so that they can succeed in life, and that's what you do...His focus is, we are here to teach kids. We are here to provide a safe environment where they can be better, where they can grow up and do what they need to do in life. This MAP stuff will come and it will go. But the kids that we send through here, that's what we're here for. (F-7, p. 25, l. 34)

Participant F-7's response indicates the focus of the expectations of Mr. Maples. As the leader, his expectations were not regarding performance on the MAP test. Instead, Mr. Maples clearly articulated his expectations in regard to how the teachers approached their responsibility to the students.

Teachers interviewed did not feel that they were under pressure to perform on the MAP. They were expected, however, to focus on the students and the students' success. Three teachers commented about the extent to which Mr. Maples emphasized performance on the MAP. Participant F-2 stated, "That (emphasis on test performance) does not happen here, because from day one it's just in the curriculum. It's in what we teach" (p. 6, l. 67). Another teacher said, "He just wants every teacher to do their best job

in teaching kids and then if we could do our best job...then the scores are going to be okay” (F-3, p. 10, l. 79). Participant F-6 summed it up by saying,

Well, we talk about it a lot. And here’s what we talk about. Do what you do because nobody does it better than you. Teach the best you can, we’ve been at the top for a long time. We know we have no place to go but down. Don’t worry about it. Teach. Do your job to reach those kids. (p. 24, l. 122)

Mr. Maples’ expectations of his teachers created a shared vision among them. They were there to teach kids.

Hiring the Best

Mr. Maples’ expectations were evident in his personnel selection. He was recognized as being a strong personnel manager, particularly when it came to hiring faculty and staff. As one participant stated, “He knows how to pick good people. He puts us where we need to be and over the years he has picked people for the job” (F-4, p. 13, l. 72). Another teacher said, “He is very involved in the hiring portion. He’s always said, ‘You know, not just anyone can work at [Red Oaks]... He gets good people that he trusts’” (F-6, p. 23, l. 94). As one participant put it, “He seems to hire people that he believes to be capable...he has such high hiring standards that it’s not a problem” (F-7, p. 25, l. 3). Another said the school’s academic success “goes back to the type of teachers that he’s hired” (F-8, p. 29, l. 45). “He has worked diligently in my opinion with the board to create the best faculty that he could pick to recommend to the board,” reported one participant (F-11, p. 36, l. 6). This person went on to say, “He’s gone out to seek the very best teachers he can” (F-11, p. 37, l. 56).

Mr. Maples' emphasis on hiring quality educators illustrated his commitment to the school and to the existing staff. The quality of staff hires created a sense of pride among all faculty and staff. In casual conversation with staff, I noted (field notes) that new teachers were warmly welcomed to the school. Because everyone knew about Mr. Maples' high expectations, new hires were not placed in a position where they were made to feel they needed to prove themselves to others. If Mr. Maples selected them, that was good enough!

Students First

Three faculty participants made reference to Mr. Maples' philosophy of putting students first. One teacher stated

His focus is, we are here to teach kids. We are here to provide a safe environment where they can be better, where they can grow up and do what they need to do in life. And this MAP stuff will come and it will go. But the kids that we send through here, that's what we are here for. (F-7, p. 26, l. 43)

Another teacher described Mr. Maples' emphasis on making students a priority in terms of the leader's vision.

I think he is always wanting everybody to feel comfortable when they come to school to feel comfortable here and it's going to be a learning situation. I think that is one of his visions, that every kid should have a chance and that we should be helping those kids, whether they are the troublemakers or not. I think that is the vision that he has, that every kid, when they leave here, they will have been educated to the best ability that all the teachers could give him and he should be

able to go on to the high school level and not feel uncomfortable and that we've done our job here. (F-3, p. 9, l. 67)

After reviewing these participants' responses, it was clear that Mr. Maples was perceived as being more concerned with preserving and encouraging posterity than in being overly concerned with performance on the "MAP stuff." He recognized the importance of investing in the eternal, rather than on issues that may be subject to the winds of change, like state testing procedures.

A third teacher participant talked about Mr. Maples' emphasis on making student needs a priority as being a significant aspect of the school's vision. When asked about a school vision statement, this teacher stated,

Well, there is one written somewhere, but I don't know what it is. [Our vision] is to see our kids succeed in life. If they make C's here, that's fine because we try to get every kid to reach his potential... We don't let the kids think that they are failures. We try to make them all think that they are successful and we tell them all that there is something out there for them and to do the best they can with whatever they've got... The vision is to have kids come back and say, "Wow. Thank you." And we have kids that do that. (F-4, p. 14, l. 86).

Mr. Maples encouraged a "no failure" message at the school. Kids were encouraged to succeed and success was recognized as relative for each individual student.

As mentioned in the description of the site, the students appeared cordial, respectful and at ease in the school. Over the four day observation period, no student conflicts were observed during passing time or in the classrooms. Mr. Maples' focus on placing students first seemed to create a caring, trusting atmosphere that allowed students

the freedom to feel at ease and accepted. Also previously mentioned was the absence of honor rolls (field notes). The practice of not posting honor rolls further underscored Mr. Maples' desire to respect students and put their needs first. Mr. Maples believed that students who were struggling did not need to be made to feel worse. He also believed that students who were academically successful did not need further accolades.

Values Individuals

Seven faculty participants noted the value that Mr. Maples placed on individuals. His level of caring and interest in people and his openness to express that created a positive atmosphere where staff felt valued and respected. A perception of equity among all members of staff was also noted. It was clear to me that the teachers felt that Mr. Maples' leadership was foundational to this perception. As one teacher stated,

He is positive and caring. He doesn't like to hurt people's feelings. He really doesn't. You can tell that it really pains him to have to tell you bad news or give you a bad review or something. He will do it, but you know that it is not something that he enjoys at all. (F-1, p. 2, l. 54)

Another teacher said,

I think he's got an atmosphere that we are all worth a million bucks, and that we all work well together. There is no teacher in here that is better than the other or seems to have more favor than the other. (F-3, p. 9, l. 43)

One teacher addressed the perceived equity in the school by saying, "...the janitors, and bus drivers, we are all in this together...everybody is just as important. I always thought that was kind of neat" (F-3, p. 10, l. 103). Another teacher added,

He's (Mr. Maples) just always been a good role model for us. I'm talking about the bus drivers, the cooks, the custodians, everybody, they don't feel like they're on the totem pole the low man or the high man. No, everyone is equal here. (F-5, p. 17, l. 50)

Parent Interviews

In structured interview sessions, eleven parents of students at Red Oaks Elementary School were asked the following questions:

1. How would you describe your child's principal's leadership style/characteristics?
2. How would your child describe the principal of his/her school?
3. What do you feel are your child's principal's greatest strengths?
4. What do you feel are your child's principal's greatest weaknesses?
5. What do you feel is your child's principal's most significant contribution to the academic success of the this school in the areas of communication arts and mathematics?
6. What would the vision statement for this school be?

Throughout the interview process, I noted that the parents seemed eager to participate in the interview. Some parent participants appeared concerned that they wouldn't have the "right answers." I assured them that there were no right or wrong answers and that the purpose of the questions was to ascertain each participants' perception of the leadership in the school. Each participant, without exception, indicated a deep respect for Mr. Maples and his leadership. An analysis of the parent responses revealed prevalent themes,

some similar to the themes emergent from the teacher interviews. The themes described indicate how the parents interviewed perceived Mr. Maples' leadership.

Presence

Parents commented that one of Mr. Maples' strengths was his visibility in the school and the community. As one parent stated, "He's definitely part of the community. He's not just out there. He's around" (P-2, p. 4, l. 4). Another parent described Mr. Maples' greatest strength as

the way he is with the students. He comes to all the events of the school pretty much. I see him everywhere. I always see him out in front of the school. He just acts like he is very concerned about our children and he cares for them. (P-7, p. 18, l. 10)

Another parent said, "We've been here seven years with three children. He has always been to every event we've had, even extracurricular events. It's like we couldn't go anywhere without seeing Mr. Maples" (P-8, p. 20, l. 7). Parent participants also indicated that their children see Mr. Maples as very visible. One parent described their child's perception of Mr. Maples as, "He's in the hallways, he talks to the kids, he knows the kids" (P. 8, p. 20, l. 21). A parent participant indicated that Mr. Maples' visibility and accessibility contributed to their child's trust in Mr. Maples. She stated

I think they (children) think he is very nice. But, once again, they know his position in the school and I think there's a respect level because basically, I mean he is always around the kids. I've always seen him. They all know his name. But they know that if you get sent to his office, he means business. If he tells you something, then that's what he means and I think that is a really good relationship

to have with them. He can't be their buddy, but he can be there for them. [They] know that he's fair. (P-11, p. 27, l. 10)

This parent indicated an understanding the Mr. Maples' presence transcended simple visibility. He communicated a deeper message to the students. His presence clearly stated that he cared for each student and could be trusted to be consistent and fair.

Parents also perceived Mr. Maples as accessible and approachable. In describing Mr. Maples' leadership characteristics, one parent said,

I've had children in school in [two other states]. Trying to convey ideas to them is a little bit harder than going to Mr. Maples. He's very personable and you can actually go up and have ideas and not everything is going to get used, but he definitely listens. He is very approachable. It's easy to suggest things. He definitely has a reason, yes or no, if he denies us something. But, I think he really has strong beliefs in the community and with this school and where he wants it to go. He is definitely connected to the school. (P-6, p. 15, l. 14)

As evidenced by these transcript excerpts, several parent participants placed a great deal of importance on the visibility of the administrator. The parents who commented about Mr. Maples' visibility seemed to correlate his visibility with the level of trust they felt toward his leadership. His presence was also seen as an indication of his level of caring for the students. In observing the parent respondents, I noted an attitude of deep respect for Mr. Maples. There was almost a feeling of awe noted as the parents talked about his presence at the school (field notes).

Caring

Three of the parent participants also perceived Mr. Maples as demonstrating a level of caring that impacted the school. When asked to describe Mr. Maples' leadership, one parent said, "He cares for each student. He knows each students name" (P-1, p. 1, l. 3). This same parent said that their child would also describe Mr. Maples as caring. The parent stated, "They (the students) know he cares because if a child is in need of something materialistically he will provide it. He will bend over backwards for the students and I think the kids see that" (P-1, p. 1, l. 13). One parent cited that caring was one of Mr. Maples' most significant contribution to the academic success of the school. She stated, "I really feel like he cares for the kids and they know it. And he cares for the teachers and he listens to those teachers and they know it" (P-10, p. 24, l. 32). Another parent said,

He is very caring. He wants to see these children that come through Red Oaks do the very best they possibly can, offer them opportunities through school that they may not be able to get through their home...I have two children here now and one of them used to be afraid of him just because he kept law and order. And he didn't do it with a harsh hand or anything, but they knew that when Mr. Maples showed up it was definitely time to do whatever was suppose to be happening at the moment. He's not afraid of him anymore, by the way. He found out that he was a very kind man with a very warm heart. (P-4, p. 11, l. 2)

Fairness

I identified fairness as a recurring theme in three parent responses describing Mr. Maples' leadership. One parent interviewed said, "He takes an interest in each child. He's

very fair handed” (P-3, p. 9, l. 6). This same parent indicated that their child would also describe Mr. Maples as fair. Another parent described Mr. Maples’ fairness in these words:

I’ve dealt with Mr. Maples with my child through the school setting and P.T.O. and to me he has been extremely fair and he has allowed a lot of growth in the school without making a huge presence known. He’s not that kind of administrator that would come in with the iron fist. He doesn’t oversee everything that is going on. He has just been extremely fair. (P-6, p. 15, l. 3)

This same parent also indicated that her children would describe Mr. Maples as fair (P-6, p. 15, l. 24). Parent participant P-11 also said that her child would describe Mr. Maples as fair (p. 29, l. 16). While only three parent participants addressed the issue of fairness, it was clear to me that Mr. Maples’ fairness was perceived as a significant strength. His fairness or consistency seemed to be a factor in establishing a level of trust among parents.

High Expectations

Parent participants described Mr. Maples’ in terms of his expectations – both of faculty and of students. According to the parent participants, Mr. Maples’ maintained high expectations in the school. As one parent said, “I think he has high expectations of the teachers and of the students” (P-2, p. 4, l. 26). Another commented that “He is very stern. The kids really respect him. Yes, he is very stern in his discipline but is very stern in what is to be expected of the students” (P-1, p. 1, l. 4). Another parent said that one of Mr. Maples’ significant contributions to the academic success of the school was

...making sure that he had qualified teachers in the classroom and not being afraid to have them step up to do their part or they have to go. And I think that anyone who comes to work for [Mr. Maples] would know his expectations of them would be very high. (P-4, p. 11, l. 24)

Hiring the Best

Mr. Maples' perceived strength in personnel management was also noted as a leadership strength by some parent participants. When asked to identify Mr. Maples' most significant contribution to the school's success, one parent noted, "Probably hiring the right teachers...He knows what would make a good teacher...we just have excellent teachers" (P-1, p. 2, l. 50). Another parent described his most significant contribution to the school's success as "making sure that he had qualified teachers in the classroom. Not being afraid to have them step up to do their part or they have to go" (P-4, p. 11, l. 24).

In addition to hiring quality faculty, parents described Mr. Maples' personnel management in terms of how he responded to current faculty. Parents noted that Mr. Maples provided adequate resources to teachers. One stated that Mr. Maples' most significant contribution to the academic success of the school was "having resources available for those teachers" (P-3, p. 9, l. 27). Another said that he "supplied the teachers with what they need. He's always said to me that teachers only have to ask" (P-5, p. 13, l. 21). Still another said,

He has allowed the teachers, if they need something, there is a budget there for them. He has encouraged them to do the things that they need to do to teach these students...I know that from being in the PTO. I think that he must have a really

good rapport with the teachers here. They really respect him and I just have never heard anything negative about Mr. Maples. (P-6, p. 16, l. 48)

One parent participant stated that “leadership comes from the top, definitely. I think he (Mr. Maples) provides them with the environment and the resources that they need to do their job. And gives some the leeway to do it” (P-11, p. 28, l. 67).

Another parent described Mr. Maples as a leader who provides autonomy to his faculty. The parent stated

He cares for the teachers and he listens to those teachers and they know it. He gives the teachers the ability to teach. He lets them have control of their classrooms...and everybody knows what the rules are from the beginning so they can go in and they can teach their classroom and not have the fear of not knowing what’s going on from day to day. And it gives them the ability to go in and actually teach what they need to teach - math or science, English, or whatever it is - without having to look over their shoulder to see if they are going to get in trouble or reprimanded or whatever. We know that if our child has a problem in there whether it is discipline or whatever, it is nipped. I mean it’s nipped in the bud right then. It doesn’t ever get to the point that it is a big issue because it’s taken care of right at the beginning and then the learning process never stops...the little things that sometimes build up that distract in the classroom, they are taken care of right then. He gives the teachers the room to take care of those things...the teachers are able to take care of that and then he stands behind them and they know that he stands behind them. (P-10, p. 24, l. 32)

From the parent responses, it was clear that they recognized Mr. Maples' support for and positive, professional relationship with the faculty and staff. They also recognized the impact that support had on the instructional process. As was stated, "...the learning process never stops." Those parents responding were able to recognize a connection between Mr. Maples' rapport with staff and their perception of his effective leadership of the school.

Values Individuals

Parents also recognized, as did the faculty participants, that Mr. Maples valued each individual in the district. One parent summed up this perception by stating, "He loves the teachers. He loves the students" (P-1, p. 1, l. 21). Another parent described Mr. Maples' greatest strength as, "...knowing all the kids. He knows their families, grandmas, grandpas, aunts, uncles" (P-3, p. 9, l. 14). The most powerful statement from a parent describing the value that Mr. Maples placed on each individual came from parent participant 4. This parent said, "I love the fact that he never gives up on us. It's like you hit a rock wall and we find another way to go around it. I feel like that's what he's done for our school" (p. 12, l. 55).

Description of Primary Leadership Roles

The overarching purpose of this study was to identify leadership characteristics and leadership styles evident in a high-poverty high-performing school. After a review of the prevalent themes evident in the faculty and parent interviews, I identified three primary leadership roles that describe the building leader's leadership style and characteristics. These leadership roles are human resource director, academic leader, and

culture facilitator. The leadership roles will be discussed in the following section and will be supported by the building leader's comments, documents, and field notes.

Human Resource Director

Commonly occurring themes in interview responses underscored the impact that Mr. Maples had on the human resource aspect of the school. Mr. Maples indicated that his biggest consideration was the hiring of the "best teachers" (field notes). According to Mr. Maples, he has hired many retired teachers on a part-time basis because they are "experienced and effective." As I shadowed Mr. Maples, comments by Mr. Maples such as "the best thing I can put in a classroom is a good teacher" were recorded in field notes. Mr. Maples further stated that he is very up front with new hires. Before the hiring is finalized, Mr. Maples reported that he warns new hires that his level of expectations is very high and that, because of those expectations, he may not be easy to work for.

Many of the faculty and staff in place at Red Oaks Elementary School have been there for many years. As previously mentioned, the head cook in the cafeteria has been working for the school for 32 years – starting out as a dishwasher. Mr. Maples indicated that it was important to him to select quality individuals, both certified and non-certified, and to make the working environment such that no one wanted to leave.

As described in field notes, each teacher interviewed indicated a high level of job satisfaction. Each teacher demonstrated a very positive perspective of the school and the leadership and also communicated a deep respect for Mr. Maples.

A review of the interview transcripts, field notes and collected documents provided a multi-leveled description of Mr. Maples' human resource impact. That impact included his high expectations of the staff, the level of autonomy granted staff members

(described as “hands off leadership”), and his support of staff members (described as “power source”).

High Expectations

Both parents and teachers interviewed stated that Mr. Maples was very strong in hiring quality staff. His high expectations ensured the selection of better educators and staff members. A teacher stated, “He knows how to pick good people and he puts us where we need to be. Over the years, he has picked people for the job” (F-4, p. 13, l. 72).

One parent said that Mr. Maples’ most significant contribution to the school was

making sure that he had qualified teachers in the classroom and not being afraid to have them step up to do their part or they have to go. And I think that everyone who comes to work for [Mr. Maples] would know his expectations of them would be very high.” (P-4, p. 11, line 24)

Mr. Maples stated that his most significant contribution to the academic success of Red Oaks was “basically just to hire the best teachers and hiring people who have an interest in those areas and then try to give them all the tools that we possible can to work with” (L-1, p. 29). As stated earlier, Mr. Maples makes his expectations very clear to new hires.

Mr. Maples said that when he hires new staff, he informs them, “I’m not easy to work for. I have high expectations. I don’t plan on hovering over you, watching. I expect you to go the extra, to do a great job” (field notes). Mr. Maples further stated that he hoped his teachers would describe him as someone who “has high expectations for the kids and high expectations for them [teachers]” (L-1, p. 1, l. 24). In spite of what appeared to be a clear understanding of his expectations, Mr. Maples also expressed concern over the fact that many of his expectations weren’t written down somewhere. As he stated,

The real problem with us, and one of the other teachers was talking to me about it the other day, is that we have so many unwritten rules here and unwritten expectations. And when we get a new teacher, we have to remind ourselves that we need to tell them that it's this, this, and this. Because it is one of those things that's just occurred over time. Some of them we get written down and some of them we don't. But everyone pretty well understands and knows that and follows those expectations. (L-1, p. 2, l. 54)

Although Mr. Maples recognized that his expectations may not be consistently or formally articulated, it was clear that a culture built on those expectations had been established. Interview responses and observations clearly indicated that Mr. Maples' expectations were understood. Teachers interviewed stated that they knew that Mr. Maples expected them to "produce results."

A review of the teacher handbook and code of ethics further underscored Mr. Maples' emphasis on setting high expectations. Each staff member is provided a teacher policy manual as well as a "teachers code of ethics" document. The code of ethics lists ten items that provide a guide detailing general expectations. The teacher policy manual lists fifty items that more specifically describe the expectations of Mr. Maples. Some of the items listed describe the times a teacher must report to his/her classroom and how the teacher must prepare lesson plans and that the lesson plans are subject to administrator review. The policy manual also instructs the teachers regarding the strict supervision of their students and the responsibility each teacher has regarding the supervision of all students "immediately upon arrival at school, continuing until the students board the bus to return to their home." According to the manual, the teachers must "devote themselves

exclusively during school hours to the duties of their respective positions” and must “conduct themselves in a proper professional manner at all times, both in and out of school.” Each teacher must also be available to meet with the board of education each year at the board’s request.

As noted in field notes, there was a mutual trust between Mr. Maples and his staff. His rigorous standards in regard to hiring led to his staff trusting in his faculty selections. This trust nurtured camaraderie among all staff. Mr. Maples’ enforcement of the high expectations allowed him to hold a high degree of trust for his faculty. He empowered the teachers to act on his expectations which provided the teachers autonomy and independence in the classroom.

Hands Off Leadership

According to participants, Mr. Maples provided a significant amount of autonomy and independence for the teachers. As one teacher stated, “He trusts us. You have to earn his trust, but once you do, he really counts on you and you are pretty much independent.” (F-1, p. 1, line 4) One parent interviewed stated,

He cares for the teachers and he listens to those teachers and they know it. He gives the teachers the ability to teach. He lets them have control of their classrooms. Everybody knows what the rules are from the beginning so they can go in and they can teach their classroom and not have the fear of not knowing what’s going on from day to day. And it gives them the ability to go in and actually teach what they need to teach – math or science – without having to look over their shoulder to see if they are going to get in trouble or reprimanded or whatever. (P-10, p. 24, line 33)

For a parent to glean this perspective, it seemed apparent that the teachers' autonomy and independence was very obvious. It was also valued as a major strength of the school. Mr. Maples' perceived granting of autonomy still maintained a measure of accountability, strengthened by the level of trust held by faculty and staff.

When he comes in the classroom, it is kind of neat, he will stand and he will observe and listen, he'll interact with the kids. But, then he also leaves you room to do what you need to do. It doesn't feel like he is standing over your shoulders. From the first day I was here 17 years ago, that didn't happen to me. There was never that persona that he was trying to see if you were bringing something across correctly. It was just making sure the interaction with the kids was on a good level and that was it. (F-2, p. 5, line 6)

This teacher obviously respected Mr. Maples' interaction with the students. The teacher did not feel threatened by the administrator's presence. Rather, Mr. Maples' presence was welcomed and appreciated. The fact that this teacher has been in the district for seventeen years underscores Mr. Maples' consistency in allowing the teacher autonomy. Inherent in this teacher's response is an appreciation for Mr. Maples' interactions. There is also an implied level of trust that Mr. Maples' is sincere and consistent.

Mr. Maples also commented that he believed in providing a sense of autonomy for his teachers. In the structured interview, he said,

I basically feel like I have to be an example for all my teachers and staff and to be open with them and honest and...try to motivate them as much as I possibly can. They are all here for the best interest of the kids to take them and go as far as we can go with them. That's basically always been my philosophy about it. I see

myself as a coach, and I also like to try to let them make as many decisions as they possibly can and I try to get them to buy into ideas and put out ideas and then I like to let them...take ownership of it. Most of these teachers really have the same goals as I have. I try to use as much of a hands off policy as possible but at the same time I also give them as much guidance as I feel they need. (L-1, p.1, l. 3)

The connection between Mr. Maples' "hands-off policy" and the expectations he had established seemed clear. His statement "Most of these teachers really have the same goals as I have" was evidence that his expectations directed his personnel selection which lead to a degree of teacher autonomy based on trust. Mr. Maples also could be perceived as a servant leader, putting the needs of his staff and students at the forefront of his actions.

The degree of autonomy enjoyed by the teachers was further demonstrated in the student handbook. Rather than including a description of one general discipline policy and procedure for the school, Mr. Maples allowed each teacher to describe in detail the discipline policy that they have implemented in their individual classroom. Page thirty-two of the handbook begins a description of twenty unique discipline plans, including responsibilities of students and consequences.

Power Source

Staff and parents perceived Mr. Maples as being emotionally and professionally supportive of teachers and students. One teacher described a situation in which she was placed in a classroom mid-year to replace another teacher. As she stated,

It made me really nervous to do that, to just go into another classroom and pick up as the teacher in December. That really brought out the very best in me because I never realized before that I was capable. That I was really, really capable and I could do it. He (Mr. Maples) just said, “I know you can do it and I know you can pick up this problem and run with it and fix it.” It really made me have confidence in myself. It really changed my outlook as a teacher. I felt like I could do anything. (F-1, p. 1, l. 30)

As this teacher spoke, it was clear that her respect for Mr. Maples was high. She expressed a sincere appreciation for his support. Although she stated that his influence had changed her “outlook as a teacher,” I surmised that Mr. Maples’ influence had a much broader impact on the individual. Mr. Maples seemed to reach out to this teacher on a much deeper level than her performance in the classroom. His influence seemed to make a lasting impact that would affect her beyond her role as a teacher.

Teachers and parents also made reference to Mr. Maples’ dedication to providing resources as an indication of his support. One parent commented, “He has allowed the teachers, if they need something, there is a budget for them. He has encouraged them to do the things that they need to do to teach these students” (P-6, p. 16, l. 48). One faculty member had expressed concerns to Mr. Maples regarding her instructional program and budget cuts. The teacher recalled Mr. Maples saying,

When we cut the sports program, we’ll cut the (subject matter) programs, but that’s not happening yet. So do everything like you’ve always done. When we make across the board cuts, I’ll let you know. But, you just keep your program.

You're doing a great job and you just keep doing what you're doing. (F-7, p. 26, l. 74)

This teacher reflected her appreciation for the academic support Mr. Maples provided. Her comment reflected an admiration and a collegiality with her administrator based on shared goals and priorities. I also noted that this teacher seemed to feel valued and appreciated. Mr. Maples' response to her question about potential budget cuts surpassed a fiscal response. He showed an appreciation for her work and her influence in the classroom.

Mr. Maples underscored the importance of providing support to faculty and staff. Mr. Maples was noted as being very involved in the teachers' interest in areas other than the classroom. He often offered workshops explaining the retirement system, provided information regarding investments, and advocated to the board on their behalf regarding salary (field notes). In the structured interview, he commented,

I do everything I can to help them in any way that I can. I try to make it as professional an organization as I can. And financially, I do everything I can to see that they make as high a salary as they possibly can, have all the benefits they possibly can. I also talk to them [about] investing money and show them different ways that they can do things. I talk to them about their retirement. I have workshops where I go over all the retirement system and try to make them understand everything that they can do over the years and how it affects them and everything like that. (L-1, p. 1, l. 15)

Mr. Maples further stated that he tries "to give them all the tools that we possibly can to work with" (L-1, p. 1, l. 30). He summed up his view of support by saying

I try to do everything that I can to ensure that we can do everything we can to have those good teachers and have the tools to work with. To provide supplemental teachers if we need it for students who are struggling and students who need extra help. So basically, that's been my goal. (L-1, p. 1, l. 34)

In our conversation, Mr. Maples emphasized why he felt it was important to encourage and support the staff. He commented, "Why would you want to waste your life if you don't enjoy your work? You give a day of your life everytime you come in" (field notes). Mr. Maples also commented that he allows teachers to leave the building during their planning time. According to Mr. Maples, some run errands and some go for walks. He encourages that because he wants to ensure the quality of their work experience. Mr. Maples viewed his staff as more than just teachers. He saw them as individuals, human beings, who were given the task of educating children. He apparently valued the needs of the individual along with the needs of the classroom.

Academic Leader

Mr. Maples' strengths as an academic leader were evidenced in his expectations of the students. In addition, Mr. Maples also was perceived to vigorously protect instructional time.

High Expectations

Mr. Maples' perceived strength as an instructional leader seemed to correspond with the high expectations he held for his students. One parent commented,

You always know where you stand with Mr. Maples. He's not wishy washy. When he says something, you know that he means it...That's the way it is, and they (students) all know that. That's the way it starts out. They all know when

they start school...When you start school, you have a handbook and you know the rules and you know Mr. Maples' rules and Mr. Maples tells you at the beginning of the school year, "these are my rules and this is what they are, they don't change, and they're not different for some. They're that way for everyone and that's the way they are." He's very strict but very fair with them. (P-10, p. 24, l. 2)

Another parent, in describing how their child feels about Mr. Maples, said,

I think they think he is very nice. But, once again they know his position in the school and I think there's a respect level because if basically, I mean he is always around the kids. I've always seen him. They all know his name. But they know that if you get sent to his office, he means business. If he tells you something then that's what he means and I think that is a really good relationship to have with them. He can't be their buddy and he can't be this but he can also be there for them and know that he's fair. (P-11, p. 27, l. 10)

Both of these parent responses conveyed a trust in Mr. Maples' sincerity and consistency. Their words underscore the way Mr. Maples takes school discipline issues seriously while at the same time demonstrating a fairness and openness to the students. Both of these parents connected these traits with Mr. Maples' influence on the academic success of the school. Although no parent participants specifically referred to Mr. Maples' "instructional leadership," I noted that there was a perception of the impact of his expectations and enforcement of those expectations on students' academic performance.

Mr. Maples, in response to being asked how he hoped his teachers would describe him, stated, "I hope that my teachers would describe me as someone who has high expectations for the kids and high expectations for them" (L-1, p. 1, l. 24). Mr. Maples'

expectations for students are also very evident in the student handbook. The handbook includes a student creed that says

I am aware of the many opportunities existing for me in school. As a student, I desire to avail myself of these opportunities and at the same time help continue and add to the traditions and ideals of the school. I will keep uppermost in my mind this thought – “Is what I am about to say or do something that every student could say or do without bringing injury to my school?” (student handbook, p. 3)

The introduction to the handbook includes the statement, “there must be an ever-increasing sense of individual responsibility, strong scholarship, good sportsmanship and worthy citizenship.

Field notes from the site underscored the impact of the high expectations. While visiting the site, I noted that generally the students were well behaved and respectful. During passing time between classes, students moved relatively quietly. During one classroom observation, it was noted that all the students were in their seats at the tardy bell, attending to the teacher. Every student had their textbook out and appeared ready to start class. As the teacher continued the lesson and the activity, there were many positive student responses. At one point during this observation, a student walked in to the class late. The student moved quietly to her assigned seat and there was no evident classroom disruption.

Protection of Instructional Time

Several of the teachers interviewed commented about Mr. Maples’ protection of instructional time. The teachers perceived that maintaining effective instructional time was a priority. Regarding paperwork, one teacher stated

He keeps those away from you. He handles them. Sometimes you may not hear of something that had to do with you, but if he feels that it pulls away from your time teaching or your teaching the kids, he's not going to bother you with it. He'll keep it away from you until the point, that, you know, that he can't answer all those questions himself and then he'll come to you. But, he never bothers us with any minor petty things. He lets us teach. (F-2, p. 5, l. 18)

Another teacher stated,

He keeps the paperwork to a minimum for us. I know other schools and they have meetings all the time on this committee and that committee; just tons of paper work to do and we don't...They don't pull us out of classes for things. [At other schools] they pull you out for a curriculum meeting or they pull you out for this and that. We are in the classroom all the time. And that's one thing that he has always said is important, that we are in the classroom and we are, everyday. (F-1, p. 3, l. 71)

Culture Facilitator

Faculty members and parents respected Mr. Maples for his role in establishing and protecting a school culture that reflected high standards. He also maintained a culture where students felt safe to be themselves and safe to strive for success. As faculty participant F-2 stated,

I know we focus on how well the kids score and stuff like that, but not to the point that a lot of people think. We want these kids to be able to come out of here and be good citizens and be able to take daily things that are thrown at them and

handle them with ease...giving them room to handle it with some supervision standing there, but leaving them alone. (p. 6, l. 48)

The opening pages of the student handbook list the school colors, the team name (mascot) and the student creed. The student behavior I observed reflected the words of the student creed:

I am aware of the many opportunities existing for me in school. As a student, I desire to avail myself of these opportunities and at the same time help continue and add to the traditions and ideals of the school. I will keep uppermost in my mind this thought – “Is what I am about to say or do something that every student could say or do without bringing injury to my school?”

The perception of a positive school culture and Mr. Maples’ role in maintaining that culture was evident in parent responses in the structured interview. One parent stated, I’m very passionate about this school now. Especially coming from other schools where there just wasn’t the same feeling behind it. It was all about test scores and all about pushing these kids to do something. Here they’ve somehow managed to get the kids to lean this stuff without being such a drag. So, I really like it. I don’t know how they do it, but its wonderful! (P-6, p. 17, l. 84)

Another parent said,

What I really want to stress today is this school is a family and I think he (Mr. Maples) has made it that way. Down to the custodians, they are an important part of this school. The cooks have been here forever. It’s literally a family and I think he has been the biggest part of that. (P-8, p. 21, l. 44)

Mr. Maples facilitated a culture where everyone felt valued. The teachers demonstrated a great deal of pride in their role. I also noted that the school cook recognized the value of her contribution to the overall success of the school (field notes). Parents also expressed pride in the culture of the school. As one parent said,

I have three kids here and they haven't had any immediate run ins with him. They have never been sent to the principal's office or anything. But, what they do know of him is he is just very fair. He knows them by name, which is, I think, a wonderful thing. With all the students coming in and out of the school that he takes the time to know them by name. He just has a very easy presence. I don't think they are afraid of him or anything like that. (P-6, p. 15, l. 23)

This parent went on to say that Mr. Maples is perceived as being very committed to the school. According to this parent, "He has the school's best interest at heart. He's looking out for all aspects of it – the parents, the students, and everything" (P-6, p. 15, l. 30).

Faculty members also described Mr. Maples' impact on the positive school culture. Faculty members used terms such as accessible, caring, involved, and sincere to describe his influence on the culture. One teacher described his impact by saying,

I think he is always wanting everybody to feel comfortable when they come to school, to feel comfortable here and it's going to be a learning situation. I think that is one of his visions that every kid should have a chance and that we should be helping those kids, whether they are the troublemakers or not. I think that is the vision that he has, that every kid, when they leave here, they will have been educated to the best ability that all the teachers could give them. (F-3, p. 9, l. 67)

Another teacher stated,

His focus is, we are here to teach kids. We are here to provide a safe environment where they can be better, where they can grow up and do what they need to do in life. And this MAP stuff will come and it will go. But the kids that we send through here, that's what we are here for. (F-7, p. 26, l. 43)

As a visitor in the school, I noted that there was a positive atmosphere in the building. Each teacher and parent interviewed struggled with a response when asked to describe a weakness of Mr. Maples.

Chapter Summary

Faculty and parents of students were interviewed to determine their perspective of the leadership at Red Oaks Elementary School, a high-poverty high-performing school in south central Missouri. Structured interview responses were evaluated to identify prevalent themes describing the leadership at the school.

After a thorough review of the transcripts from the faculty interviews, several themes emerged as descriptive of the teachers' perception of the leadership in their school. The emergent themes were presence, hands off leadership, golden communication, power source (through both personal and professional support), high expectations, hiring the best, students first and values individuals.

A thorough review of the transcripts from the parents interviews revealed additional themes which described the parents perception of the leadership at their children's school. The emergent themes from the parents' perspective were presence, caring, fairness, high expectations, hiring the best and values individuals.

From those prevalent themes, considered with accompanying documents, building leader comments and field notes, three primary leadership role descriptions emerged. The leadership roles described the leadership characteristics of the building leader. The leadership roles identified were human resource director, academic leader, and culture facilitator.

In the following chapter, the leadership roles will be considered in relation to current literature. In addition, implications for further study will be discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine and to identify the characteristics of leadership that exist in a high-performing school located in a high-poverty environment. In spite of potential barriers to academic achievement of students in high-poverty schools (Neill, 2003; Casbarro, 2005; Bickman, Hallinger & Davis, 1996), there are some schools that are the exceptions (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2005; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006). Research has indicated that the school leader can have a significant impact on the student achievement level (Beaudin, Thompson & Jacobson, 2002; Brownson, Kahlert, Picucci & Sobel, 2004; Thompson, 2003).

Site selection for this study was based on the following factors: (a) designation by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as a high-performing middle/junior high school, (b) designation of high-performing in the areas of communication arts and mathematics, (c) a free/reduced lunch program participation rate of 40% or above, and (d) a building leader who had served in that position for at least three years. Two schools in Missouri met each of the four requirements. Red Oakes Elementary School was selected due to the fact that it did not have open enrollment. Students attending this school had no other attendance centers from which to choose. Fifty-five percent of the students enrolled participated in the free/reduced lunch program. In 2006, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education designated Red Oakes Elementary as a top ten school for sustained performance in percent of

students scoring at the “proficient” and “advanced” level in the areas of communication arts and mathematics on the Missouri Assessment Program. The building leader, Mr. Maples, has served as a building leader for thirty-one years.

The researcher selected a qualitative research design (Creswell, 1998). The specific design was an observational case study of a bounded system over time (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 1998; Thomas & Brubaker, 2000). Data collection included individual interviews (Berg, 2002), field notes of observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 1998; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995) and document collection and analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Stake, 1995).

Summary of the Findings

Two primary questions guided the research. The questions were:

1. What leadership traits are identified in a high-poverty, high performing school? Specifically, the following perspectives were examined:
 - a. The building leader
 - b. The faculty/staff
 - c. The parents of students
2. What impact does the leader or the evident leadership style have on stakeholders within the school? Specifically, the following perspectives will be examined:
 - a. The faculty/staff
 - b. The parents of students

Eleven parents of students and eleven members of the faculty were interviewed. Transcripts of interviews, field notes of observations and documents were analyzed

through open coding and focused coding (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). Prevalent themes were identified within each of the two interview groups and then synthesized into primary themes. The faculty interview group described Mr. Maples in terms of his presence, his hands-off leadership, his communication skills, his support (both personal and professional), the high expectations he holds for his staff and students, his commitment to hiring only the best candidates, his passion for placing the needs of the students first, and the value that he placed on each person. The parent interview group described Mr. Maples in terms of his presence, his caring attitude, his fairness, the high expectations he holds for his staff and students, his commitment to hiring only the best candidates, and the value that he placed on each person.

An analysis and synthesis of these descriptors revealed prevalent themes of hands off leadership, high expectations, power source, protection of instructional time, and culture. These themes provided the foundation for primary leadership roles portrayed by the building leader, Mr. Maples. The primary leadership roles were (a) human resource director, (b) academic leader and (c) culture facilitator. As human resource director, Mr. Maples' strengths lay in his high expectations, his hands off leadership style, and his role as a power source for his staff. High expectations also impacted Maples' role as an academic leader, as did his commitment to protecting instructional time. Figure 1 provides graphic representation of the synthesis of descriptors to themes and primary leadership roles that emerged from the data analysis.

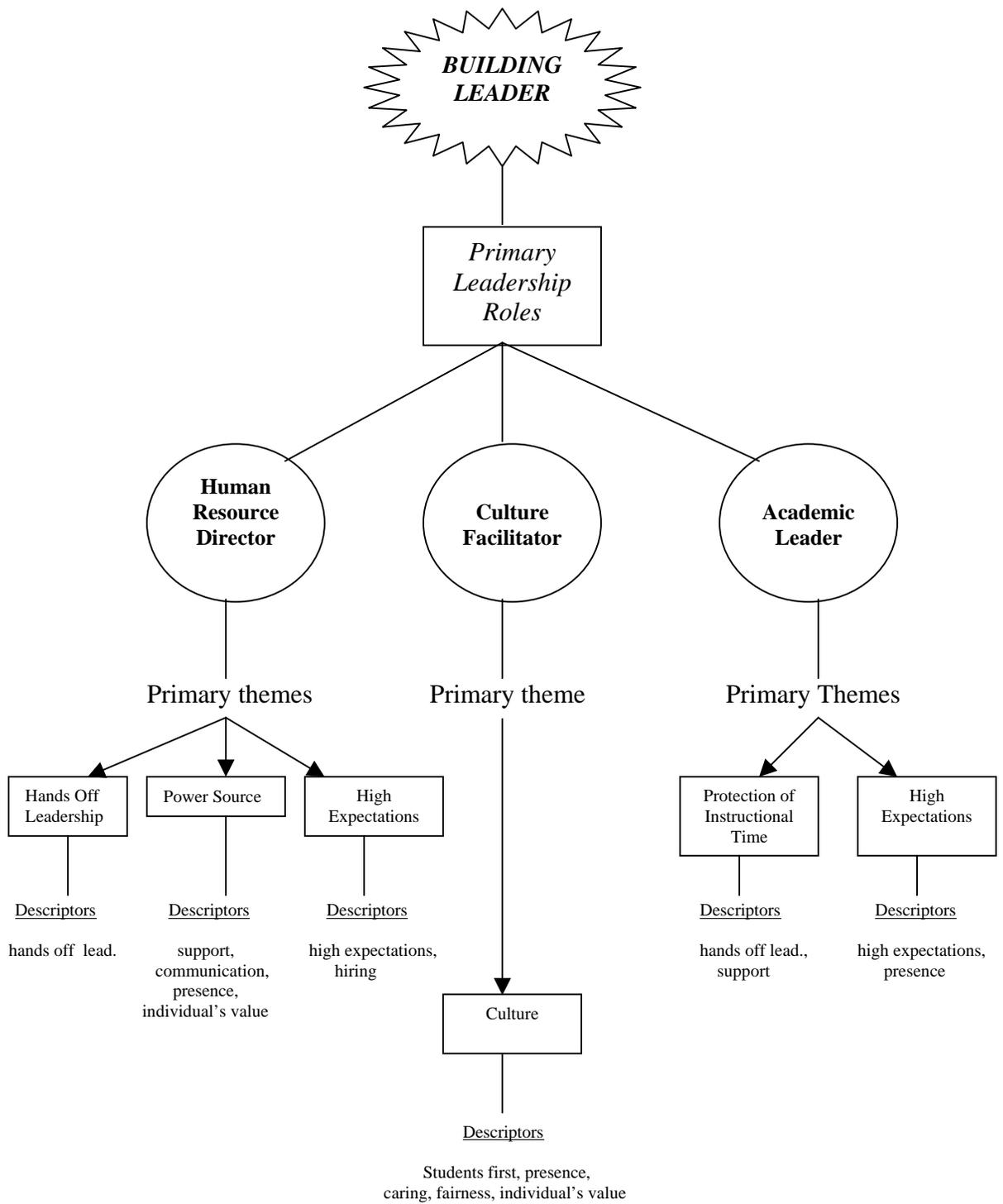


Figure 1. Synthesis of descriptors to themes and primary leadership roles.

Discussion of Findings

High expectations of his staff, students and parents contributed to Mr. Maples' strength as a human resource director and as an instructional leader. The importance of clearly articulated expectations of the leader has been discussed in current literature.

Bickman, Hallinger and Davis (1996) stated that principals play a key role as leaders by "shaping teachers' attitudes concerning students' ability to master school subject matter" (p. 534). The authors further stated that reduced expectations have the greatest negative effects on students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. In a study to determine the effect of principal leadership on student engagement in school, Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) found a significant impact. According to the study, principal leadership holds a potential for impacting student achievement. A study by the Washington School Research Center (2002) described high academic expectations as integral to the development and maintenance of a successful and effective school. Barkley, Bottoms, Feagin and Clark (2002) also emphasized the impact that the leader's expectations had on student achievement. They noted that it was important for a leader to, not only verbalize expectations, but also to demonstrate those expectations in their responses to teachers, parents and students. Fox, Reavis and Vinson(1999) stated that a principal's consistency in enforcing expectations was a significant component in creating a culture of success.

According to Williams (2000), teacher perception of an administrator's high expectations was also important. Schein (1992) discussed a leader's expectations as a "primary embedding mechanism" (p. 230). According to Schein, a leader's development and articulation of observable criteria for allocation of rewards, status, recruitment,

selection, promotion, retirement and excommunication was a necessary skill for effective leadership. Block (2007) emphasized the importance of maintaining high expectations in the hiring process. He noted the dilemma created by “the desire to hire the very best candidates versus the need to put a live person in every classroom” (p. 55). Bloch asserted that, even though many administrators face rapidly increasing enrollments, hiring decisions should not be made in haste. Bloch further suggested that, while waiting for a good fit, “hiring full-time temporary teachers with no immediate prospect for tenure” (p. 56) would be advantageous.

Mr. Maples consistently demonstrated high expectations in his selection of staff and in his evaluation of their daily performance. Many of the respondents in the study cited Maples’ high expectations and high standards. One respondent stated that Mr. Maples expects teachers to “produce results” (F-1, p. 1, l. 26). Another participant said, “His greatest strength I think is his high expectations. High expectations for the teachers he hires...He expects us to do our best teaching kids” (F-7, p. 25, l. 34). Mr. Maples himself indicated that he is very particular when hiring new staff. He tells new staff up front of his high expectations. Mr. Maples described his most significant contribution to the school as “basically just to hire the best teachers” (p. 1, l. 29). When asked to describe Mr. Maples’ most significant contribution to the academic success of the school, one parent said, “I would say, probably, hiring the best teachers” (P-1, p. 2, l. 50).

Mr. Maples’ expectations of students was also clearly articulated and understood by parent and faculty participants. As one teacher stated, “He is very strict with high expectations. He is not afraid to tell the kids what’s wrong. He’s not afraid to talk to their

parents” (F-4, p. 12, l. 34). A parent participant said, “He is very stern in his discipline...stern in what is to be expected of the students” (P-1, p. 1, l. 4).

Another important factor in Mr. Maples’ role as human resource director was his ability to demonstrate a “hands-off leadership style.” The term hands-off leadership describes the extent to which the building leader allows the staff independence and autonomy. In their description of the formative leadership theory, Ash and Persall (2000) suggested that leadership is not role-specific, reserved only for the administrator. Instead, the principal should be viewed as a leader of leaders. The leader’s role was to provide learning opportunities for the faculty and staff so that they can develop or enhance their own skills and become productive leaders. As one participant stated, “He (Maples) makes the teachers feel like they are important here and that he’s not running the show, that we’re all in it together, and he’s a working principal” (F-5, p. 17, l. 39). Yukl (2002) also discussed the importance of empowerment of stakeholders within an organization. Yukl asserted that a transformational leader would strive to encourage followers to see their significant role in the big picture of the organization. Kelehear (2003) cited teacher autonomy as an important part of a successful school. Kelehear further stated that teacher autonomy was best achieved through effective mentoring by the building leader. Corallo and McDonald (2001) underscored the importance of leadership creating a culture that encourages the distribution of leadership functions to members of the school and community.

Mr. Maples also served as a power source for his staff through his professional and personal support. The amount of power that a building leader provides for staff can have a significant impact. Thomas (2003) discussed the impact of personal support of

faculty. Thomas stated that an effective leader will be sensitive to the needs of the staff and will be “very aggressive with positive and upbeat communication” (p. 9). A study by Richardson, Lane, and Flanigan (1996) further underscored the impact that administrative support had on educators. Their study cited “caring” as one of the five most important attributes of a principal. In a study of teacher perceptions of leadership attributes, Williams (2000) noted that effective principals were perceived to nurture the on-going culture of the school through development of positive interpersonal relationships among members of the organization. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (2002), “The most effective school leaders find satisfaction in seeing students learn and succeed in school, in working with students, and in helping teachers develop and be successful in their work” (p. 2).

Mr. Maples empowered his staff through his support of them, both professionally and personally. Parent participant 5 stated that his most significant contribution to the academic success of the school was to supply the teachers with what they needed. This parent indicated that the teachers appeared prepared to insure student success because of Mr. Maples’ provision and support. Parent 6 added, “he has encouraged them (the teachers) to do the things that they need to do to teach these students. I think that he must have a really good rapport with the teachers here” (p. 16, l. 48). Faculty participants also indicated that they felt Mr. Maples supported them professionally and personally. As one teacher said, Mr. Maples’ encouragement in a unique situation “made me have confidence in myself. It really changed my outlook as a teacher. I felt like then I could do anything” (F-1, p. 1, l. 35).

In addition to high expectations, Mr. Maples' strength as an academic leader was evidenced by the value he placed on instructional time and the protection of instructional time. As faculty participant number 2 stated, "We are in the classroom all the time. And that's one thing that he has always said is important, that we are in the classroom, and we are everyday" (p. 3, l. 77). Current research underscores the impact the leader's view of instructional time can have on the success of a school. Duke (2004) suggested that an effective leader will constantly evaluate the use of instructional time and make adjustments necessary to ensure the success of students. Brownson, Kahlert, Picucci and Sobel (2004) also identified the implementation of what they termed as "thoughtful school structures" as integral to addressing the needs of high-poverty students. Thoughtful school structures address the effective and efficient use of instructional time.

Mr. Maples also maintained a culture of success, achievement and support in the school. Goldman (1998) asserted that a leader has the power to create, change or destroy cultures within an organization. Fox, Reavis and Vinson (1999) described effective school leaders as being the bearers of the high achievement culture. The establishment and maintenance of a positive school culture influences teachers' effectiveness as instructors (Cosner and Peterson, 2003). Many faculty and parent participants commented on the culture of the school. One faculty member described the school's achievement culture in terms of the school's vision for its students.

We want these kids to be able to come out of here and be good citizens and be able to take daily things that are thrown at them and handle them with ease... You know, the vision for us basically is to get these kids out and whether they are going to be in a ditch digging or where they're going to be...to be able to handle

daily things that are thrown at them, just handle them with ease and go ahead and have a good life. (F-2, p. 6, l. 51)

Mr. Maples proved to be an effective leader in a successful, achievement oriented school. The roles he played in his leadership that had the most significant impact on the school's success were those of human resource director, academic leader and culture facilitator.

A phrase that often appears in many schools' mission statements and other academic rhetoric is "life long learners." School leaders frequently espouse that their vision is to nurture students who will learn how to learn and will develop a hunger for additional learning that will last a lifetime. While this is a noble quest, in an education culture where schools are driven by outcome, often times the focus is on creating students who are successful test takers. Like the famous question, "which came first, the chicken or the egg," administrators are faced with the dilemma of which comes first, high scores on a state mandated test or successful lifelong learners.

Mr. Maples appeared to have resolved that question for himself and served in a manner that encouraged the philosophy that the development of life long learners must always come first and that the high test scores would follow. As was evidenced in interview responses, Mr. Maples created an atmosphere where the students' overall well being was addressed. Rather than direct educators' energy toward a test, that energy was directed toward each student's future success. As was stated in earlier chapters, it was apparent to me that results on a test were not the outcome sought in the school, rather the outcome sought was the potential future achievement of each student, regardless of background or perceived ability.

Mr. Maples' support of his staff exemplified the cliché "they won't care how much you know until they know how much you care." He created an atmosphere in which his staff recognized that they were valued and appreciated. It is interesting to note that Mr. Maples reported that he doesn't recognize one teacher over another. Mr. Maples has created a culture of value that is not dependent on incentives and individual recognition. A staff member commented that

One thing he doesn't do, and I don't know if this is why we work so hard, but he doesn't come up really individually and say, "you are really doing a good job." But, it's more of a blanket thing to all teachers. He never really picks out one person that did a great job. He always says, "You all did a great job." But, he is always just building us up and I don't know, there is just something about him that makes us keep working for him. (F-4, p. 12, l. 20)

Mr. Maples maintained a vision for what he expected for the school, the staff, the students, and the parents. His expectations were high, as reported by all participants, and were clearly communicated. Because of his well-articulated and clearly understood expectations, he was able to nurture relationships with stakeholders built on trust. He could trust staff, students and parents to know his expectations and, in turn, staff, students and parents could trust him to act appropriately in regard to those same expectations. Whether in the form of student or staff discipline, parent versus teacher support, curriculum decisions or program development, stakeholders trusted that his actions would be held to the same crucible of expectations.

Implications for Educational Leaders

After considering the roles that Mr. Maples assumed as a building leader, I would identify the common thread as vision. Whether addressing Maple's high expectations, his support of staff, his protection of instructional time, or his facilitation of a positive educational culture, everything boils down to what he sees as significant. As was stated previously, Mr. Maples had been an educator for thirty years. In that time, he witnessed the cyclical nature of education initiatives, programs and philosophies. He perpetuated a philosophy of focusing on what is constant, that is - the fact that students will grow up and, with or without the assistance and support of the educational environment, will contribute something, good or bad, to our culture. Mr. Maples demonstrated a belief that each student held the potential for greatness as defined by their contribution to the society. Mr. Maples' leadership indicated his belief that every educator was responsible for nurturing that potential.

Today's educational leaders must develop that same philosophy. They must move beyond focusing on yearly test results. What happens in the classroom should have less to do with performance on a test in the spring and more to do with performance in life. If the test mandated by the state governing body is a true reflection of what is important in our culture and the skills that are necessary for future success, then high test scores will result.

Institutions of higher education should strive to maintain an emphasis on the development of vision-forging techniques in leadership training programs. Current and future educational leaders should be encouraged to view their role as a calling to something significant, something eternal, not as a manager of the status quo in education.

Short of defining their worth by their vocation, educational leaders must, at the very least, see their role as worthwhile. Unless today's leaders develop a vision for the school year that extends beyond a nine-month calendar, lasting impact on students will not be accomplished. As stated earlier, a report by the National Conference of State Legislatures (2002), "the most effective school leaders find satisfaction in seeing students learn and succeed in school, in working with students, and in helping teachers develop and be successful in their work" (p. 2).

In addition, educational leadership training programs should better prepare future leaders in the area of personnel selection, induction, and evaluation. Educational leaders need to invest much time, energy and patience in the interviewing of potential staff members. Today's leaders need the training and support to encourage them to be willing to step up and courageously defend each student's right to an appropriate and meaningful education by dismissing individuals who do not live up to the standards established in the school. Historically, school leaders have been hesitant to do so, not wanting to be viewed as anti-teacher or pro-firing (Bolch, 2007). The key is for each leader to desire to be viewed as pro-student, period. A well-articulated vision with clearly defined expectations that focus on the value on the students' educational experience will assist in the development of a culture of high standards.

Building leaders need to assume the role of protectors of a positive school culture. Decisions impacting the staff and other stakeholders should be considered in light of the effect of outcomes related to the overall culture and philosophy of the school. A study by the Washington School Research Center (2002) identified the establishment of a caring

and collaborative professional environment as a primary factor in the development of a successful and effective school.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was limited in that it addressed leadership characteristics in a small, rural K-8 school. Questions concerning whether or not the leadership characteristics noted in this study could be generalized to a larger school population setting arise. In addition, one should consider the impact of a small community's culture on the facilitation of culture within the school. A smaller school population may also better accommodate a consistent articulation of expectations among staff, parents, students and other stakeholders. Further studies should be expanded to examine the leadership in a high-poverty high-performing school located in an urban area. This additional research may illustrate the leadership characteristics that are common among rural and urban settings. Leadership characteristics specifically effective in larger, urban schools may also be identified.

Another limitation of this study was the lack of participation of students. Further research may consider the direct interview of student stakeholders. Student perceptions regarding the leadership in their school would provide valuable information pertaining to effectiveness of the leadership as well as the interpretation of the leadership.

Further research to determine the relationship between successful schools and the establishment of a shared vision within the school would be beneficial. Studying the genesis of the vision (from shared decision-making among staff or from the heart of the leader) would also more clearly describe the impact of vision.

Finally, a study relating various leadership theories to the findings of this and future related studies is recommended. Such research would facilitate a clearer understanding of leadership theory as it relates directly to the school setting.

Conclusion

My study of the leadership at Red Oaks Elementary resulted in a colorful picture of a building principal who served as a human resource director, academic leader and culture facilitator. Mr. Maples utilized a common sense approach to leadership that led him to focus on student outcomes reaching beyond a yearly test. His caring attitude toward his staff and students was evidenced in faculty and parent responses to interview questions.

Mr. Maples provided a standard by which all leaders can measure effectiveness. His establishment of a learning environment based on high expectations and high standards consistently coincided with academic success for his students. His demeanor, however, belied a deeper purpose than high test scores. He truly wanted to make a difference in the lives of children.

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Appendix A

SHOW-ME CONTENT STANDARDS

(Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006)

MAP items are aligned with the Show-Me Standards/GLE Strands. The Show-Me Content Standards/GLE Strands are grouped by content area.

Communication Arts

In Communication Arts, students in Missouri public schools will acquire a solid foundation that includes knowledge of and proficiency in:

1. speaking and writing Standard English (including grammar, usage, punctuation, spelling, capitalization)
2. reading and evaluating fiction, poetry, and drama
3. reading and evaluating nonfiction works and material (such as biographies, newspapers, technical manuals)
4. writing formally (such as reports, narratives, essays) and informally (such as outlines, notes)
5. comprehending and evaluating the content and artistic aspects of oral and visual presentations (such as story-telling, debates, lectures, multi-media productions)
6. participating in formal and informal presentations and discussions of issues and ideas
7. identifying and evaluating relationships between language and culture

Mathematics

In Mathematics, students in Missouri public schools will acquire a solid foundation that includes knowledge of:

1. Number and Operations: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division; estimation and computing techniques; number representations, systems, and relationships; use of these operations and concepts in the workplace and other situations.
2. Algebraic Relationships: algebraic concepts including patterns, relations, and functions; represent and analyze mathematical structures using algebraic symbols; understand quantitative relationships; analyze change in various contexts.
3. Geometric and Spatial Relationships: geometric and spatial sense including analysis of characteristics/properties of geometric shapes; arguments about geometric relationships; coordinate geometry; symmetry and transformations; visualization, spatial reasoning, and geometric modeling.
4. Measurement: measurable attributes of objects and the units, systems, and processes of measurement; use of appropriate techniques, tools, and formulas to determine measurements.
5. Data and Probability: data collection and statistical reasoning; formulating questions to be addressed with data analysis and statistics; develop and evaluate inferences based on data; understand and apply probability concepts.

Appendix B

SHOW-ME PROCESS STANDARDS (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006)

The Show-Me Process Standards are grouped by goals.

Goal 1 – Gather, analyze, and apply information

Standards:

1. develop research question/ideas
2. conduct research
3. design/conduct investigations
4. organize information using tools
5. comprehend/evaluate resources
6. discover/evaluate relationships
7. evaluate information
8. organize data and ideas
9. compare past and present societies
10. apply information, ideas, and skills

Goal 2 – Communicate effectively

Standards:

1. plan and make presentations
2. revise communications
3. exchange ideas and take others' perspectives
4. present perceptions and ideas
5. produce works in the arts
6. apply communication techniques
7. use information technology

Goal 3 – Recognize and solve problems

Standards:

1. identify and define problems
2. apply others' strategies
3. apply one's own strategies
4. evaluate problem-solving processes
5. reason logically
6. examine solutions from many perspectives
7. evaluate strategies
8. assess consequences

Goal 4 – Take social responsibility

Standards:

1. support decisions
2. understand and apply citizenship rights
3. analyze individuals' responsibilities
4. practice honesty and integrity
5. develop/revise plans of action
6. identify cooperative tasks
7. apply safety/health practices
8. explore/seek opportunities

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form – Faculty Version

Dear Research Participant;

Thank you for considering participation in the study “Against All Odds: Leadership in High-Poverty High-Performing Schools.” This study is being conducted to complete my doctoral degree in educational leadership and policy analysis at University of Missouri – Columbia.

The purpose of this study is to examine the leadership that exists in a high-poverty high-performing middle/junior high school. This information will be useful in educational leadership training programs to document leadership characteristics that exist in a particular high-poverty high-performing middle/junior high school.

Before you make a final decision about participation, please read the following about how your input will be used and how your rights as a participant will be protected:

- Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any point without penalty.
- You will be asked 4-6 open-ended questions regarding your perception of leadership in your building. Your answers will be tape-recorded for transcription. During the transcription process, all tapes will be kept in a secure location with no participant identifying information. All tapes/transcriptions will be destroyed after completion of the project.
- You need not answer all of the questions.
- Your answers will be kept confidential. Results will be presented to others in summary form only, without names or other identifying information.
- Your participation will take approximately one hour. During this time, you will be asked questions about the building leadership in your school.
- As a faculty member, your participation will not have an effect (positive or adverse) on your employment at the school.

This project has been reviewed by the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board. The committee believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject’s privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The project is being supervised by Dr. Cindy Macgregor, Associate Professor, Educational Administration, MSU (417-836-6046).

If at this point you are still interested in participating and assisting with this important research project, please fill out the consent form below. Keep the top of this letter for future reference. You can contact me at 417-499-5158 if you have questions or concerns about your participation. In addition, you can contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board by calling 573-882-9585 or by going online at <http://research.missouri.edu/cirb>. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

David K. Stephens
Doctoral Student, University of Missouri – Columbia

I, _____, agree to participate in the study of leadership in a high-poverty high-performing middle/junior high school, conducted by David K. Stephens. I understand that:

- My answers will be used for educational research.
- My participation is voluntary.
- I may stop participation at any time without penalty.
- I need not answer all of the questions.
- My answers and identity will be kept confidential.
- My participation will not have an effect (positive or adverse) on my employment.

I have read the information above and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realizing that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form - Parent Version

Dear Research Participant;

Thank you for considering participation in the study “Against All Odds: Leadership in High-Poverty High-Performing Schools.” This study is being conducted to complete my doctoral degree in educational leadership and policy analysis at University of Missouri – Columbia.

The purpose of this study is to examine the leadership that exists in a high-poverty high-performing middle/junior high school. This information will be useful in educational leadership training programs to document leadership characteristics that exist in a particular high-poverty high-performing middle/junior high school.

Before you make a final decision about participation, please read the following about how your input will be used and how your rights as a participant will be protected:

- Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any point without penalty.
- You will be asked 4-6 open-ended questions regarding your perception of leadership in your building. Your answers will be tape-recorded for transcription. During the transcription process, all tapes will be kept in a secure location with no participant identifying information. All tapes/transcriptions will be destroyed after completion of the project.
- You need not answer all of the questions.
- Your answers will be kept confidential. Results will be presented to others in summary form only, without names or other identifying information.
- Your participation will take approximately one hour. During this time, you will be asked questions about the building leadership in your school.
- As a parent of a student, your participation will not have an effect (positive or adverse) on your child’s grades or standing in the school.

This project has been reviewed by the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board. The committee believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject’s privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The project is being supervised by Dr. Cindy Macgregor, Associate Professor, Educational Administration, MSU (417-836-6046).

If at this point you are still interested in participating and assisting with this important research project, please fill out the consent form below. Keep the top of this letter for future reference. You can contact me at 417-499-5158 if you have questions or concerns about your participation. In addition, you can contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board by calling 573-882-9585 or by going online at <http://research.missouri.edu/cirb>. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

David K. Stephens
Doctoral Student, University of Missouri – Columbia

I, _____, agree to participate in the study of leadership in a high-poverty high-performing middle/junior high school, conducted by David K. Stephens. I understand that:

- My answers will be used for educational research.
- My participation is voluntary.
- I may stop participation at any time without penalty.
- I need not answer all of the questions.
- My answers and identity will be kept confidential.
- My participation will not have an effect (positive or adverse) on my child’s grades or standing in school.

I have read the information above and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realizing that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Project: Against All Odds – Leadership in High-Poverty High-Performing Schools

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee: Building leader

(Briefly describe the project and remind interviewee of informed consent)

Questions:

1. Describe your leadership style/characteristics. How do you see yourself as a leader?
2. How do you see/understand your relationship to the teachers with whom you work?
3. How would you hope your teachers would describe you?
4. Tell me about your most significant contribution to the academic success of this school in the areas of communication arts and mathematics?
5. Where do you feel you need to focus your energies to sustain/improve teaching and learning in your school?
6. What would the vision for this school be?

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Project: Against All Odds – Leadership High-Poverty High-Performing Schools

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee: Faculty Member

(Briefly describe the project and remind interviewee of informed consent)

Questions:

1. Describe the leadership in your school.
2. What do you feel are your principal's greatest strengths?
3. What do you feel are your principal's weaknesses?
4. What do you feel is your principal's most significant contribution to the academic success of this school in the areas of communication arts and mathematics?
5. What would the vision for this school be?

Appendix G

Interview Protocol

Project: Against All Odds – Leadership in High-Poverty High-Performing Schools

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee: Parent

(Briefly describe the project and remind interviewee of informed consent)

Questions:

1. Describe your child's principal's leadership style/characteristics.
2. How would your child describe the principal of his/her school?
3. What do you feel are your child's principal's greatest strengths?
4. What do you feel are your child's principal's greatest weaknesses?
5. What do you feel is your child's principal's most significant contribution to the academic success of this school in the areas of communication arts and mathematics?
6. What would the vision for this school be?

Appendix H

OPEN CODING: TEACHER INTERVIEWS

(number in parentheses indicates the number of times the descriptor was used among all participants)

1. Describe the leadership in your school:

- He trusts us (3)
- He gives us independence (autonomy) (8)
- He is visible (involved) (2)
- He is accessible (3)
- He is student-centered (3)
- He is a good listener (2)
- He is a visionary (3)
- He is supportive (7)
- He encourages/challenges us (2)
- He is a good communicator (2)
- He is diplomatic (PR) (2)
- He hires good teachers (3)
- He respects us (2)
- He has strong values (1)
- He has high expectations (3)
- He is professional (1)
- He is good at finance (2)

2. What do you feel are your principal's greatest strengths?

- Charismatic (1)
- Caring (1)
- Finance (3)
- Protects instruction/supports teachers (4)
- Good listener (1)
- Visibility/level of involvement (5)
- Student-centered (2)
- High expectations (4)
- Gives teachers independence/autonomy (2)
- Role model (for students/teachers) (1)
- Communication (1)
- Visionary (1)
- Creative (1)
- Sincere (1)

3. What do you feel are your principal's greatest weaknesses?

- Lack of personal praise/criticism (3)

Appendix H (Cont.)

Spread too thin (2)
Hard to read (1)
Needs to have stronger expectations (1)
None (6)

4. What do you feel is your principal's most significant contribution to the academic success of this school in the areas of communication arts and mathematics?

Protects instruction (2)
We want to please him (1)
He is creative/flexible (5)
Supports teachers/instruction (2)
Student-centered (3)
Gives teachers independence/autonomy (4)
Hires good teachers (5)
He is intelligent (1)
He is a visionary (1)
He supports academics (1)
He is involved (1)
He has high expectations (2)

5. What would the vision for this school be?

Stay the way we are (4)
Develop good citizens (3)
Stay student-centered (3)
Maintain high expectations (2)
Be the best we can be (1)
Help every child reach his/her potential (4)

Appendix I

OPEN CODING: PARENT INTERVIEWS

(number in parentheses indicates the number of times the descriptor was use among all participants)

6. Describe your child's principal's leadership style/characteristics.

Caring (5)
Strict (2)
Respected (2)
High expectations (1)
Approachable (3)
Involved (5)
Visible (2)
Fair (2)
Detailed (1)
Supportive (1)
Works well with students (1)
Knowledgeable (1)
Trustworthy (1)
Consistent (1)

7. How would your child describe the principal of his/her school?

Stern/strict (5)
Caring/warm (4)
Friendly/kind (4)
In charge (1)
Fair (3)
Intimidating (2)
Respected (2)
Visible (1)
Approachable (1)

8. What do you feel are your child's principal's greatest strengths?

Godly (1)
Loves the school/committed (2)
Longevity in district (1)
Knows the school (1)
Knows kids/families (1)
Active/involved (3)
Makes things run smoothly (1)
Visible (1)
Caring (1)

Appendix I (Cont.)

Discipline (1)
Puts kids first (1)
Consistent (1)
Character/integrity (2)
Sincerity (1)

9. What do you are your child's principal's greatest weaknesses?

Appears unapproachable (1)
Preferential treatment (2)
Controlling (1)
None (7)

10. What do you feel is your child's principal's most significant contribution to the academic success of this school in the areas of communication arts and mathematics?

Personnel selection (2)
High expectations (3)
Good communication (1)
Emphasis on extracurricular activities (1)
Provides resources for teachers (5)
Involved (1)
Encourages family atmosphere (1)
Caring (1)
Protects teacher autonomy (1)
Backs/supports teachers (1)

11. What would the vision for this school be?

Prepare the kids for life/develop leaders (4)
Stay small (3)
Maintain high standards (achievement/discipline) (6)
Keep up with current technology (1)
Update buildings (1)
Maintain moral values (1)
Safety (1)

VITA

David K. Stephens was born May 19, 1961, in Miami, Oklahoma. Raised in Carl Junction, Missouri, he is the second child of Melvin and LaVada Stephens. After graduating from Carl Junction High School in 1979, he received the following degrees: BSE in psychology and special education from Missouri Southern State University (1984); MS in school counseling from Pittsburg State University (1989); Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from The University of Missouri – Columbia (2007). He is married to Kelly Marie Stephens and they have one child, Isabelle Diana Stephens. Currently, he serves as assistant superintendent of schools for the Carl Junction R-1 School District.

The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined
the dissertation entitled

**AGAINST ALL ODDS: LEADERSHIP IN A
HIGH-POVERTY HIGH-PERFORMING SCHOOL**

presented by David K. Stephens

a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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