Opportunity to Learn: The Role of Prompting Cognitive Shifts in Understanding and Addressing Educational Inequities

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OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN: THE ROLE OF PROMPTING COGNITIVE SHIFTS IN UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL INEQUITIES

Dissertation in Practice

by

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by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how district- and school-level leaders' understanding of achievement gaps influences the work of leadership in addressing educational inequities and broadening students' opportunity to learn. While the reporting of disaggregated data by student subgroup confirms that achievement gaps exist, reports from high-stakes testing fail to provide district- and school-level leaders with the diagnostic data needed to identify key factors inhibiting student performance. Yet, identifying and understanding factors hindering student performance is critical knowledge for leaders to cultivate as they work to address elements within their school or district that may need to change if student learning is to improve. Results from this single case study in a diverse urban district illuminate how district- and school-level leaders can challenge and support their community as they work collectively to confront and address issues related to disparities in student performance.

Drawing on previous research, which introduced the cognitive shift as a unit of analysis for studying the work of leadership, this study identifies shifts in thinking that district- and school-level leaders attempted to prompt in others, as well as the framing strategies district- and school-level leaders used in their attempts to prompt identified shifts in thinking. The study found that district- and school-level leaders attempted to prompt a common set of cognitive shifts using a range of framing strategies.

Furthermore, the study found a correlation between leaders' use of a particular of framing strategy and their level of leadership (i.e., district or school), with common patterns of strategy use unique to each level of leadership. Additionally, distinct patterns of strategy use also emerged for the leaders of the district's top performing schools which differed from the patterns of strategy use that emerged for the leaders of the district's lower performing schools. These findings suggest that certain framing strategies may be more effective than others.

Opportunity to Learn: Understanding and Addressing Educational Inequities

Executive Summary
Dissertation in Practice

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Context and Background

The release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 marks a defining moment in the history of American education, heralding the advent of standards-based educational reform. Whereas previous reform efforts worked to provide *equal* access to education for minority groups (e.g., *Brown v. Board of Education*, Civil Rights Act of 1964, Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Amendments of 1966, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975), the standards-based reform movement focuses on *excellence* for *all*. Providing the same to all may at times create unfair and unjust circumstances leading to greater levels of inequity and injustice. As a result, there are times when "persons may be treated and rewarded unequally and also justly" (Green, 1983, p. 324). While some examples of inequalities are in fact just, inequities are never just.

PROVIDING THE SAME TO ALL MAY AT TIMES CREATE UNFAIR AND UNJUST CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO GREATER LEVELS OF INEQUITY AND INJUSTICE.

In the pursuit of excellence, the role of standards continued to gain strength, culminating in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, now commonly referred to as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). With bi-partisan support for the enactment of NCLB, standards-based educational reform emphasizing standards, assessments, and accountability "was catapulted into national policy" (Foorman & Nixon, 2006, p. 163). In order "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education" (20 U.S.C. 6302 § 1001), NCLB established a test-based accountability system (Hamilton, 2003; Hamilton & Koretz, 2002). Test-based accountability systems include four major components: goals (i.e., rigorous standards), measures (i.e., high-stakes state tests), targets (i.e., adequate yearly progress), and consequences (i.e., school transfer options, supplemental services, corrective actions, and restructuring) (Hamilton & Koretz, 2002).

Since the authorization of NCLB in 2001, there is little evidence to suggest that the current accountability system is having a positive effect on long-standing equity issues (Harris & Herrington, 2006). Even though the ultimate effectiveness

of current federal and state policy is yet unknown, policymakers continue to show unwavering support for the pairing of rigorous standards to test-based accountability. Most recently, support for this pairing was demonstrated by the provision of federal funding to the assessment consortiums of SMARTER Balanced and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) to support the development of a national testing system that will assess the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) adopted by 45 out of the 50 United States of America (Achieve, Inc., 2013; SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

While efforts to raise standards and improve assessments deserve thoughtful consideration in the "landscape of educational policy, they are not effective drivers toward significantly changing the conditions for students who are in need….For a student, or to a parent whose child is academically drowning, simply moving the shoreline further away is not compelling" (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012, pp. 10-11). Instead, attention must turn towards formulating "a support-based reform agenda focused on creating the learning environment and condition in which...all children will have an opportunity to learn and succeed" (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012, p. 11).

Purpose of Study

The most recent "report cards" from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) highlight enduring and substantial achievement gaps. In these reports, disaggregated data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveal statistically significant discrepancies between the performance of African-American and Hispanic students and their White, non-Hispanic peers (NCES, 2011a, 2011b). Equally large performance gaps separate low-income from middle- to high-income students (NCES, 2011a, 2011b). And, although less attention has been focused on measuring, monitoring, and reporting changes experienced by English language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities (SD), considerable performance gaps also exist for these student populations (NCES, 2011a, 2011b). Equally alarming, national data exposes sizable differences in graduation rates when presented by race/ethnicity. These on-going, statistically significant disparities raise critical questions regarding educational equity and students' opportunity to learn within the public school system.

Addressing long standing disparities in student performance calls for systemic change, a theme that resounds throughout and across the work of many educational practitioners, scholars, researchers, and advocacy groups. Igniting such a transformational change requires "step[ping] outside the situation, make[ing] sense of it, and reframe[ing] the problem" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 54). Part of reframing the problem involves a collective shift in thinking that moves away from viewing disparate outcomes as an "achievement gap," which too often reinforces the beliefs and attitudes of some that the root cause of widely discrepant outcomes stems from underperforming students' lack of ability to achieve at high levels, and towards seeing disparate outcomes as an "opportunity gap," which places the onus for divergent outcomes squarely upon the educational system. This essential shift in thinking emphasizes that disparities in outcomes for students are absolutely "not a reflection of their potential nor their abilities—but a direct result of denying them equitable supports and resources they need to be fully engaged and succeed" (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012, p. 2). In an effort to further explore the "opportunity gap" that exists for many students, the purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how district- and school-level leaders' understanding of the "nature of the gap" influences the work of leadership focused on addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability.

THIS STUDY SOUGHT TO ANSWER TWO OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- *HOW DO DISTRICT- AND SCHOOL-LEVEL LEADERS UNDERSTAND DISPARITIES IN STUDENT PERFORMANCE RELATED TO RACE/ETHNICITY, CLASS, AND/OR DISABILITY?*
- *HOW DO THESE UNDERSTANDINGS THEN INFLUENCE THE WORK OF LEADERSHIP FOCUSED ON ADDRESSING DISPARITIES IN STUDENT PERFORMANCE RELATED TO RACE/ETHNICITY, CLASS, AND/OR DISABILITY?*

Methodology

Under the umbrella of qualitative research designs, a case study approach was selected, "which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 534). Yin (2008) explains "a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). Conducting a single case study allowed the research team the opportunity to fully analyze all aspects of the study in depth.

Sample and participant selection. This qualitative case study began by identifying a school district and superintendent through the review of district profiles on the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. Once a district was identified, the strategies of purposeful and snowball sampling were used to identify school-level leaders, as well as additional district-level leaders. To mitigate the risk of coercion, the superintendent of the district was asked to name more people than needed for the research study sample, and research team members have kept confidential who was, in fact, approached for recruitment. To further assure confidentiality, an administrator's decision regarding whether or not to participate in the research study was not shared with the superintendent.

Data collection. Data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews and then supplemented by the gathering of documents recommended by participants during their interviews. The researchers used purposeful sampling for the identification and collection of relevant school and district documents. The collection and analysis of document data offered researchers the opportunity to crosscheck and verify interviewee responses, as well as the conclusions being drawn by the researchers as they engaged in data analysis. This process of verification supported the triangulation of data and thus strengthened the trustworthiness of the study's findings and final conclusions.

Data analysis. This research study followed the three components of data analysis described by Miles and Huberman (1994): (a) data reduction, (b) data display, and (c) conclusion drawing/verification. Once data was entered into a

data display, several tactics were used to both draw and verify conclusions. Ultimately, the researchers aimed to draw conclusions that have been rigorously tested for "their plausibility, their sturdiness, their 'confirmability'—that is, their validity" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.11).

Findings and Discussion

The fourteen participants involved in this study shared their perspectives and revealed that they engaged in interactions that contributed to their understanding of the nature of the achievement gap. Some leaders in the New Hope School District recognized that disparities in student outcomes was "not a reflection of their potential nor their abilities—but a direct result of denying them equitable supports and resources they need to be fully engaged and succeed" (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012, p. 2). In turn, this understanding influenced their work focused on addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability. This was evident in both participant responses and a full review of documents.

This research study applied the distributed leadership theoretical framework to explore the following research questions: How do district- and school-level leaders understand disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class and/or disability? How do these understandings then influence the work of leadership that focuses on addressing disparities in race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability? The distributed leadership framework allowed for a focus on interactions and the practice of leadership (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2004; Spillane et al., 2009; Sherer & Spillane, 2011). Specifically, the practice of leadership focused on the interactions of district- and school-level leaders and aspects of their work such as the tools and routines utilized to address disparities in student performance and broaden students' opportunity to learn (Spillane, 2006; Sherer & Spillane, 2011).

In this study four researchers (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014) explored how district- and school-level leaders' understanding influenced the work of addressing barriers inhibiting students' opportunity to learn. In an attempt to answer the overarching research

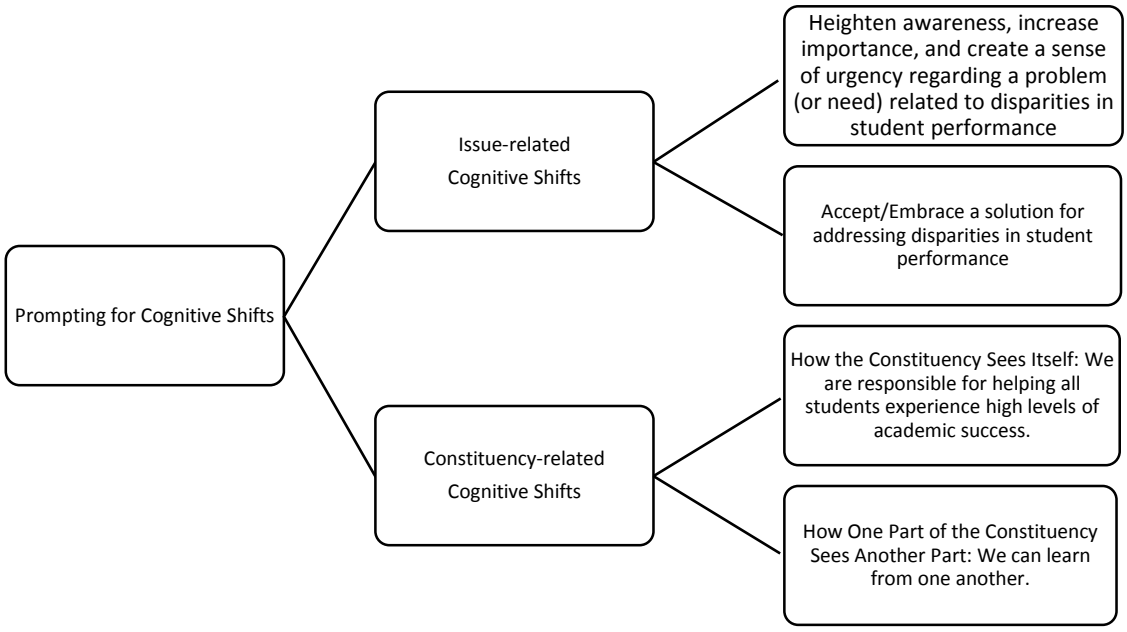
questions, each researcher examined separate aspects of the central phenomenon, including:

- The specific shifts in thinking that district- and school-level leaders identified as needed before disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability could be effectively addressed, as well as the strategies district- and school-level leaders used in their attempts to prompt these shifts in thinking (Allwarden, 2014).
- The professional learning leveraged by district-level leaders for school-level leaders as an action to further learn about, understand, and address the barriers that may be inhibiting students' opportunity to learn (Talukdar, 2014).
- The data analysis structures and routines that district- and school-level leaders perceived to be essential in understanding and addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability, as well as promoting students' opportunity to learn (Potenziano, 2014).
- The influence that interactions between district- and school-level leaders had on their understanding of barriers to students' opportunity to learn, as well as the influence that existing ties between district- and school-level leaders had on their practice aimed at improving students' opportunity to learn (Zaleski, 2014).

Prompting cognitive shifts. The findings from this portion of the case study include (a) district-and school-level leaders used a range of framing strategies to prompt a common set of issue-and constituency-related cognitive shifts and (b) a correlation existed between leaders' use of particular framing strategies and their "level" of leadership (Allwarden, 2014). The cognitive shifts that district- and school-level leaders were attempting to prompt are presented in Figure 1 and have been divided into two broad categories: issue- and constituency-related cognitive shifts.

Issue-related cognitive shifts focus on the problems and solutions related to student performance disparities. When attempting to prompt for issue-related cognitive shifts, district- and school-level leaders' choice of framing strategies revealed similarities and differences. Whereas both district- and school-level

Figure 1. Prompting for Cognitive Shifts



leaders used data to quantify and clarify the magnitude of a problem in order to heighten awareness, increase importance, and create a sense of urgency (e.g., data war rooms, data walls, excel spreadsheets–all color-coded to emphasize the distribution of students by achievement level), district- and school-level leaders differed in their use of framing strategies for getting their audience to accept a solution. District-level leaders focused on offering proof that an idea worked. For example, they frequently leveraged the success of the Level 1 school with implementing inclusive practices. District-level leaders also focused on explicitly establishing the direction (e.g., schools had to establish a data war room; principals had to spend 2.5-3 hours a day in classrooms). School-level leaders, on the other hand, concentrated on presenting solutions as best practice (e.g., students analyze their own data, set individual goals, and track their progress; teachers use performance data to inform their instruction and select appropriate interventions). Furthermore, data collected from leaders of Level 1 and Level 2 schools revealed that these leaders also focused on framing issues as having leverage (e.g., being strategic, focusing on and prioritizing the “right things”) and connecting solutions to their school’s mission.

Constituency-related cognitive shifts involve a change in how an audience views themselves, their work, or others within the school district. The framing strategies that district- and school-level leaders used to prompt constituency-related cognitive shifts were the same. In order to foster a sense of responsibility for helping *all* children experience high levels of academic success, leaders focused on redefining and re-envisioning the constituency's role and responsibilities within the organization (e.g., district-level leaders working side by side principals; principals spending 2.5-3 hours a day in classrooms; using data to inform instruction). In order to promote the idea that we can learn from one another, leaders concentrated on building and acknowledging the competency and capacity present within the constituency. While the framing strategies used by district- and school-level leaders were the same, important differences were noted regarding the cognitive shift that emphasized learning from one another. Whereas district-level leaders spoke of the schools learning from one another (e.g., communicating regularly, sharing successful practices), school-level leaders spoke of learning from individuals, or groups of individuals, within their school (e.g., data meetings, common planning time). Another notable difference emerged with the disaggregation of data collected from leaders of Level 1 and Level 2 schools. These leaders used the framing strategy of redefining the students' role and responsibility within the organization to prompt the following cognitive shift among students: we are capable (e.g., knowing their data, setting goals, tracking their progress).

Social ties among leaders. Social capital theory reminds us that the structure of ties relate to how knowledge and resources flow to individuals in the network (Daly & Finnigan, 2011), and are considered to be a determinant in actions (Daly & Finnigan, 2010, 2012; Leanna & Pil, 2006), and that trusting, cohesive, partnerships are an essential element to the tie relation (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Daly & Finnigan, 2011, 2012; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

"I WISH WE COULD COME TOGETHER MORE AS A COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP GROUP IN THE DISTRICT. WE'RE UNABLE TO. IT'S NOT THE CULTURE…YOU HAVE TO BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY AND HOW YOU SAY IT AND WHEN YOU SAY IT; IT SOMETIMES CAN COME BACK AND GET YOU."
BUILDING LEADER JAYDEN

Therefore, strengthening social ties is one way to improve collaboration among district- and school-level leaders. After analyzing the data, the existing social ties and their influence on leadership practice as it relates to students opportunity to learn became clearer. As such, the following findings emerged: (a) lack of trust hinders building level leader ties with one another, (b) district leaders have greater ties and reciprocity among themselves than building leaders, (c) despite specific building and district relations, ties are evident between district- and school-level leaders, and (d) regardless of tie relations, all leaders engage in tasks to enhance student learning (Zaleski, 2014).

***Lack of trust hinders building-level leader ties with one another*.** Figure 2 displays the first analysis of tie relations, which is the social network among building leaders. Each node represents one of the six interviewed building leaders and the arrows reflect the direction of the connection. Participant responses revealed that there are no mutual ties indicated in the group. Mutual ties in this study refer to an aspect of tie strength that involves a reciprocal sharing of information (Granovetter, 1973).

***District leaders have greater ties and reciprocity among themselves than building leaders*.** Relationships between district leaders are represented in Figure 3. Here, it is noted that there are greater ties than in the building leader network as well as greater reciprocity. However, of the eight district leaders interviewed, there are no more than three mutual ties between them. Trust was mentioned as a factor among half of the district leadership team. Further interview data reveals that despite the nature of building or central office specific relations, this does not hinder the interactions between school and district level leaders.

[redacted]

"YEAH, I THINK PART OF IT YOU BUILD TRUST AS YOU GET TO KNOW PEOPLE…I ALREADY KNEW VERONICA COMING INTO THE POSITION ALREADY, AND I'VE LEARNED OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS TO HAVE A LOT MORE TRUST FOR SEAN, LOGAN, AND COTE…I THINK THIS GROUP HAS A GOOD WORKING DYNAMIC. I MEAN, DO WE GO BACK AND FORTH WITH EACH OTHER SOMETIMES ON SOME MATTERS, OF COURSE WE DO, BUT JUST OUT OF FRUSTRATION FOR THE WHOLE JOB AND LACK OF RESOURCES."
DISTRICT LEADER ADRIANNE

Figure 2. Sociogram for School-Level Leaders

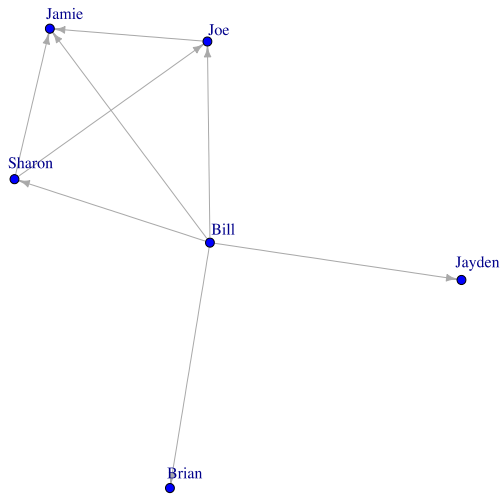
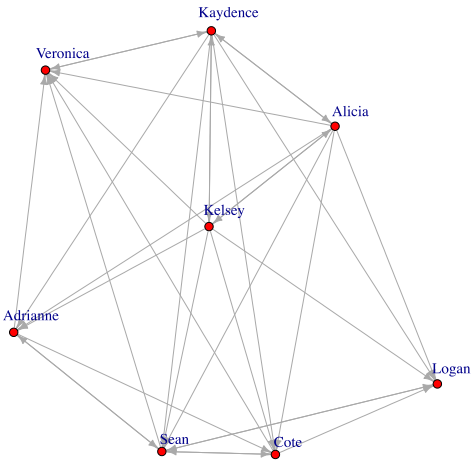
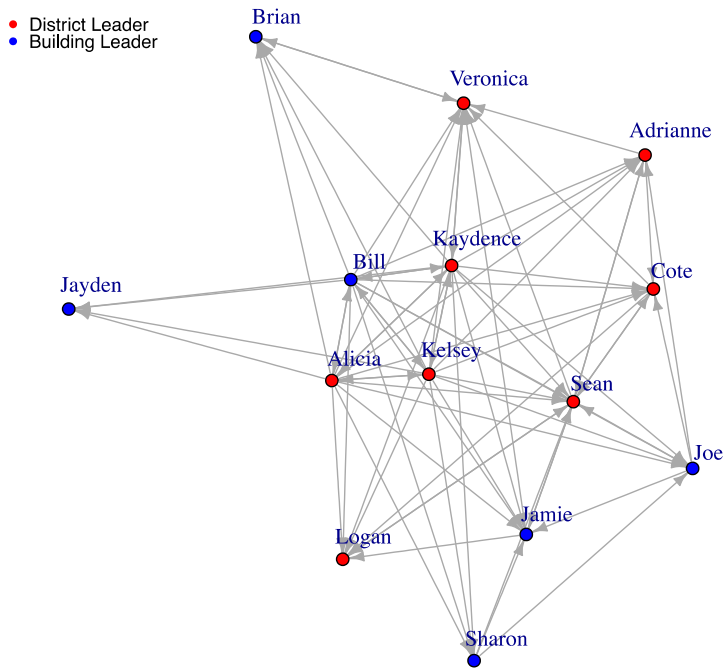


Figure 3. Sociogram for District-Level Leaders



Despite specific building and district relations, ties are evident between district- and school-level leaders. Despite the fact that trust impacts at least half of the relations at the school and district level, Figure 4 highlights that all building leaders have incoming ties from at least three district leaders. Figure 4 also highlights that more than half of the district leadership team is actively seeking out building leaders. Also, all five district leaders engaging with principals share at

Figure 4. Sociogram for District- and School-Level Leaders



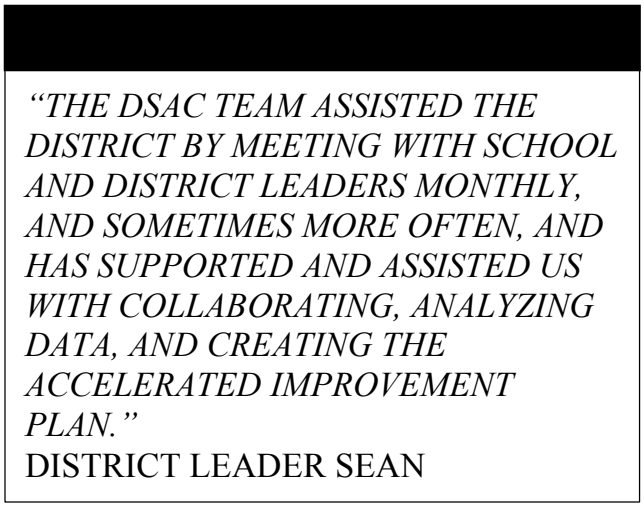
least one mutual tie with a building leader. Similarly, four of the six building leaders (with the exception of Sharon and Jayden) revealed that they are seeking out district leaders to exchange knowledge, ideas, and seek advice. The two leaders not seeking out district leaders attribute this to a perception that central office has too much on their plate and other resources are more easily accessible at the building level.

"I GUESS PART OF IT IS THEY ARE PEERS OF MINE AND IT'S A NATURAL WAY FOR ME TO KIND OF EXPAND THE KNOWLEDGE THAT I NEED BY WORKING WITH THEM, AND PROBABLY PART OF IT IS PROXIMITY. THEY'RE HERE IN THE SAME OFFICE WITH ME, I CAN SIT IN MY OFFICE AND SCRATCH MY HEAD AND TRY TO FIGURE IT OUT OR I COULD WALK DOWN THE HALL AND TRY TO BRAINSTORM AND TRY TO BRAINSTORM IT WITH THEM."
DISTRICT LEADER COTE

Complementary Findings

The following discussion synthesizes insights drawn from the four individual studies. These insights were gained by searching for complementary results based on the "complementarity model of triangulation" (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003, p.469). Applying the complementarity model of triangulation involved reviewing the individual studies for findings that complemented one another. Because the complementary findings were drawn from individual studies that highlighted different aspects of the central phenomenon, these findings offer a stronger depiction of the topic being analyzed (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003) and further inform current understandings about the work of leadership focused on addressing disparities in student performance and enhancing students' opportunity to learn.

Level 3 status: Catalyst for change. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) emphasized that initiating change often triggers cyclical patterns of acquiring knowledge and taking action. Insights from across the studies revealed that the designation of Level 3 state accountability status served as a catalyst for change in the New Hope School District. The assignment of Level 3 status led to the development of new organizational structures and routines, which, in turn, supported patterns of acquiring knowledge and taking action (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Specifically, the development of new organizational structures and routines led to (a) increased opportunities for leaders to interact with one another (Zaleski, 2014) and (b) enhanced opportunities for leaders to engage in professional learning (Talukdar, 2014). Furthermore, since the structures and routines described by district- and school-level leaders occurred regularly (e.g., weekly, monthly, quarterly), leaders were provided with ongoing support as they grappled with understanding—or further developing their understanding—of barriers hindering students' opportunity to learn (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014).



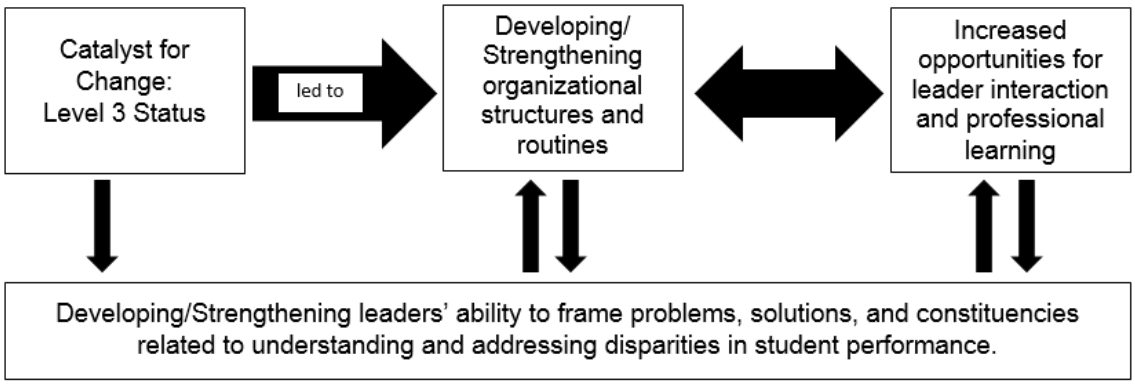
Additionally, the development of new organizational structures and routines provided leaders with a forum for presenting their plans for addressing disparities in student performance, as well as presenting the outcomes that resulted from actions taken.

Figure 5 depicts the relationship between the catalyst for change, the development of organizational structures and routines, and the increased opportunities for leader interaction and professional learning (Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Figure 5 also illustrates the relationship between these three elements and leaders' ability to frame problems, solutions and constituencies related to disparities in student performance (Allwarden, 2014). While the individual researchers of this study looked at specific aspects of leadership in isolation, Figure 5 offers a broader, more complete picture of how these elements interacted and influenced one another in real life.

As a result of the Level 3 status, district-level leaders sought out and established a partnership with the District and School Assistance Center (DSAC), a state sponsored organization. This partnership led to the establishment of new structures and routines which afforded on-going opportunities to conduct in-depth analyses of (a) disparities in student performance, (b) barriers in the learning environment, and (c) organizational challenges related to students' opportunity to learn. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) emphasize the importance of analyzing situations in an objective fashion and framing issues from a different perspective when working to addressing long-standing disparities in student performance. The partnership with DSAC led to the construction of structures and the development of routines that supported this aspect of leadership work.

As leaders came together to analyze disparities in student performance, barriers in the learning environment, and organizational challenges related to students' opportunity to learn, the professional learning environment within the district was further enhanced. The interactions that took place within this learning environment between district- and school-level leaders were examined as a critical element relating to school improvement (Daly & Finnigan, 2010, 2011, 2012). The superintendent's statement captures the value of these interactions when he offered, "The DSAC team assisted the district by meeting with school

Figure 5. The Interrelationship of Elements Studied



and district leaders monthly, and sometimes more often, and has supported and assisted us with collaborating, analyzing data, and creating the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP)." Frequently, interactions between district- and school-level leaders occurred during Administrative Council (ADCO), Full Administrative Council (FADCO), and traveling cabinet meetings (Zaleski, 2014). These meetings offered leaders regular opportunities to engage in professional learning that enhanced their capacity to (a) identify and describe gaps in student performance and (b) consider and explore potential barriers to student learning (Talukdar, 2014). In other words, these meetings offered leaders opportunities "to engage in continuous and sustained learning about their practice in the setting where they actually work...confronting similar problems of practice" (Elmore, 2004, p. 127).

Finnigan and Daly (2010) remind us that sharing knowledge and mobilizing resources embedded in individual interactions is critical to influencing practice and enhancing success in "purposive action" (p. 180). The assignment of Level 3 status triggered the mobilizing of resources to develop new structures and routines, which then enhanced leaders' ability to share knowledge and take purposive action (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). The actions taken were deliberate (thought about and discussed), developmental (designed to assist with growth and bring about improvement), and progressive (kept moving forward), always with the intent of ensuring that students' opportunity to learn was enhanced. These actions supported understanding student performance disparities and informing solutions to address barriers to students' opportunity to learn.

The leaders in New Hope School District also used organizational routines and structures to help distribute leadership responsibilities (Spillane, 2006). Prior to the Level 3 designation, structures and routines were in place that required district- and school-level leaders to meet. However, leaders were not required to collectively identify and develop a shared understanding of achievement disparities. Following Level 3 designation, enhanced and newly created structures and routines helped promote collaboration and build robust intra-organizational ties (Honig, 2004; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). The use of the structures and routines also played a critical role in guiding the New Hope School District in their development of a clearly aligned vision and mission (Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, & Hopkins, 2007; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

PARTICIPANT QUOTES

"AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP GROUP… WE'VE DONE, LET'S SEE MONTHLY MEETINGS…. CERTAINLY TALKING ABOUT THE DATA, TALKING ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF DATA….THEN, OKAY, HOW DOES THIS TRANSLATE INTO WHAT YOUR TEACHERS ARE DOING IN THE CLASSROOM."
BUILDING LEADER BILL

"IF I'VE LEARNED ANYTHING IN MY TIME HERE, EACH SCHOOL IS A FUNCTION OF THEIR PRINCIPAL, THE LEADERSHIP CULTURE AT THEIR SCHOOL….I THINK NOW WITH THIS ACCELERATED IMPROVEMENT PLAN WHICH WE ARE IN YEAR TWO OF, I THINK IT WILL HELP MOST OF THESE LEVEL 3 SCHOOLS MOVE UP AT LEAST ONE LEVEL….I'M CONFIDENT THEY CAN MOVE UP FROM AT LEAST THREE TO TWO."
DISTRICT LEADER LOGAN

Structures and routines led to shared understandings and collective action. New Hope School District leaders described specific structures and routines that had been set in place to support collaboration between district- and school-level leaders, as well as to support data use practices. The Administrative Council (ADCO), Full Administrative Council (FADCO), traveling cabinet, DSAC meetings, and the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) are examples of structures and routines put in place to support collaboration and data use among district- and school-level leaders (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). In addition, these structures allowed leaders to engage in ongoing professional learning (Talukdar, 2014). Spillane (2006) describes this

leadership practice as "a product of the joint interactions of school *leaders*, *followers*, and aspects of their *situation* such as tools and routines" (p. 3).

According to the distributed leadership framework, the structures used within the New Hope School District can be thought of as tools and routines because they involved recurring patterns of "interdependent actions, involving multiple actors" (Feldman & Pentland, 2003, p. 311). For instance, the traveling cabinet structure supported the routine of leaders meeting regularly to engage in ongoing professional learning that involved the frequent review and analysis of student performance data (Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014). Established structures and routines also sought to allow district-and school-level leaders to develop an understanding of the opportunity gaps present in the learning environment (Allwarden, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). The action planning template and the AIP that leaders created in partnership with DSAC facilitated this understanding (Zaleski, 2014). As a result, leaders' ability to recognize barriers was evident in the areas of leadership skills, curriculum alignment and implementation, and instructional practice. More specifically, leaders identified barriers specific to students with disabilities, students from low-income households, Latino/a students, and English language learners (ELL). Additionally, the implementation of enhanced and newly developed structures and routines helped to expose inequitable practices in the New Hope School District.

[redacted]

"THE SCHOOLS WE'RE STILL STRUGGLING WITH, YOU MAY HEAR [PRINCIPALS] SEPARATE OUT ONE POPULATION OF STUDENTS FROM ANOTHER, BUT THE SCHOOLS THAT WERE A SUCCESS, LIKE I SAID WITH THE DATA, THEY'RE ALL INCORPORATED IN; IT'S ALL STUDENTS ALL THE TIME. AND THERE'S A BIG SHIFT IN THE DISTRICT AROUND INCLUSIVE TEACHING."
DISTRICT LEADER ADRIANNE

District- and school-level leaders interviewed consistently referred to students receiving special education as the sub-group most impacted by the achievement gap in the New Hope School District. Research findings revealed that one of the barriers to student learning for students with special needs was inequitable access to the general education curriculum (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014;

Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Greene (1983) explains that equality in education focuses on "inputs" and ensures that the same is provided to all, while equity places emphasis on "outputs" and focuses on achieving the same outcomes for all. Lindsey et al. (2009) contend accommodations that account for differences, such as race and ethnicity, language, and ability are sometimes needed in order to achieve educational equity.

Students receiving special education services in the New Hope School District were often educated in separate settings. Research evidence revealed there were some schools that deliberately encouraged equitable learning environments for special education students. When comparing schools across the district, data indicated that schools utilizing co-teaching and inclusion models earned higher state accountability ratings than those that did not. By focusing on differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students within the general education classroom, leaders within the New Hope School District believed that school staff were moving closer to creating educational equity while improving students' opportunity to learn.

When examining how district-level leaders sought to leverage professional learning opportunities in the New Hope School District, leaders took advantage of improved structures and routines resulting from the DSAC partnership (Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014). Knapp (2003) reported "professional learning could involve changes in one's capacity for practice (i.e., changes in professionally relevant thinking, knowledge, skills, and habits of mind) and/or changes in practice itself (enacting the new knowledge and skills in one's daily work)" (pp. 112-113). New structures and routines, such as traveling cabinet meetings, not only resulted in increased interaction between leaders, but also offered occasions for leaders to build their data analysis and decision-making capacity (Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Further, structures and routines promoted sustained, job-embedded professional learning (e.g., ADCO, FADCO, and traveling cabinet meetings, learning walks, and 9-day instructional coaching cycle) and allowed for frequent collaboration and discussion of factors influencing teaching and learning (Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Given the evidence of deficit thinking that existed among some school staff, particularly as it related to special

education students, district leaders also sought to leverage professional learning to prompt cognitive shifts (Talukdar, 2014).

As district- and school-level leaders' understanding developed, so did their ability to influence how others understood factors contributing to disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability. Influencing how others understand a situation is a critical aspect of leadership work, and the ability to effectively frame the problems, solutions, and constituencies related to disparities in student performance becomes a powerful means for shifting the thinking of others. After all, when effectively done, influencing how others understand a situation can positively impact individuals' perceptions of their work and provide a powerful source of inspiration and motivation (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Foldy, Goldman, & Ospina, 2008).

The interactions and professional learning that occurred among leaders as a result of the structures and routines that were in place not only led to an understanding of the nature of the gap, it also led to an influence on their work, which focused on addressing disparities in student performance (Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Specifically, leaders recognized that ongoing data analysis was critical to teaching and learning improvements. The task of analyzing data was distributed among all leaders for the specific purpose of improving the professional capacity to identify gaps in learning with the goal of eliminating barriers. For instance, when looking at data, one building leader recognized that low-income and Latino students lacked opportunities pertaining to course placement; it was then brought to the attention of a district leader who subsequently mandated that all students take at least one Advanced Placement course prior to graduation. Similarly, as a result of student performance data analysis, several building-based accelerated improvement plans were strategically created and utilized as tools across the district to enhance the learning environment.

The Accelerated Improvement Plans included specific initiatives and objectives that were designed by school and district leaders as tools to guide their work in an effort to eliminate identified barriers and enhance student opportunities to learn. Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, and Hopkins (2007) remind us that

school improvement based on a distributed leadership model is not automatic, rather, “much depends on the way in which leadership is distributed, how it is distributed and for what purpose” (p. 9). The strategic approach utilized to address barriers in the learning environment in the New Hope School District as mentioned above reinforces that they subscribed to a distributed leadership model. It is clearly indicated that school and district leaders have gained an understanding of barriers in the learning environment pertaining to low-income students, as well as students with disabilities, as a result of their interactions with one another. However, further data reveals that despite these interactions some school leaders need additional support as they work to continually understand and address barriers in the learning environment.

School leaders need more central office support. During interviews some of the school level leaders indicated that they need more support from district level leaders regarding data analysis. District leader Kelsey acknowledged that district level leaders tend to assume everyone including administrators knows how to use data, and she further offered:

> We need to make sure that everybody understands what it is that we're analyzing, and exactly what a particular tool is able to do for us. So if we're looking at benchmarks in fluencies, people need to be aware that we are looking at fluency, and just fluency, and then extrapolating from that what that means, okay, that people need to understand what that can do for you and what it can’t do for you.

Daly and Finnigan (2010, 2011) emphasize that schools are rooted in the wider efforts of the district, and district-level leaders may have a direct influence on change initiatives and outcomes through the development of network ties between district- and school-level leaders. In an effort to examine leader connectedness and its relation to the performance of leadership tasks (Borgatti, Jones, & Everett, 1998), ties and relations among leaders was examined.

Student learning is enhanced regardless of tie relations. District- and school-level leaders revealed that they are engaging in a variety of practices to enhance students’ opportunity to learn at the school and district level. This was evident regardless of whether or not trusting ties were formulated and existent between

individuals (Zaleski, 2014). For example, to prompt shifts in thinking and practice among principals and school staff, district leaders fostered and leveraged professional learning activities (Talukdar, 2014). Interview responses suggested professional learning played a role in the way some thought about and in-turn approached their work with particular sub-groups of students (e.g., students with disabilities).

In addition, some district- and school-level leaders appeared more willing to learn from the best practices of schools realizing academic growth. One of the ways in which these educators were able to learn more about successful schools was through professional learning activities (e.g., book studies, belief surveys, case studies, and resource sharing) (Talukdar, 2014). For example, although Jamie shared no outgoing tie connections with building leaders, she acknowledged that she engaged in efforts with Bill and Joe to create a school within her school to address students and subgroups with risk factors such as poor attendance, retention, and high discipline referrals (Zaleski, 2014).

The systems and structures (ADCO, FADCO, traveling cabinet) are supporting leaders with enhancing students' opportunity to learn across the district. One school in the district did move from a Level 2 to Level 1 status last year; this is the highest performance rating assigned by the state. District leaders are diligently working with principals to close gaps in performance via the structures in place, and district leader Sean is working with principals on improvement planning at the building level. District leader Alicia also works with principals on attendance, dropout rates, and graduation rates within a four-year period of time. Although there was a lack of tie relations at the building and district level, this did not result in initiatives being stalled (Zaleski, 2014). Rather, despite the nature of relations in the New Hope School District, the organizational structures in place resulted in both building and district leaders being actively engaged in practices that were intended to support enhancing students' opportunity to learn (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014).

Recommendations for Practice

First and foremost, we recommend that the New Hope School District keep organizational structures intact. ADCO, FADCO, and the traveling cabinet offer

building leaders direct oversight and support from central office leaders. Spillane (2012) states that the advantages of organizational structures and routines are that they "allow efficient coordinated action; [provide] a source of stability; and reduce conflict about how to do work". Furthermore, the use of organizational structures and routines that district- and school-level leaders institute has significant potential to enhance students' opportunity to learn. This was best evidenced in the New Hope School District when district- and school-level leaders analyzed student data with uniformity resulting in at least one school narrowing achievement gaps and advancing to Level 1 status. School districts that embrace these types of structures and routines increase the likelihood that interaction among administrators will take place which will allow knowledge and resources to flow through the network of leaders, ultimately informing the work of practitioners (Daly & Finnigan, 2010). Sustainability is also likely enhanced when these structures and routines are in place. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) emphasize "sustainable leadership matters [as it] preserves, protects, and promotes deep and broad learning for all in relationships of care for others" (p. 23). In an effort to enhance relations, increase support from central office leaders to building leaders, and enhance success at the building level, it is recommended that the district consider creating prescribed structures/routines that require school-level leaders to visit each other's schools to analyze data together and share successful practices. In doing so, school-level leaders are also less likely to feel unsupported and isolated from one another.

Varying tie relations may be a result of competitive pressure at the local level to perform and meet accountability demands (Zaleski, 2014). Daly (2009) points out that as a result of high stakes accountability, relations between school and district leaders tend to become less collaborative and more official and organized. One way to remedy this is by fostering the professional growth of leaders and differentiating supports for principals depending on their needs as instructional leaders. Daly and Finnigan (2010) highlight that "leadership development programs both outside and within districts have the unique opportunity to create the space for reflection and dialogue for leaders to explore these tensions and how they may be brought into balance" (p. 520). Therefore, it is essential that school districts add a component to their existing professional development plans that specifically promote the building of relationships among

leaders across the district in a way that supports collaboration (Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). The National Institute for School Leadership Program (NISL) is one example of a program designed to assist leaders with collaborating and enhancing their skills in the face of accountability demands (NISL, 2013). Participation in the NISL program also holds the potential to increase the social capital among leaders and assist with policy implementation at the local level (Daly & Finnigan, 2010).

District-level leaders should also consider creating opportunities for school-level leaders to strengthen relations and formulate new ties (Zaleski, 2014). Allowing leaders' time to meet and discuss building based concerns without a central office driven agenda may enhance relations as well. Daly and Finnigan (2010) point out in a related study "district[s] will have to avoid the trap of merely providing time and directives to work together as this does not necessarily result in meaningful collaboration between leaders" (p.128). Therefore, practitioners should heed the advice of DuFour and Burnette (2002) by insisting that principals develop improvement plans demonstrating the collective efforts of the team and not merely the work of individuals.

Enhancing connections at the district level will assist with building relations across the district, ultimately improving the overall school climate (Zaleski, 2014). Curtis and City (2009) agree that collaboration is critical and begins at the central office level stating:

> Central office departments create teams to do their work most effectively. The superintendent convenes a senior leadership team to shape and drive the direction of the system's work. Effective collaboration is critical to success at all levels of the organization. Yet the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for collaboration are seldom taught. It is deeply ironic that a skill students need to ensure their future opportunities is one that the adults responsible for their education often do not possess and have not had the opportunity to learn (p. 38).

In order for the central office team to be considered high functioning, there must be a "high level of trust, a willingness to be vulnerable, and comfort with conflict" (Curtis & City, 2009, p.56). District leaders are encouraged to implement and

facilitate team-building activities to work on strengthening partnerships with each other. Incorporating time on meeting agendas for district- and school-level leaders to engage in activities focused on developing authentic relationships is a suggested activity (Curtis & City, 2009). For instance, Curtis and City (2009) suggest leaders complete the Meyers & Briggs Personality Inventory and share results in an effort to enhance relations and build trust. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) emphasize that "investing resources in training, trust building, and teamwork" (p. 267) is a function of sustainable leadership that has long lasting effects.

District leaders should consider expanding liaison support to all principals, and not limit this resource to struggling schools alone (Zaleski, 2014). Honig et al. (2010) point out that central office staff can engage in efforts to support the teaching and learning environment entirely by "taking the case management and project management approaches to their work"(p. 7). Honig et al. (2010) emphasize that the case management approach enables district leaders to utilize their expertise to fully support "the specific needs, strengths, goals, and character of each individual school in their case load" with the goal of working to provide "high-quality, responsive services appropriate to their individual schools"(p. 8). Likewise, the project management approach results in district leaders directly "solving problems that promised to help schools engage in teaching and learning, even if those problems cut across multiple central office units" (p. 8).

District-level leaders should also consider expanding professional learning opportunities intended to eliminate deficit thinking within the district (Talukdar, 2014). The New Hope School District superintendent took positive steps to support principals in their efforts to dismantle deficit thinking and enhance some of the skills needed to assume responsibility for teaching and learning improvements. Moving forward, the superintendent must deepen the dialogue around instructional issues beyond data review. In light of the success of schools that ensured students with disabilities had full access to the curriculum, consideration should be given to expanding the full-inclusion teaching model across the district.

Consideration should also be given to implementing multicultural and anti-racist professional learning opportunities in order to continue to prompt shifts in teacher beliefs. While anti-racist and multicultural education are closely related in the goal to improve student outcomes, Kailin (1998) believes that multicultural education is a non-threatening way to address gaps in student performance because it is focused around building teachers' and students' cultural awareness rather than tackling structural aspects of racism. Kailin (1998) further argues that an anti-racist approach to education must focus on the deliberate dismantling of racism whereas multicultural education strives to broaden teachers' understanding of the diverse histories of students they serve as a means to empower them. It is important to note, however, that ultimately multicultural education and anti-racism both seek raise the academic achievement of students of color while nurturing the growth of all students. By implementing multicultural and anti-racist professional learning opportunities, administrators of the New Hope School District will be better equipped to learn about, understand and address the undeniable correlation between students' race and ethnicity and disparities in student performance.

There are prevailing approaches to multicultural and anti-racist professional development and learning that espouse to reduce the achievement gap while transforming teacher beliefs (Ferguson, 2007; Howard, 2007; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Skrla, McKenzie & Scheurich, 2009). Ferguson (2007) is responsible for putting forth a conceptual framework titled the Tripod Project, which aims to close the achievement gap by addressing the three legs of the "tripod": content, pedagogy, and relationships. He argues that in order to reduce achievement gaps, content must be accessible and culturally relevant, pedagogy must involve varied approaches to meeting students' needs, and teachers must develop meaningful relationships with students while maintaining high expectations for ALL students.

Skrla et al. (2009) describe the need to use Equity Audits as a way to create equitable and excellent schools. They contend that by assessing the equity and inequity of programs, as well as teacher quality and achievement, school leaders will be better prepared to develop an action plan that uncompromisingly promotes educational equity. They describe particular skills teachers must

develop to improve their practice that include clearly communicating expectations, stimulating students with high-level tasks, and using an asset-based approach when working with diverse populations.

While experienced, high-quality teachers within the New Hope School District may already possess many of the skills needed to serve most students effectively, Singleton and Linton (2006) argue that in order to reduce the "racial" achievement gap, educators must be willing to engage in courageous conversations about race. Additionally, they and many others (Gay & Howard, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Nieto, 2000; Tatum, 1997) believe it is critical for teachers to explore their own racial identities and consider how it affects their teaching of students, particularly students of color (e.g., Asian American, Hispanic/Latino, Black/African-American, Multiracial and Native American). The research of Singleton and Linton (2006) indicates when white teachers were able to relate to their diverse students experiences, and as they developed cultural awareness or competence, a narrowing of the achievement gap occurred. Given over 90% of administrators and teachers in the New Hope School District are white while over 60% of students identify as students of color, and in light of the existing racial achievement gap as measured across three performance indicators (i.e., state achievement tests, graduation rates, and SAT performance reports), serious consideration should be given to implementing multicultural and anti-racist professional learning opportunities.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

Cohesive relations between school and district leaders are often hindered by accountability policy demands (Daly 2009). This often complicates the job of leaders trying to effect change in schools (Zaleski, 2014). Daly and Finnigan (2010) point out that "effectively responding to state and federal accountability policies at the local level may require a more collaborative relationship among and between central office and school administrators to allow for the diffusion of innovation and knowledge"(p.131). In an effort to strike this balance, district leaders need to develop systems and structures to enhance collaboration within school districts (Potenziano, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). New Hope School District leaders implemented structures to support collaboration in an effort to enhance students' opportunity to learn. Their efforts yielded evidence that some schools

were making progress. This supports the research claim that school culture, namely interactions, is a valuable consideration when enhancing student opportunities to learn. Policy makers should be mindful of this consideration and recognize that accountability demands alone do not promote equitable student opportunities to learn (Harris & Herrington, 2006).

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study contributed to theoretical knowledge and provided a practical contribution to the field of education, future research areas must be noted. First, conducting an exploration of interactions among leaders using an external social capital lens (Leana & Pil, 2006) may prove beneficial. The external partnership with DSAC in this study was instrumental in assisting leaders with responding to accountability demands beyond standardized testing through the development of the Accelerated Improvement Plan. A deeper exploration of external partnerships may yield findings in relation to the importance of these relations when attempting to enhance students' opportunity to learn. Second, an examination of which structures and routines district- and school-level leaders perceive to be important when analyzing student data in multiple districts on a larger scale may prove beneficial. Third, future research should include multiple districts with similar demographics in an effort to gain a more comprehensive and generalizable understandings of how district- and school-level leaders seek to understand and address disparities in student performance.

Finally, because the research team members sought to understand how district- and school-level leaders learned about, understood, and addressed barriers to students' opportunities to learn, interviews were limited to district- and school-level leaders. This had potential implications for the overall conclusions drawn. Future research efforts involving staff at all levels could help to address this limitation and assist in uncovering the true impact of efforts aimed at eliminating barriers to students' opportunity to learn.

Conclusion

The literature portrays a multifaceted depiction of how many factors have the potential to impact district- and school-level leaders understanding of the nature of the gap and how these understandings then influence the work leadership

focused on addressing disparities in student performance. It was the intent of the research team to enhance insight in this area for practitioners. It is evident that leaders' interactions and framing of events coupled with how they practice has the potential to enhance the school climate and increase students' opportunities to learn (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Additionally, the purposeful distribution of leadership work provides the opportunity to enhance collaboration and collective action (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Conversely, without proper district-level leadership and leader distribution, effectively addressing disparities in student performance may be hindered.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Tables

Figures

Chapter One[1]

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The most recent "report cards" from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) highlight enduring and substantial achievement gaps. In these reports, disaggregated data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveal statistically significant discrepancies between the performance of African-American and Hispanic students and their White, non-Hispanic peers (NCES, 2011a, 2011b). Equally large performance gaps separate low-income from middle- to high-income students (NCES, 2011a, 2011b). And, although less attention has been focused on measuring, monitoring, and reporting changes experienced by English language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities (SD), considerable performance gaps also exist for these student populations (NCES, 2011a, 2011b).[1] Equally alarming, national data exposes sizable differences in graduation rates when presented by race/ethnicity. For example, while the graduation rate for White, non-Hispanic students reaches 82%, the graduation rates for African-American and Hispanic students are at 63.5% and 65.9% respectively (Stillwell, Sable, & Plotts, 2011). These on-going, statistically-significant disparities raise critical questions regarding educational equity and students' opportunity to learn within the public school system.

While the reporting of disaggregated data by student subgroup ensures "a focus on the extent to which an achievement gap exists" (Shaul & Ganson, 2005, p. 152), it fails to provide district- and school-level leaders with the descriptive, diagnostic data

[1] Chapter One was co-authored by Ann F. Allwarden, Phillip J. Potenziano, Sujan S. Talukdar, and Karen J. Zaleski.

needed to identify key factors inhibiting student performance (Braun, 2005; Stecher, 2005). Identifying and understanding factors hindering student performance is critical knowledge for leaders to cultivate as they work to address elements within their school or district that may need to change if student learning is to improve. Boykin and Noguera (2011) also emphasize the need for educators to develop a deep understanding of these underlying complexities, warning:

> Before undertaking efforts to eliminate the disparities in outcomes that, in most districts, correspond to the race and class backgrounds of students...it is essential that educators understand the nature of the gap and why it exists. Absent a clear understanding of the causes of the gap, it is easy for schools to adopt strategies that either do not work or, in some cases, even exacerbate the problem (p. 1).

Addressing long standing disparities in student performance calls for systemic change, a theme that resounds throughout and across the work of many educational practitioners, scholars, researchers, and advocacy groups. Igniting such a transformational change requires "step[ping] outside the situation, make[ing] sense of it, and reframe[ing] the problem" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 54). Part of reframing the problem involves a collective shift in thinking that moves away from viewing disparate outcomes as an "achievement gap," which too often reinforces the beliefs and attitudes of some that the root cause of widely discrepant outcomes stems from underperforming students' lack of ability to achieve at high levels, and towards seeing disparate outcomes as an "opportunity gap," which places the onus for divergent outcomes squarely upon the educational system. This essential shift in thinking emphasizes that disparities in outcomes for students are absolutely "not a reflection of their potential nor their

abilities—but a direct result of denying them equitable supports and resources they need to be fully engaged and succeed" (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012, p. 2). In regards to the notion of providing equitable supports and resources, Katie Haycock, director of The Education Trust, contributed the following quote to a press release entitled "A Dream Deferred: 50 Years after Brown vs. Board of Education":

> We have never made good on the promise of equal opportunity in public education....The fact is, we have organized our educational system in this country so that we take children who have less to begin with and then turn around and give them less in school, too. Indeed, we give these children *less* of all of the things that both research and experience tell us make a difference (The Education Trust, 2004).

In an effort to further explore the "opportunity gap" that exists for many students, the purpose of this qualitative research study will be to explore how district- and school-level leaders' understanding of the "nature of the gap" influences the work of leadership focused on addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability. In this study, the "work of leadership" will be defined as "influencing the community to face its problems….leaders mobilize people to face problems, and communities make progress on problems because leaders challenge and help them do so" (Heifetz, 1996, p. 14). Based on this description, challenging and helping communities to make progress on addressing an identified problem is a key outcome of leadership. Therefore, this study will examine specific ways leaders go about challenging and helping their community to face the problem of student performance disparities (i.e., prompting changes in thinking, leveraging professional learning), as well as specific

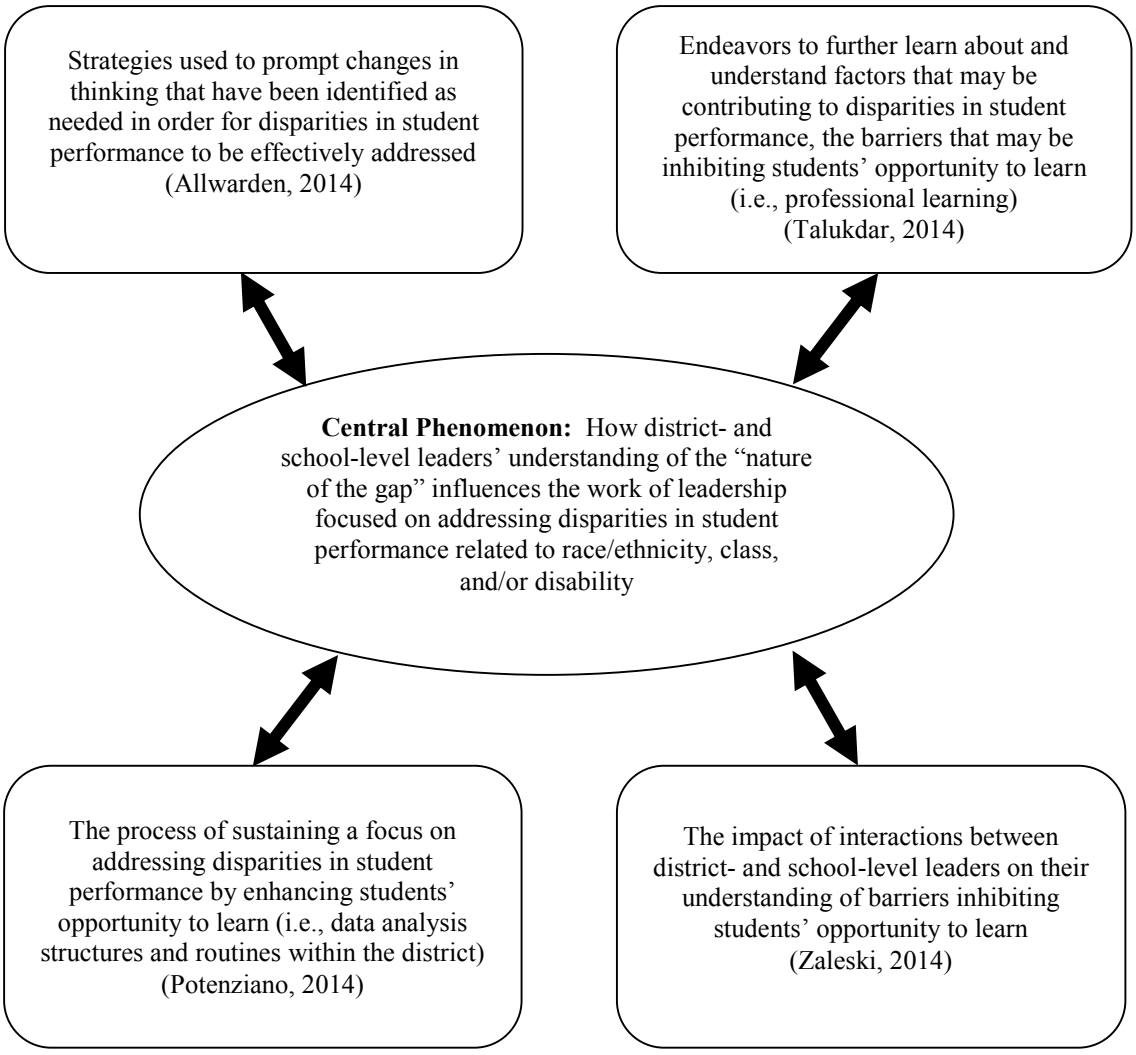
aspects of the situation that may be contributing to the community's collective capacity to address student performance disparities (i.e., data analysis structures and routines, relationships between district- and school-level leaders) (see Figure 1.1).

Research Questions

Facing problems often involves initiating change, and initiating change often triggers cyclical patterns of acquiring knowledge and taking action (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). In order to better understand the actions of district- and school-level leaders, the following research will be explored:

- How do district- and school-level leaders understand disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability? How do these understandings then influence the work of leadership focused on addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014)?
- What specific shifts in thinking do district- and school-level leaders identify as needed before disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability can be effectively addressed? What specific strategies do district- and school-level leaders use to prompt shifts in thinking about disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability (Allwarden, 2014)?
- How do district-level leaders leverage professional learning for school-level leaders as an action to further learn about, understand, and address the barriers that may be inhibiting students' opportunity to learn (Talukdar, 2014)?

Figure 1.1. Developing an In-depth Understanding of the Central Phenomenon



- What data analysis structures and routines do district- and school-level leaders perceive to be essential in understanding and addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability, as well as promoting students' opportunity to learn (Potenziano, 2014)?
- How do interactions between district- and school-level leaders influence their understanding of barriers to students' opportunities to learn (Zaleski, 2014)?

In general, this study aims to further inform the work of district- and school-level leaders by helping them to examine and evaluate specific leadership practices that focus on

understanding and addressing disparities in student performance. Spillane and Diamond (2007) point out that "knowing what leaders do is one thing, but a rich understanding of how, why and when they do it, is essential if research is to contribute to improving the practice of leading and managing schools" (p.5). Understanding how, why, and when to engage in specific leadership practices will allow district- and school-level leaders to more effectively and strategically address disparities in student performance—ultimately enhancing students' opportunity to learn.

The concept of opportunity to learn has an interesting, as well as controversial, history. The following section will explore a range of policies and scholarship from which the notion of opportunity to learn emerged and developed. This review of relevant policies and scholarship also serves to illuminate the incredibly complex and challenging work of leadership, specifically the work of leadership focused on understanding and addressing the seemingly entrenched discrepancies in student performance.

Chapter Two[2]

Literature Review

Historical Context

The release of *A Nation at Risk (NAR)* in 1983 marks a defining moment in the history of American education, heralding the advent of standards-based educational reform. While previous reform efforts worked to provide *equal* access to education for minority groups (e.g., *Brown v. Board of Education*, Civil Rights Act of 1964, Elementary and Secondary Education Act Amendments of 1966, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975), the standards-based reform movement focuses on *excellence* for *all*. Recommendations identified in the *NAR* report included (a) developing rigorous and measurable standards, (b) lengthening the amount of time spent in school, (c) increasing the requirements for high school graduation, (d) improving teacher preparation and salaries, and (e) strengthening educational leadership (NCEE, 1983). These recommendations, which called for a significant investment of resources, were put into motion in an effort to regain "our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technology innovation" (NCEE, 1983, p. 1).

Published during the same year as *NAR*, "Excellence, Equity, and Equality" by Thomas F. Green (1983) offers further insight into the thinking that surrounded and informed policymakers' decision-making processes during this time period. Green (1983) explains how the quest for one educational ideal (i.e., excellence, equity, or equality) may

[2] Chapter Two was co-authored by Ann F. Allwarden, Phillip J. Potenziano, Sujan S. Talukdar, and Karen J. Zaleski.

inhibit the development of another (p. 381). In particular, Green (1983) clarifies that the principles of equality and equity differ in significant ways. For example, the ideal of equality focuses on "inputs" and denotes providing the same to all, disregarding differences such as race/ethnicity, language, age, gender, and ability (Green, 1983; Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 2009). Providing the same to all may at times create unfair and unjust circumstances leading to greater levels of inequity and injustice. As a result, there are times when "persons may be treated and rewarded unequally and also justly" (Green, 1983, p. 324). While some examples of inequalities are in fact just, inequities are never just. This is a critically important distinction. The ideal of educational equity is based upon fair treatment through "justified inequality" (Green, 1983, p. 331). Equity acknowledges and promotes the notion of providing accommodations "for differences so that the outcomes are the same for all individuals" (Lindsey et al., 2009, p. 166).

After describing, comparing, and contrasting the ideals of excellence, equity, and equality, Green (1983) goes on to carefully consider "which of the ideals should have priority in the formulation of policy" (p. 318). He concludes:

> Policies in pursuit of educational excellence are more likely to produce gains in equity than policies in pursuit of equality are likely to produce gains in excellence. Thus, it is better to pursue the ideal of equity through the pursuit of excellence than to pursue excellence through the advancement of equality. If this is true, then it is better to formulate policy for the advancement of excellence than to formulate policy for the advancement of equality (p. 331).

Therefore, even though the *NAR* report was not particularly concerned with strengthening

educational equity (Harris & Herrington, 2006), Green (1993) concluded that through the development of policies that pursue excellence of education, the interests of educational equity will also be served. In their analysis of the implementation of *NAR* recommendations, Harris and Herrington (2006) offer further support for Green's conclusion, stating that the "reforms recommended in NAR...had a significant positive impact on achievement equity" (p. 213). Yet, initial gains credited to *NAR* recommendations, which focused on providing more resources and better content, slowed as the attention of policymakers turned to the development of an accountability system.

In the pursuit of excellence, the role of standards continued to gain strength, culminating in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, now commonly referred to as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). With bi-partisan support for the enactment of NCLB, standards-based educational reform emphasizing standards, assessments, and accountability "was catapulted into national policy" (Foorman & Nixon, 2006, p. 163). In order "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education" (20 U.S.C. 6302 § 1001), NCLB established a test-based accountability system (Hamilton, 2003; Hamilton & Koretz, 2002). Test-based accountability systems include four major components: goals (i.e., rigorous standards), measures (i.e., high-stakes state tests), targets (i.e., adequate yearly progress), and consequences (i.e., school transfer options, supplemental services, corrective actions, and restructuring) (Hamilton & Koretz, 2002).

Since the authorization of NCLB in 2001, there is little evidence to suggest that the current accountability system is having a positive effect on long-standing equity issues (Harris & Herrington, 2006). Even though the ultimate effectiveness of current

federal and state policy is yet unknown, policymakers continue to show unwavering support for the pairing of rigorous standards to test-based accountability. Most recently, support for this pairing was demonstrated by the provision of federal funding to the assessment consortiums of SMARTER Balanced and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) to support the development of a national testing system that assesses the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) adopted by 45 out of the 50 United States of America (Achieve, Inc., 2013; SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

While efforts to raise standards and improve assessments deserve thoughtful consideration in the "landscape of educational policy, they are not effective drivers toward significantly changing the conditions for students who are in need….For a student, or to a parent whose child is academically drowning, simply moving the shoreline further away is not compelling" (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012, pp. 10-11). Instead, attention must turn towards formulating "a support-based reform agenda focused on creating the learning environment and condition in which...all children will have an opportunity to learn and succeed" (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012, p. 11).

Opportunity to Learn (OTL)

The punitive nature of current policy and legislation increases pressure on school leaders to address educational inequities and narrow existing achievement gaps—or suffer the consequences of not making adequate yearly progress. This increased focus on students' achievement, as measured by standardized tests, heightens an awareness of and concern for the consequences of high-stakes tests on students (Darling-Hammond, 1994,

2004; Guiton & Oakes, 1995; Porter, 1994, 1995). Critics of accountability measures argue that it is unfair to hold schools and students accountable for content and skills they have not had the opportunity to learn (Darling-Hammond, 1994, 2004; Guiton & Oakes, 1995; Traiman, 1993; Ysseldyke, Thurlow, & Shin, 1995). Therefore, while NCLB outlines the legal responsibilities that accompany the current test-based accountability system, there remain important ethical considerations regarding increased accountability and high expectations.

Starratt (2003) argues "imposing…accountability systems without fully addressing the issue of OTL is a violation of social justice" (p. 298). Have all students had the opportunity to learn? Darling-Hammond (2004) emphatically disputes the notion that standards and testing alone will improve schools or guarantee equitable opportunities to learn, emphasizing that "the biggest problem with the NCLB act is that it mistakes measuring schools for fixing them" (p. 9). Instead, school reform efforts need to focus on ensuring access to high-quality teaching and providing equitable opportunities to learn rigorous curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 2004, 2007a, 2007b).

Although a recurring theme of current school reform, a focus on truly providing equitable opportunities to learn rigorous curriculum struggles to gain—and hold—center stage. As a result, prominent individuals within the field of education have called for the inclusion of data beyond results from high-stakes state tests. In her testimony for the House Education and Labor Committee on the reauthorization of NCLB, Darling-Hammond (2007b) emphasized the need for multiple indicators of learning and school performance in order to "build a more powerful engine for educational improvement by understanding what is really going on with students and focusing on the elements of the

system that need to change if learning is to improve" (p. 72). Darling-Hammond goes on to present and describe an indicator system that includes measures of (a) student learning (e.g., state and local assessments), (b) additional student outcomes (e.g., data on attendance, promotion/retention, and graduation rates), and (c) learning conditions (e.g., school climate, instructional practices).

Part of the intent behind the development of school process indicators, or a complete "indicator system," is that they offset the deficiencies arising from an over-focus on school inputs (i.e., standards) and school outputs (i.e., test scores). School process indicators measure "services the education system is actually providing" (Stecher, 2005, p. 4). The intent of school process indicators is to "monitor the nature of schooling: the curriculum students study, the instruction teachers provide, and the environment in which teaching and learning take place" (Porter, 1991, p. 13). Consequently, data from school process indicators offer district- and school-level leaders opportunities to evaluate their school reform efforts and strengthen their decision-making process, which could ultimately lead to more effective and equitable school improvement planning and implementation.

The Challenge of Defining and Measuring OTL

Threaded throughout much of the available research is the ongoing challenge of defining and measuring a variable, or set of variables, which represent a valid and reliable measure of a school's contribution to students' learning. The challenge resides in the fact that school systems are inherently complex organizations. Therefore, identifying, isolating, and measuring school factors that contribute to students' learning remains an on-going difficulty. As a result, the thinking of scholars and researchers who have

actively confronted these challenges differs considerably. In an effort to illustrate noteworthy differences, two contrasting perspectives will be presented. The work of Andrew Porter represents a traditional view of OTL, and the work of James Paul Gee represents a sociocultural view of OTL.

A traditional perspective of OTL. Porter (1994) discusses how OTL has historically been defined as "the enacted curriculum as experienced by the student" (p. 427). Porter (1994) also points out that enacted curriculum encompasses both the content of instruction and "the pedagogical quality of instruction" (p. 427). "The content and pedagogy of instruction are the two best school-controlled predictors of student achievement" (Porter, 1994, p. 427). Therefore, Porter (1991, 1994) presents for consideration a theoretical model that focuses on the content of instruction as a school process indicator. The model predicts a causal relationship between the level of curriculum alignment and student outcomes. In other words, stronger curriculum alignment leads to better student outcomes.

Efforts aimed at strengthening curriculum alignment focus on increasing the degree of alignment between (a) instruction, (b) standards, (c) assessments, (d) curriculum materials and resources, and (e) professional development opportunities (Porter, Smithson, Blank, & Zeidner, 2007). Yet, whereas efforts that focus on curriculum alignment have the potential to significantly improve student outcomes (Porter, 1991, 1994), "alignment is only good for education if the target for alignment is of sufficient quality" (Porter et al., 2007, p. 29).

A sociocultural perspective of OTL. Gee (2008), in contrast, argues against definitions of OTL based on a traditional view of knowledge, which focuses on

quantifying exposure to instructional content that is aligned with standards and assessments. These definitions are built upon the assumption: If students are exposed to the same instructional content, then they have been provided with an equal opportunity to both (a) learn the instructional content and (b) demonstrate their learning on an assessment. Embedded within this notion are underlying "complexities" (Gee, 2008, p. 77). These underlying complexities relate closely to the concept of equality and justice discussed earlier. Providing equal opportunities does not ensure equal outcomes. Instead, students need to be provided with equitable opportunities to learn instructional content and demonstrate their learning. This shift in thinking significantly complicates measuring students' OTL. The difference between measuring equal and equitable opportunities to learn is the difference between a teacher covering instructional content and a student learning instructional content. Yet, if these underlying complexities are ignored, Gee argues that the resulting measure of OTL offers an incomplete picture.

Gee (2008) defines OTL from a sociocultural perspective, which examines the relationship between learners and their environment. Gee describes the "action possibilities" (p. 81) that exist within learners' environments. Gee then discusses the impact of learners' abilities, or lack thereof, to first recognize action possibilities available to them, and then to convert those action possibilities into "actual and effective" (p. 81) actions. This pairing of action possibilities with learners' capacity to take meaningful action broadens the traditional view of what it means to offer opportunities to learn.

Common ground. The distinct perspectives embraced by Porter and Gee illustrate the challenges and limitations that accompany defining and measuring OTL.

Yet, interesting to consider is the motivation behind both Porter and Gee's work. Although Porter and Gee provide very different ways of thinking about and conceptualizing OTL, both share a common focus on examining what is happening in schools. What is the nature of schooling, and how does it enhance or inhibit students' opportunities to learn? This emphasis on the part of researchers and scholars to untangle complexities inherent within the process of schooling provides further incentive for looking more closely at the specific actions of district- and school-level leaders as they grapple with these very challenges. Additionally, Boykin and Noguera (2011) put forth for consideration: "It is essential that educators understand the nature of the gap and why it exists" (p. 1). Therefore, this research study will focus on how district- and school-level leaders' understanding of the "nature of the gap" influences their actions as they work to address disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability, including (a) the use of strategies to prompt shifts in thinking, (b) the leveraging of professional learning, (c) the use of data analysis structure and routines, and (d) the interactions between district- and school-level leaders.

Theoretical Framework

> A useful theory helps you *organize* your data….A useful theory also *illuminates* what you are seeing in your research. It draws your attention to particular events or phenomena and sheds light on relationships that might otherwise go unnoticed or misunderstood (Maxwell, 2008, p. 227).

The researchers of this study viewed the process of identifying and reviewing potentially useful theories, which ultimately led to the final selection of a useful theory, as an important part of developing an appropriate research design. The researchers

recognized that a useful theory would influence the methods of data collection and would also become an important instrument for generalizing the results of the case study (Yin, 2008). Therefore, researchers believed the identification and selection of a useful theory would further support and enhance their ability to thoroughly investigate the research questions and draw valid and reliable conclusions. At the same time, the researchers considered the disadvantages to using existing theory. Maxwell (2008), referring to the work of Becker (1986), follows the benefits of using an existing theory with the following warning:

> Existing literature, and the assumptions embedded in it, can deform the way you frame your research, causing you to overlook important ways of conceptualizing your study or key implications of your results….Trying to fit your insights into this established framework can deform your argument, weakening its logic and making it harder for you to see what this new way of framing the phenomenon might contribute (Maxwell, 2008, p. 227).

After reviewing both the beneficial and detrimental effects of using existing theory, the advice of Becker (1986) ultimately guided the selection and implementation of existing theory in this study. "'A serious scholar ought routinely to inspect competing ways of taking [*sic*] about the same subject matter,' and warns 'Use the literature, don't let it use you'" (Becker, 1986 as cited in Maxwell, 2008, p. 227). Therefore, the researchers explored various existing frameworks in their efforts to both (a) identify an existing theory that appropriately aligns with the research focus and will allow the research team to reap the potential benefits and (b) examine existing theories in an effort

to help them "routinely inspect" competing ways of seeing and understanding the same subject matter.

Since this research study will be examining district- and school-level leaders' understandings and how these understandings then influence the work of leadership, the researchers determined that the distributed leadership theoretical frame, with its focus on interactions and the practice of leadership aligns most closely with this study (Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Spillane, Healey, & Mesler, 2009). Spillane (2006) states distributed leadership practice is defined as "a product of the joint interactions of school *leaders*, *followers*, and aspects of their *situation* such as tools and routines" (p. 3). Tools can be defined as outer portrayals of ideas that multiple leaders use in their practice, such as lesson plans, student work samples, observation protocols, and student assessment data (Spillane, 2006). Spillane (2012) uses the definition of routines created by Feldman and Pentland (2003): "a repetitive, recognizable pattern of interdependent actions, involving multiple actors" (p. 311). As this theoretical frame is applied to the present study, there will be focus on both leaders' interactions and aspects of their situations as defined from this perspective.

A distributed leadership perspective is primarily about interactions and leadership practice (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2004; Spillane et al., 2009). According to this framework, decisions are not made in isolation, rather, the interactions between many individuals involved in shared activities contribute to the decision making process. "These collaborative dialogues are a key component of what Spillane et al. (2004) have defined as the social distribution of leadership" (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007, p.71). Leadership from a distributed perspective is defined as individuals, officially

or unofficially assigned to leadership roles, taking responsibility for the work of leadership (i.e., leadership activities) (Spillane, 2006). Distributed leadership is more than leaders interacting and assuming responsibilities. Instead, it is the interactions among these individuals that specifically contribute to the practice of leadership that is critical to this theoretical framework (Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, & Hopkins, 2007; Spillane, 2006).

The distributed leadership framework highlights the potential and opportunity for any individual within a school district to engage in the work of leadership, strengthening the collective capacity of individuals to change and improve schools (Harris, 2002). Examining this shared aspect of leadership work, as well as how it can be intentionally distributed across individuals as they work to address disparities in student performance, offers the researchers greater insight into the topic being studied as they seek to answer the research questions.

The development of distributed leadership is also believed to enhance school improvement by building the capacity of employees to achieve goals collectively (Copland, 2003; Harris, 2004). However, it is important to note that school improvement based on a distributed leadership model is not automatic, rather, "much depends on the way in which leadership is distributed, how it is distributed and for what purpose" (Harris et al., 2007, p. 9). Specific consideration will be given to these factors when examining leadership practices at the district and school levels.

Spillane (2006) and Spillane et al. (2004) further state that distributed leadership offers an analytic perspective that is designed to allow school leaders to reflect on and diagnose the distribution of leaders, the practices employed, and the impact on outcomes

which enhances the design process. Spillane (2006) describes three governing design principles:

- The practice of leadership should be a central focus in efforts to improve school leadership because it is a more proximal cause of instructional improvement than leadership roles, processes or structures.
- Intervening to improve leadership necessitates attention to interactions, not just actions, because leadership practice takes shape in the interactions between leaders and followers.
- Intervening to improve leadership practice requires attention to the design and redesign of aspects of the situation, such as routines and tools, because the situation helps define leadership practice (p. 93).

The distributed leadership framework will inform this study and assist in identifying and assessing the routines and tools utilized in practice and distributed among district- and school-level leaders as they work to address disparities in student performance. Additionally, the framework will assist us in exploring the significant nature of relations between district- and school-level leaders. This framework also supports the individual portions of this study, which examine related but distinct aspects of leadership work—cognitive shifts, professional learning, data structures and routines, and leader interactions.

Chapter Three[3]

Methods

The focus of this study was on investigating how district- and school-level leaders understand disparities in student performance due to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability, and how their understandings of those disparities then influence the work of leadership focused on addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability in a culturally diverse school district. Therefore, the design of this research sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do district- and school-level leaders understand disparities in student performance due to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability?
2. How do these understandings then influence the work of leadership focused on addressing disparities in student performance due to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability?

Because the researchers were interested in "not only the physical events and behavior taking place, but also how the participants in [the] study make sense of these and how their understandings influence their behavior" (Maxwell, 2008, p. 221), qualitative methods offered the greatest opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding.

Qualitative Research

Maxwell (2008) outlines five broad research goals which he believes are especially well-suited to qualitative research. Three of the five goals identified by Maxwell (2008) were particularly relevant to the researchers' proposed inquiry:

[3] Chapter Three was co-authored by Ann F. Allwarden, Phillip J. Potenziano, Sujan S. Talukdar, and Karen J. Zaleski.

- Understanding the meaning, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, and actions they are involved with, and of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences.
- Understanding the particular context within which the participants act and the influence this context has on their actions.
- Understanding the processes by which events and actions take place (Maxwell, 2008, p. 221).

The researchers wanted to hear richly detailed, first-hand accounts of events, situations, and actions that have influenced district- and school-level leaders' understanding of existing disparities in student performance. In other words, they wanted to "achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience" (Merriam, 2009, p. 14). Furthermore, the researchers hoped to gain insight into how these understandings then influence the work of leadership focused on addressing disparities in student performance. As a result, they believed the characteristics, or features, which distinguish qualitative research, provided them with the greatest opportunity to develop and share an in-depth understanding of the research focus.

Eisner (1991) describes six features that make a study qualitative. First, qualitative studies are "field focused." Researchers "observe, interview, record, describe, interpret, and appraise settings as they are" (Eisner, 1991, p. 33). Next, researchers consider themselves to be the main "instrument." This is important because "the features that count in a setting do not wear labels on their sleeves: they do not announce

themselves. Researchers must see what is to be seen…it is not a matter of checking behaviors, but rather of perceiving their presence and interpreting their significance" (Eisner, 1991, pp. 33-34). The third feature of a qualitative research identified by Eisner (1991) is its "interpretive character." Interpretive character refers to a researcher's ability to make sense of and explain a situation, including the significance it holds for those involved in the situation. A fourth feature of qualitative research is "*the use of expressive language* and the presence of voice in text….We display our signatures. Our signature makes it clear that a person, not a machine, was behind the words" (Eisner, 1991, p. 36). The fifth feature is its "attention to particulars." This allows the readers to "gain a feeling for the distinctive characteristics of the case. The classroom, the school, the teacher are not lost to abstraction" (Eisner, 1991, p. 39). The final feature detailed by Eisner (1991) involves the criteria used to evaluate qualitative research. "Qualitative research becomes believable because of its *coherence*, *insight*, and *instrumental utility*" (Eisner, 1991, p. 39).

The researchers believed the six features of qualitative research, as described by Eisner (1991), captured the type of inquiry in which they needed to engage to successfully address both the research goals and questions. Under the umbrella of qualitative research designs, the researchers selected the case study approach "which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 534).

Case Study

Creswell (2012) defines a case study as "an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection

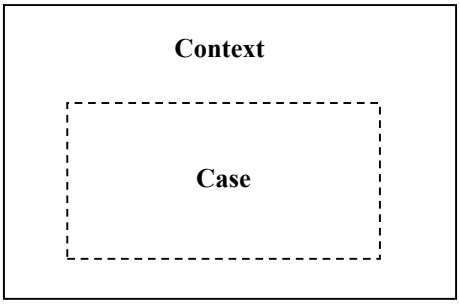
(Creswell, 2007). Bounded means that the case is separated out for research in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries" (p. 465). Yin (2008) explains "a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18) (see Figure 3.1).

Case studies rely on multiple sources of evidence (Creswell, 2012), and both single and multiple case studies are used in case study research (Yin, 2008). Yin (2008) explains that case study research is quite challenging and should not be underestimated. The single case study allows the researcher to devote more time to exploring the case in depth (Creswell 2007, 2012). Conducting a single case study allowed the research team the opportunity to fully analyze all aspects of the study in depth.

Sample and Participant Selection

The study began with the identification of a school district and superintendent through purposeful sampling. Patton (2002) contends that "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry" (p. 230). Similarly, Maxwell (2008) describes purposeful sampling as "a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 235). Merriam (2009) further explains that "purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77). As a result, purposeful sampling allows "for the

Figure 3.1. Single-case Study (Yin, 2008, p.18)



examination of cases that are critical for the theories that the study began with or that have been subsequently developed" (Maxwell, 2008, p. 235). In other words, the sampling for this study was theoretically-driven. "Choices of informants, episodes, and interactions are being driven by a conceptual question, not by a concern for 'representativeness'" (Miles & Huberman, 2004, p. 29). The researchers' main goal was to select a site and individuals who could help them gain an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon to be studied. Therefore, the researchers established criteria that guided their selection of the school district. The following sections outline three "stages" of sampling. During each successive stage, established criteria was applied to further narrow the pool of potential research sites to include only districts that would provide a strong case for this research study.

District selection: Stage one. Researchers visited the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) website to review school district profiles. School districts that met the following criteria were noted: (a) a K-12 public school district, (b) a small to medium-sized school district (i.e., five to ten schools), and (c) a school district with identifiable, measurable disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class and/or disability.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2012):

> A difference in scores between two groups of students (for instance male and female, Black and White, or Hispanic and White) can only be considered an achievement gap if the difference is statistically significant, meaning larger than the margin of error.

As such, in stage one of district selection the researchers adhered to this definition in order to identify measurable disparities in student performance. When reviewing school district profiles on the DESE website, particular attention was paid to MCAS scores and graduation rates disaggregated by race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability. Further, the researchers sought to understand disparities in performance across student sub-groups within a single-school district. Disparities within the district were not compared to the performance of students across the nation.

The first criterion, a K-12 public school district, and the third criterion, a school district with identifiable, measurable disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class and/or disability, relate directly to the educational issue that this research study identified as concerning: On-going, statistically significant disparities raise critical questions regarding educational equity and students' opportunity to learn within the public school system.

The second criterion, a small to medium-sized school district (i.e., five to ten schools), was pre-determined to provide the research team with an opportunity to conduct both comprehensive and in-depth interviews of district- and school-level leaders. Since qualitative studies require researchers to "define aspects of your case(s) that you can study within the limits of your time and means" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 27), a

small to medium-sized district allowed the researchers to conduct in-depth interviews of most of the district- and school-level leaders. Furthermore, interviewing most of the district- and school-level leaders provided a richer, more insightful understanding of the case, as well as increased the credibility of the study. Comparing and contrasting data collected from individuals with different perspectives is a form of triangulation, which is an important strategy for strengthening the internal validity of a research study (Merriam, 2009).

District selection: Stage two. During the second stage of sampling, the criteria for selection shifted to identifying school districts whose administrators (a) believed they were committed to addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability and (b) thought they were actively engaged in work that focused on eliminating performance gaps related to at least one of the following areas: race/ethnicity, low income, and/or disability. The research team reviewed school district websites for evidence relating to one or more of the following areas:

- The district thought it was investing resources (e.g., time, money, people) in an effort to address disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability.
- The district thought it was implementing a strategic change effort that targeted addressing student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability.

The criteria for this stage of sampling was directly related to the study's overarching research questions. In order for the researchers to examine how district- and school-level leaders understand disparities in student performance due to race/ethnicity,

class, and/or disability, as well as how their understandings of these disparities then influence the work of leadership focused on addressing disparities in student performance, the school district ultimately selected believed that they were committed to and actively engaged in addressing student performance disparities.

In addition to visiting and reviewing the websites of the school districts, the strategy of reputational sampling was relied upon heavily during this stage. Reputational sampling involves seeking out recommendations from experts or key informants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researchers asked experts and key informants in the field (e.g., superintendents, principals, university professors, and researchers) to suggest school districts that they believed met the pre-determined criteria. Therefore, while the review of district websites served as a source of useful information, it was not a requirement for this stage of sampling.

District selection: Stage three. Once the research team narrowed down a list of potential research sites that met the pre-determined criteria, additional sampling was conducted to ensure that the superintendents or assistant superintendents of the school districts met the following established criteria: (a) had provided the district with stable, consistent leadership and (b) thought they were providing school-level leaders with a professional learning opportunity that focused on addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability. With regard to stable and consistent district-level leadership, the research team sought out a district that had either employed their superintendent or assistant superintendent for at least two years and/or had a district-level leadership team that had provided consistent leadership over the course of at least two consecutive years in the area of addressing disparities related to

race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability.

Although the state and district websites provided evidence indicating that a superintendent or assistant superintendent met the pre-determined criteria, the researchers relied more heavily upon reputational sampling as a strategy during this stage. Once a district that seemingly met all of the established criteria was identified, initial contact was made with the superintendent. The initial contact was made by an individual who was known to the research team and was also a colleague of the superintendent. After talking with the superintendent, this individual connected the research team with the superintendent through email. Through email the superintendent asked the research team to send a description of what the proposed study would entail. A member of the research team responded:

> Thank you for your email and interest in our study. On behalf of our research team, I have attached a brief overview of what our study entails. We would love the opportunity to discuss this with you, and it is our hope to set up a date/time to meet with you at your convenience. We look forward to your response and please do not hesitate to contact us with any specific questions you may have regarding our study.

The overview sent to the superintendent included (a) the study's research questions, (b) the purpose of the research study, (c) a description of how and what data would be collected, and (d) the amount of time research participants would need to commit to the study. After the superintendent read the overview of the proposed study and indicated that he was interested in talking further with the research team, the team provided the superintendent with a number of potential meeting dates and times, the superintendent

selected a date and time that worked best for him and a face-to-face meeting was scheduled.

Three out of the four researchers were able to meet with the superintendent. At this meeting the superintendent began by sharing some of his personal history, including where he grew up and where he had lived as an adult. He expressed that living in different areas of the state strengthened his lens and passion to serve all students regardless of their socio-economic background. The superintendent then went on to briefly describe the current focus of the district- and school-level leaders' work. The superintendent described the role of data in their efforts to improve student achievement. He also emphasized the importance of collaboration between district- and school-level leaders. Lastly, the superintendent expressed interest in participating in the proposed study but stated he would need to consult with the leaders making up the Full Administrative Council (FADCO), as they would be asked to participate.

The superintendent asked the research team to attend the next FADCO meeting and present to the other district- and school-level leaders. The research team agreed and returned to the district two weeks later to provide members of FADCO an overview of the proposed study. After the presentation, the superintendent asked the members of FADCO to let him know if they had any hesitations or questions. He later sent an email to the research team that read, "I asked people to get back to me if they had any hesitations or questions and the only feedback I have gotten are yes."

School-level leaders and additional district-level leaders. The strategies of purposeful and snowball sampling were used to identify school-level leaders, as well as additional district-level leaders. All building principals were asked to participate in the

study. In order to identify additional district-level leaders to interview, the researchers relied on the superintendent and assistant superintendent to recommend individuals whom they felt could best describe efforts aimed at impacting students' opportunity to learn and performance gaps. This strategy of sampling is referred to as snowball sampling. Creswell (2012) defines snowball sampling as "sampling procedure in which the researcher asks participants to identify other participants to become members of the sample" (p. 628). Merriam (2009) further elaborates by stating that snowball sampling "involves locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria you have established for participation in the study. As you interview these key participants [i.e. the superintendent and the assistant superintendent] you ask each one to refer you to other participants" (p. 79). Thus, the interview snowball grew to include additional district-level leaders who played a critical role in efforts aimed at understanding and addressing barriers inhibiting students' opportunity to learn.

Additionally, under specific conditions the use of snowball sampling would have been extended. For example, if a building principal had stated to an interviewer that he or she should interview another building-level leader because this individual played a critical role in the school's efforts to understand and address barriers inhibiting students' opportunity to learn, the researchers would have considered extending the use of snowball sampling. This recommendation would have needed to be freely offered during the interview. The researcher would not have actively sought out this information. Furthermore, the research team would have met to discuss and debate the usefulness and appropriateness of including the recommended interviewee in the sample. Using snowball sampling to reach additional individuals that otherwise would have been

excluded would have potentially allowed the research team to gain further information that may have helped strengthen the triangulation of interview data. Furthermore, the use of snowball sampling aligned with both the type of research being conducted (i.e., qualitative) and the study's theoretical framework (i.e., distributed leadership) because it would have used the social or personal knowledge of the individual being interviewed (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Although extending the use of snowball sampling was part of the initial research design, none of the participants interviewed recommended interviewing individuals beyond central office leaders and building principals.

Data Collection

Data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews and then supplemented by the gathering of documents recommended by participants during their interviews.

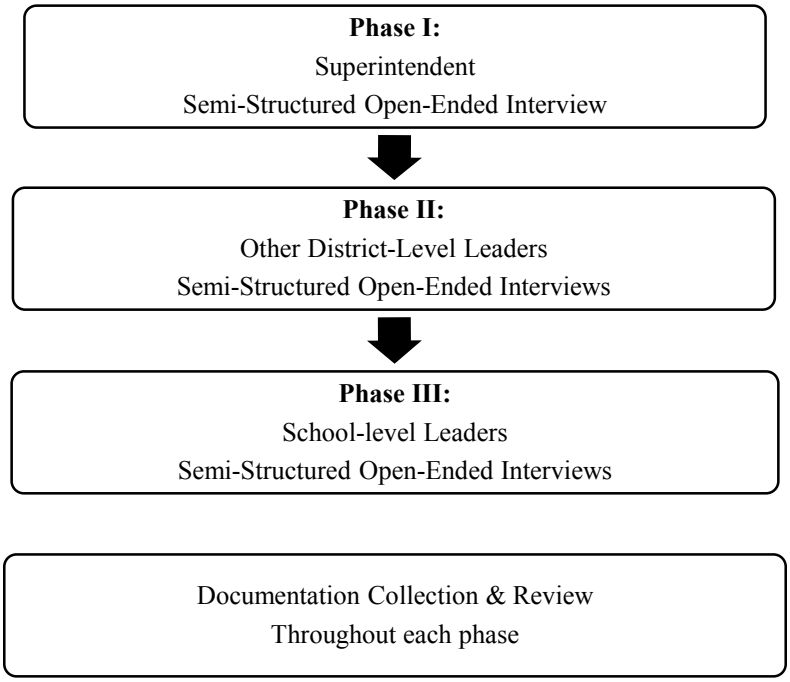
Interview. DeMarrais (2004) defines the research interview as "a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study" (p. 55). Merriam (2009) provides a continuum of three types of interviews: highly structured/standardized, semi-structured, and unstructured/informal (p. 89). Open-ended, semi-structured interviews served as the primary method of data collection for this case study. Falling in the middle of the "interview structure continuum" (Merriam, 2009), a semi-structured interview method provides a researcher the opportunity "to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 2002, p. 341), and to respond flexibly to new information that may surface related to topic being studied (Merriam, 2009).

> Semi-structured interviews allow the opportunity to digress from the primary question and probe a response to understand more clearly what is seen as a provocative remark on the part of the interviewee. Such remarks may come in two categories: (1) the researcher has not heard that position stated before or (2) what has been said seems to be in contradiction to comments others have made previously (James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam, 2008, pp. 73).

While semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility, they also provided for some uniformity among the researchers during data gathering. Additionally, having a pre-determined list of questions enhanced the researchers' ability to efficiently gather needed information. More open-ended, less focused interview protocols can lead to collecting "too much superfluous information…An overload of data will compromise the efficiency and power of the analysis" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 35). Interviews assisted researchers in answering the study's overarching research questions, as well as provided insight into the researchers' individual portions of the study. Figure 3.2 provides a conceptual design that illustrates the order of interviewing. The interview process also assisted the researchers in determining "what services the education system is actually providing" (Stecher, 2005, p.4).

Interviews were conducted in-person within the school district setting, in as natural an environment as possible, most frequently at each interviewee's office, unless an alternate location was mutually agreed upon. Privacy was a factor in determining the location to ensure the session was uninterrupted, and in the hopes that this would enhance the participants' attentiveness and willingness to respond in a fashion that was open and honest. In an effort to minimize intrusion upon the interviewees' ability to perform their

Figure 3.2. Sequence of Interview Process



professional duties, all interviews were arranged at a time convenient for the interviewees. Specific interview protocols for this study were used and are located in Appendix A. All participants were asked to sign a Consent to Participate form. This consent reviewed participants' rights, details of confidentiality and record keeping procedures, and offered them the information necessary to make an informed decision prior to agreeing to participate.

Each interviewer allowed for approximately one hour per interview. All four research team members conducted interviews individually or in pairs with interview assignments predetermined. All interviews were recorded in their entirety unless a participant asked otherwise. If an interviewee preferred that the interview not be recorded, the interviewer proceeded with the interview by taking hand-written notes. This happened only once during the collecting of data. One participant asked that the audio

recording be stopped in the middle of an interview. The participant wanted to share information that he or she was not comfortable having audio recorded. The participant agreed to the interviewer taking notes by hand during this portion of the interview. Following this portion of the interview, the recording of audio resumed for the remainder of the interview.

The research team piloted the research questions. Each member of the research team piloted the interview protocol a minimum of two times and reported back to the research team on what was learned from those interviews and how to improve upon them (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) stresses the importance of piloting interview questions:

> Not only do you get some practicing interviewing, but you also quickly learn which questions are confusing and need rewording, which questions yield useless data, and which questions, suggested by your respondents, you should have thought to include in the first place" (p. 95).

Research team members used the strategy of conducting pilot interviews in pairs to ensure that the interview protocol was sufficiently covered, as well as to ensure that there was consistency across researchers regarding how interviews were conducted. In addition, during the interview piloting process, the researchers attempted to mitigate any issues that the presence of a digital voice recorder may have caused by practicing with the recording devices they planned to use (McMillian, 2004). A professional transcriptionist, who was required to sign a confidentiality agreement, was hired to transcribe some of the interview recordings. In an effort to further strengthen the reliability of the study, secondary sources of data were also sought out, including archived schools documents (Creswell, 2012).

Documents. The researchers used purposeful sampling for the identification and collection of relevant school and district documents. Creswell (2012) extols that the use of "documents represent a good source for text data for a qualitative study" (p. 223). Furthermore, Stake (1995) states that using a variety of data sources such as archival documents will reduce the potential for misinterpretation and help produce greater reliability. Yin (2008) also states the benefit of using documents in case studies, explaining that documents are not the case study but rather help explain and corroborate details of the study.

In an effort to collect relevant documents, each participant was asked during his or her interview if there were specific documents that he or she viewed as particularly germane to the researchers' areas of focus (i.e., prompting shifts in thinking, professional learning, data analysis structures and routines, interactions) and would recommend that the researchers collect for analysis. Researchers also sought out additional documents that they believed were pertinent to the case, including:

- District Improvement Plan
- School Improvement Plans
- Documents outlining and detailing professional learning opportunities relevant to the study topic offered by the district

The collection and analysis of document data offered researchers the opportunity to crosscheck and verify interviewee responses, as well as the conclusions being drawn by the researchers as they engaged in data analysis. This process of verification supported the triangulation of data and thus strengthened the trustworthiness of the study's final conclusions and findings.

Data Analysis

This research study followed the three components of data analysis described by Miles and Huberman (1994): (a) data reduction, (b) data display, and (c) conclusion drawing/verification.

Data reduction. The first component of data analysis, data reduction, involves "selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). For this study, the process of data reduction began with the identification of a theoretical framework (i.e., distributed leadership) and the development of specific research questions (i.e., How do district- and school-level leaders understand disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability? How do these understandings then influence the work of leadership focused on addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability?). The process of data reduction continued with the selection of specific strategies for sampling (i.e., criterion-based selection and snowball sampling). Decisions regarding the choice of a theoretical framework, the development of research questions, and the selection of sampling strategies served as important mechanisms for focusing and narrowing (or reducing) the data that was ultimately collected. Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to these decisions as "anticipatory data reduction" (p. 10) because they are made before the collection of data has begun.

The process of data reduction continued throughout the study. During (and after) the data collection period of the study, data reduction occurred as researchers engaged in the coding process. Creswell (2012) defines coding as a "qualitative research process in which the researcher makes sense out of text data, divides it into text or image segments,

labels the segments, examines codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapses these codes into themes" (p. 618). Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1994) describe coding as "a way of forcing you to understand what is still unclear, by putting names on incidents and events, trying to cluster them, communicating with others around some commonly held ideas, and trying out enveloping concepts against a wave of observations and conversations" (p. 62). In other words, as researchers engaged in the process of coding, they identified and assigned labels to "chunks," in essence highlighting and extracting sections of data that seemed particularly relevant. The process of coding, therefore, was inherently analytical and served as another important mechanism for further reducing the data collected.

Creating codes. Prior to entering the research site, each researcher created a "start list" of codes based on the study's theoretical framework and their specific research questions. In order to ensure the consistent application of codes across interview transcripts and documents each researcher developed clear definitions for each of their master codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Definitions for master codes were theoretically based and drawn from the literature. The analysis of collected data began with the coding of the transcript from the interview with the superintendent. The process of coding continued through subsequent phases of analyzing different "sets" of interviews (i.e., district-level leaders, school-level leaders). These successive sets of data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. The constant comparative method "involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. Data are grouped together on a similar dimension. The dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category" (Merriam, 2009, p. 30). The use of the constant

comparative method—constantly comparing the data for similarities and differences—further refined each researcher's initial set of codes. (Information regarding how each researcher's initial list of codes changed across the course of the study is detailed in the researcher's individual section of the study.) Miles and Huberman (1994) cite the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) as they describe the different ways in which codes can be revised as a study progresses:

- Filling in: adding codes, reconstructing a coherent scheme as new insights emerge and new ways of looking at the data set emerge
- Extension: returning to materials coded earlier and interrogating them in a new way, with a new theme, construct, or relationship
- Bridging: seeing new or previously not understood relationships within units of a given category
- Surfacing: identifying new categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 62)

Coding procedures. The process of coding began following the first trip to the field to collect data. Researchers first independently read and coded interview transcripts and any collected documents. Then, after the researchers completed their independent coding of the data (i.e., interview transcripts, documents), the researchers met in pairs to share how each coded the data. The researchers then worked to reach consensus regarding interpretations. Additionally, the researchers had planned to follow the recommendation of Miles and Huberman (1994) which encourages researchers to code data collected during each visit to the site before returning to the site to collect more. This cycle would have supported researchers' emerging understanding by "working through iterative cycles of induction and deduction to power the analysis" (Miles & Huberman,

1994, p. 65). The scheduling of interviews did not provide the researchers enough time to code a data set before returning to the field. Yet, following the collection of data, coding procedures still involved iterative cycles of induction and deduction as the researchers refined and revised their list of codes and then recoded previously coded data.

Marginal remarks. As researchers coded multiple pages of text, they interspersed coding with written remarks in the "margins." Since researchers used web-based qualitative research software, marginal remarks were recorded by clicking on and opening a comment window. These remarks included the researchers' thoughts and reactions to the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) emphasize that "these ideas are important; they suggest new interpretations, leads, connections with other parts of the data" (p. 67). Miles and Huberman (1994) also suggest that recording marginal notes may "point to important issues that a given code may be missing or blurring, suggesting revisions in the coding scheme" (p. 67). In addition to noting marginal remarks early in the coding cycle, researchers were also able to retrieve and review "chunks" of text that share a common code and add new marginal remarks.

Memoing. Glaser (1978) describes memoing as "the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding" (p. 83). The content and focus of memos varies. Memos can be written when a researcher is confused or surprised. Memos can also be written in response to another researcher's memo, sharing an alternative perspective. Other memos may focus on proposing a new code (or set of codes). Memos are frequently written to explore emerging patterns and themes. While the content and focus of memos varies, the writing of each memo provides

researchers important opportunities to gain further clarity and insight. The researchers of this study followed the memoing advice of Miles and Huberman (1994):

- Always give top priority to memoing.
- Memoing should begin as soon as the first field data start coming in, and should usually continue until right up to production of the final report.
- Keep memos "sortable."
- Memos are about ideas…Simply recounting data examples is not enough.
- Don't standardize memo formats or types, especially in a multi-researcher study.

Data storage and management. As data was collected, it was compiled into a "case study database" (Yin, 2008). A case study database refers to the collection and organization of data. The storage and organization of the data was critically important. A well-organized case study database allowed for the easy retrieval of relevant data during analysis. For this reason, a "code-and-retrieve" computer software program was used to ensure the development of a well-organized case study database. Code-and-retrieve programs allowed researchers to "divide text into segments or chunks, attach codes, and find and display all instances of coded chunks (or combinations of coded chunks)" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 312). This coding scheme allowed for the easy retrieval of relevant data to support the work of determining (a) the frequency of themes and patterns, (b) the intersection of themes and patterns, and (c) the comparisons of themes and patterns.

Data displays. The second component of data analysis, data displays, involves displaying the data as "an organized, compressed, assembly of information that permits

conclusion drawing and action" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). The use of data displays further supported the work of comparing and contrasting data, identifying patterns and themes, detecting trends, and ultimately enabling researchers to draw valid conclusions. The process of creating data displays involved transforming multiple pages of text into a visual format that fit on a single page and displayed data in ways that:

- show the data and analysis in one place,
- allow the analyst to see where further analyses are called for,
- make it easier to compare different data sets, and
- permit direct use of the results in a report, improving the credibility of conclusions drawn (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 92).

The researchers of this study used data displays within their individual research sections.

Conclusion drawing and verification. The third component of data analysis, conclusion drawing and verification, involves deciding "what things mean…noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, casual flows, and propositions" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). Once data has been entered into a data display, several tactics can be used to both draw and verify conclusions. The researchers of this study began by applying tactics appropriate for drawing initial conclusions; the researchers then selected from a different set of tactics to verify those conclusions. Table 3.1 lists the range of tactics used by the research team as they worked to draw and verify both individual and group conclusions. The tactics used by individual researchers as they worked to answer questions specific to their portion of the research study are further detailed within each researcher's individual section. The main tactics used by the research team as they worked together to answer the research study's overarching

Table 3.1

Tactics for Drawing and Verifying Conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

Tactics for Drawing Conclusions	**Description**
Noting patterns, themes	Note recurring patterns, themes, or "gestalts" (p. 246)
Seeing plausibility	Jot down what some plausible conclusions seem to be, and then check them with other tactics (p. 248)
Clustering	Grouping and then conceptualizing objects that have similar patterns of characteristics (p. 249)
Counting	"See" the general drift of the data more easily and rapidly by looking at distribution (p. 253)
Making contrasts/comparisons	How does X differ from Y (p. 254)
Noting relations between variables	Once you are reasonably clear about what variables might be in play in a situation….How do they relate to each other (p. 257)
Tactics for Verifying Conclusions	**Description**
Triangulating to ensure reliability and validity	Triangulating: • By method (i.e., interview, document) • By source (i.e., persons to be interviewed) • By researcher (i.e., investigator A, B, C, and D) (p. 267)
Following up on surprises	Follow up on surprises: • Reflect on the surprise to surface your violated theory • Consider how to revise it • Look for evidence to support your revision (p. 271)
Making if-then tests	Make if-then statements on data about which you: • Are increasingly puzzled or blocked • Feel on the brink of an Aha! (p.272)
Checking out rival explanations	During the final analysis, first check out the merits of the "next best" explanation you or others can think of as an alternative to the one you preferred at the end of the field work (p. 275).

questions, which involved drawing and verifying conclusions based on the findings from each of the researchers' individual sections, included (a) noting patterns and themes, (b) making comparisons and contrasts, (c) triangulating to ensure reliability and validity. Ultimately, the researchers aimed to draw conclusions that have been rigorously tested

for "their *plausibility*, their *sturdiness*, their '*confirmability*'—that is, their *validity*" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.11).

Traditional analysis sequence. The process of data analysis followed a slightly modified "traditional analysis sequence" (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4). The traditional analysis sequence includes (a) conducting interviews, (b) transcribing the interviews, (c) coding the interview data, (d) displaying the interview data, (e) drawing conclusions, (f) creating an outline for the final report, and (g) writing the final report. Whereas a traditional data analysis sequence involves multiple cycles of conducting interviews, transcribing interviews, coding data, displaying data, and drawing conclusions before moving on to creating an outline and writing the final report, the sequence of this study involved multiple cycles of coding data, displaying data, and drawing conclusions before moving on to creating an outline and writing the final report.

This modification to the traditional data analysis sequence resulted from the limited amount of time available between trips to the field. The research team conducted three full days of interviews. The three days were evenly spread across a three week time span. The researchers discovered that a week was not enough time to transcribe the data (write up the data), code the data, display the data, and draw conclusions before the next trip into the field. Therefore, all the data was collected and written up before any significant coding, displaying, or conclusion drawing occurred. Yet, valuable and iterative cycles of induction and deduction occurred as researchers refined and revised their list of codes which led to the recoding of previously coded data.

The Use of Triangulation

Researchers of this study applied two distinct understandings regarding the role

Figure 3.3. Traditional Data Analysis Sequence (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 85)

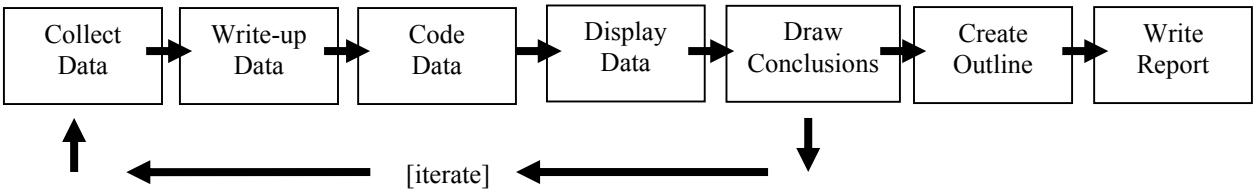
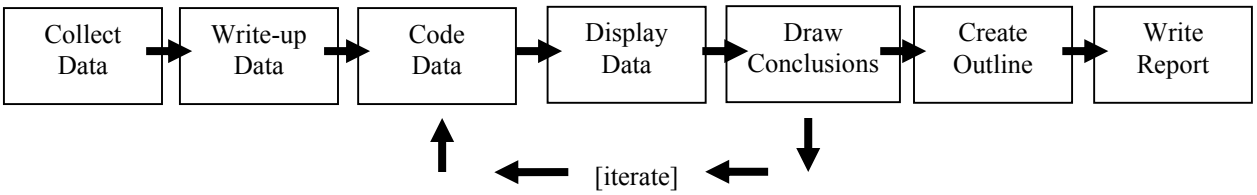


Figure 3.4. Modified Traditional Data Analysis Sequence



and purpose of triangulation. The first understanding views triangulation as a way to ensure reliability and validity. In qualitative studies, reliability refers to "whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (Merriam, 2009, p. 221). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe reliability in terms of "dependability" and "consistency." Ultimately, the reliability of a study depends on the likelihood that others, "outsiders," would draw the same conclusions given the data collected (Merriam, 2009). If yes, then the study's results are consistent with the data collected and therefore reliable, as in dependable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Validity, in qualitative studies, speaks to the credibility of a study's findings (Merriam, 2009). "Do the findings capture what is really there" (Merriam, 2009, p. 213)? Do the findings emanate accuracy and truthfulness? If yes, then the study's results are considered valid, as in credible.

The second understanding views triangulation "less as a strategy for validating results and procedures than an alternative to validation…which increases scope, depth, and consistency" (Flick, 1998, p. 230 as cited by Erzberger & Kelle, 2003, p. 461). Within the researchers' individual sections, the first understanding of triangulation was

applied (see the following section entitled “Reliability and Validity”). Then, as the researchers brought together the understandings and findings that emerged from their individual sections in order to address the overarching research questions of the larger study, the researchers shifted to apply the second understanding of triangulation. At this point, the work of the researchers focused on searching for complementary results based on the “complementarity model of triangulation” (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003, p.469), meaning, that as the researchers investigated the central phenomenon of the larger study “different methods highlight different aspects of it” (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003, p.469). As a result, the researchers reviewed and examined understandings and findings from the individual sections looking for findings that complemented each other, ultimately resulting in a stronger depiction of the topics being analyzed (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003).

Reliability and Validity

It is critical to ensure the trustworthiness of findings based on the information gathered and data analysis. Merriam (2009) states “the most well-known strategy to shore up the internal validity of a study is what is known as triangulation” (p. 215). Creswell (2012) also emphasizes the process of triangulation as ensuring the validity of the findings. Both Merriam (2009) and Miles and Huberman (1994) describe triangulation from Denzin’s (1978) description of the four forms of triangulation, including: by method, by source, by researcher, or by theory. Each form of triangulation serves to verify the study’s findings. The researchers of this study applied the following forms of triangulation within their individual sections: (a) by method (i.e., interviews and documents), (b) by source (i.e., multiple district- and school-level leaders), and (c) by researcher (i.e., multiple researchers collecting and analyzing data).

The process of "check coding" was also used to ensure reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 64). Check coding occurs when more than one researcher codes data, then they review and discuss the results together. Once the data was accurately coded and triangulated, the data was interpreted and written in narrative form (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009).

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

This research team consisted of four doctoral candidates who were all working as administrators in public school districts that were attempting to address disparities in student performance. Each of districts had different approaches to this work and as a result the researchers brought different experiences and perspectives to the analysis process. Because of the varying backgrounds and viewpoints, it is important to note that the researchers may have shared certain characteristics with the research participants. As a result, the researchers may have brought bias regarding the interpretation of leaders' understanding about the nature of the gap and related actions. Merriam (2009) states that researchers are the primary instrument in the data collection and analysis process, therefore, biases may influence the research study. Rather than trying to remove the biases, it is essential to "identify them and monitor them as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data" (Merriam, 2009, p.15).

Chapter Four[4]

Description

The city of New Hope, Massachusetts was first settled in the 1700s. The city is positioned on the New Hope River and a railway. Comprised of numerous one-way streets, bridges, and hills, New Hope is divided into several diverse neighborhoods that each have a specific ethnic identity (City of New Hope, 2013). Upon entering the city of New Hope, visitors encounter the downtown area which is intersected by the river.

A cluster of human service agencies line Main Street and are geared toward providing services in the city and nearby surrounding towns. The downtown business district is deprived of hustle and bustle, foot traffic, and commerce. This once prosperous nineteenth century manufacturing center now consists of numerous derelict factories undergoing conversion for alternate uses such as businesses and residences. The city shows further signs of a troubled economy with many vacant storefronts and apparently abandoned buildings throughout. Despite this sense of hardship, there are undercurrents of revitalization in the city. There is an acknowledgement of the arts in the city in the form of sculptures, and there are numerous restaurants catering to an ethnically diverse palette. A local college recently accredited with University status lies in the heart of the city.

New Hope is governed by a Mayor and is populated with over 40,000 individuals and up to 10,000 families residing in multi-family and single family homes. There is a 50% homeownership rate in the city of New Hope. According to the United States 2010

[4] Chapter Four was co-authored by Ann F. Allwarden, Phillip J. Potenziano, Sujan S. Talukdar, and Karen J. Zaleski.

Census Bureau, the racial makeup of the city was roughly 80% White, 5% African American, 0.3% Native American, 4% Asian, 0% Pacific Islander, 9% from another race, and 4% from two or more races and more than 20% of the population is made up of Hispanic or Latinos of any race. English is spoken as the first language in more than 75% of the homes. The median income for a household in the city averaged just below $50,000 and the median income for a family was slightly below $60,000 (United States Census Bureau, 2010). About 15% of families and 19% of the population were below the poverty line which included almost 30% of those being under age 18 and roughly 13% of those ages 65 or over (United States Census Bureau, 2010). As of 2011 the crime rate was estimated at roughly 400.1 compared with the U.S. average of 213.6 (City-Data, 2011). New Hope has the highest crime rate in comparison to the eight surrounding towns (City-Data, 2011). The New Hope Police Department responds to over 40,000 incidents each year.

Overview of the New Hope Public School District

The city of New Hope has eight public schools, five private/parochial schools, a regional vocational technical school, and a charter school that services students from the city of New Hope (City of New Hope, 2013). Students are registered and assigned to the public schools based on their primary residence; however, parents have the option of requesting their child's school assignment based on their top three choices of schools within the district (City of New Hope, 2013). Students are also accepted into the district by school choice. According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2013a) school choice gives parents the option of seeking school enrollment for their children in a school district outside of their hometown. All

application considerations are processed by the New Hope School District's Director of ELL who also handles registration for the district. Students are accepted into the only charter school in the district via a lottery.

The public school district serves approximately 4,900 students in grades K-12 and of those, approximately 76% qualify for free and reduced lunch and 21% have individualized special education programs. The student population is identified racially as 44.6% Hispanic, 38.2% White, 5.8% Black/African American, 5.5% Asian, 5.7% Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic, and the remaining Native American or Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander. There are different home languages, and 32% of the students speak a first language other than English.

Using 2012-2013 district data, there are approximately 282 full time equivalent teachers in the district. Of those, approximately 258 are White, 16 Hispanic, five Black/African American, two Asian and one Multi-Race Non-Hispanic, with the gender breakdown being 221 females and 61 males. The complete district wide staffing data by race, ethnicity, and gender by full time equivalents is as follows: 602 White, 39 Hispanic, 15 African American/Black, three Asian, one Multi Race Non-Hispanic, 116 males and 544 females for a total of 660 staff.

The New Hope School District has eight district-level leaders and eight school-level leaders (i.e., principals). Interviews were conducted with all eight of the district-level leaders and six out of the eight school-level leaders. The following pseudonyms were given to district-level leaders: Sean, Adrianne, Veronica, Kaydence, Cote, Kelsey, Alicia, and Logan. The pseudonyms assigned to school-level leaders included: Ken, Mary, Brian, Jayden, Joe, Bill, Jamie, and Sharon. Table 4.1 offers additional information

Table 4.1

New Hope District- and School-level Leaders

Participant	District/School	Accountability and Assistance Level 2010-2012	Accountability and Assistance Level 2013
Sean	District	Level 3	Level 3
Adrianne	District	Level 3	Level 3
Veronica	District	Level 3	Level 3
Kaydence	District	Level 3	Level 3
Cote	District	Level 3	Level 3
Kelsey	District	Level 3	Level 3
Alicia	District	Level 3	Level 3
Logan	District	Level 3	Level 3
Ken	School	Level 2	Level 1
Mary	School	Level 3	Level 3
Brian	School	Level 3	Level 3
Jayden	School	Insufficient Data	Level 2
Joe	School	Level 3	Level 3
Bill	School	Level 2	Level 2
Jamie	School	Level 3	Level 3
Sharon	School	Insufficient Data	Insufficient Data

Note. Information shaded in gray indicates the district's top performing schools.

about each of the leaders interviewed. This table also includes information about the district's accountability and assistance level, as well as each school's accountability and assistance level.

In the state of Massachusetts, each school is assigned an accountability and assistance level. There are five different levels (1-5). Level 1 status is assigned to the highest performing schools, and Level 5 is assigned to the lowest performing schools. (Districts are assigned a level based on the level of their lowest performing school.) Currently, the majority of schools within the state of Massachusetts have been assigned Level 1 or Level 2 status (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013b). A school assigned a Level 3 status indicates that it is among the lowest performing 20% of schools (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and

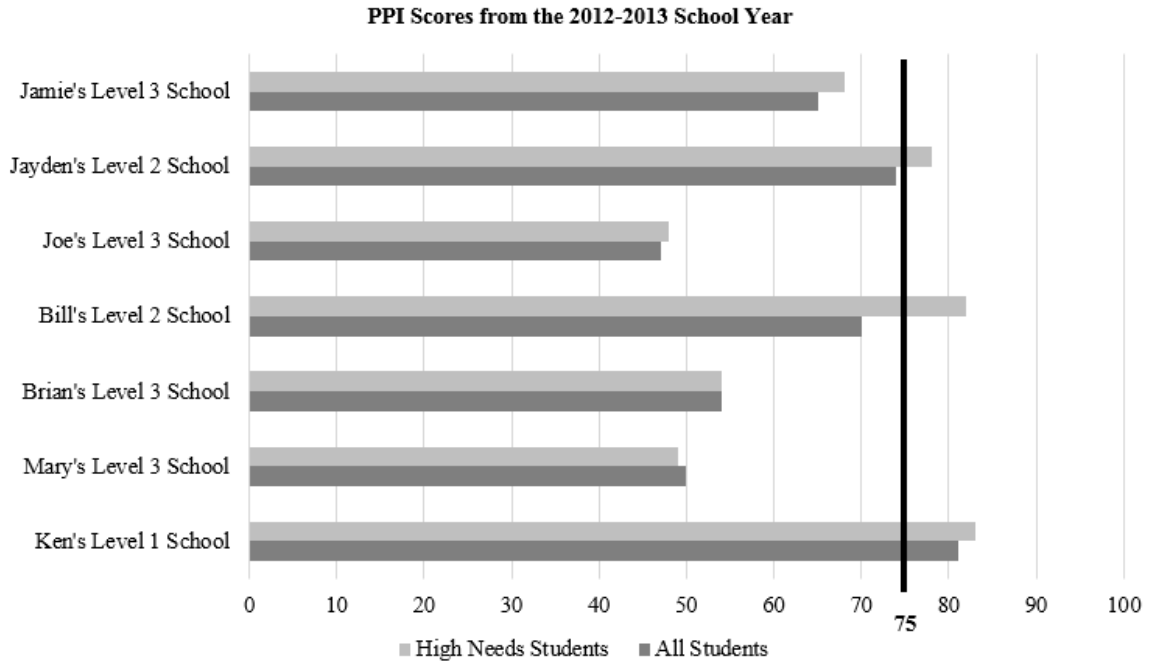
Secondary Education, 2013b).

In order to determine the accountability and assistance level for each school, the state uses the Progress and Performance Index (PPI). The PPI "combines information about narrowing proficiency gaps, growth, and graduation and dropout rates into a number between 0 and 100" (MADESE, 2013b, p. 2). A school is considered to be making progress toward narrowing proficiency gaps when the cumulative PPI for both the "all students" group and "high needs" group reaches or surpasses 75 (MADESE, 2013b). The high needs group is comprised of an "unduplicated count" of all students in a school belonging to at least one of the following subgroups: students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL)/Former ELL students, low income students (eligible for free/reduced price school lunch) (MADESE, 2013b, p. 2). The state's decision to include the high needs group stems from the belief that it will hold "more schools accountable for the performance of students belonging to historically disadvantaged groups" (MADESE, 2013b, p. 2). A school's level status can change from one year to the next based on their PPI score and their school percentile.

> School percentiles (1-99) are reported for schools with at least four years of data. This number is an indication of the school's overall performance relative to other schools that serve the same or similar grades. State law requires ESE [Massachusetts's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education] to classify a school into Level 3 if it is among the lowest performing 20 percent of schools relative to other schools of the same school type (percentiles 1-20) (MADESE, 2013b, p. 7).

Figure 4.1 illustrates each school's PPI score for "all students" and "high needs" students

Figure 4.1. PPI Scores from the 2012-2013 School Year



from the 2012-2013 school year. With the target being 75, some schools seem better positioned to qualify for a move up in accountability and assistance level. The following section will explore further the disparities in student performance at both the district and individual school level.

Disparities in Student Performance

In an effort to describe clearly the student performance disparities that exist within the New Hope School District, three key indicators were examined: (a) state achievement tests, (b) graduation rates, and (c) Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) performance reports.

State achievement tests. Between the years of 2009 and 2013, an average of 50% of students attending the New Hope School District scored proficient or higher on the English Language Arts (ELA) portion of the state test. On the Mathematics portion of the state test, an average of 40% of New Hope students scored proficient or higher. The

disaggregation of this data illustrates the performance differences that exist among the specific student subgroups. As shown in Figures 4.2 and 4.3, the performance of some student subgroups falls substantially below the performance of other student subgroups. The greatest disparities (i.e., "gaps") in student performance, as measured by the state test, are experienced by Students with Disabilities, ELL students, Hispanic/Latino students, and Low Income students. Discrepancies in performance are evident in both ELA and mathematics for the students in these subgroups.

Table 4.2 provides the same information but disaggregated by school. Similar to district results, the greatest disparities in student performance have been experienced by Students with Disabilities, ELL students, Hispanic/Latino students, and Low Income students. This holds true for student performance in both ELA and mathematics. Table 4.2 also shares the percentage of students statewide who scored proficient or higher on the ELA and mathematics portions of the state test. Comparing individual school results against state results allows for a greater level of analysis. For example, the Students with Disabilities, ELL students, and Low Income students in Ken's Level 1 elementary school have regularly met or exceeded the state's performance. This further clarifies why Ken's school recently moved from Level 2 to Level 1. Another example includes the ELA performance of Low Income students in Bill's Level 2 school. Students within this subgroup have made steady gains since 2009, culminating in a record high of 52% percent scoring proficient or higher in 2013 which exceeded the state's performance by two percentage points. Although small, the percentage of Students with Disabilities scoring proficient or higher in Bill's school has also increased across the last five years. Other "stand outs" include the Students with Disabilities and Low Income students

Figure 4.2. New Hope School District's ELA MCAS Results

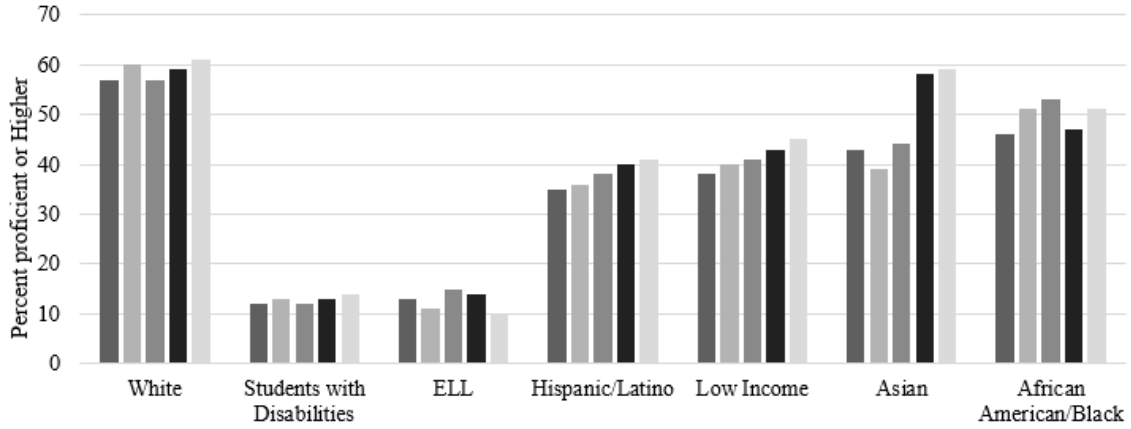
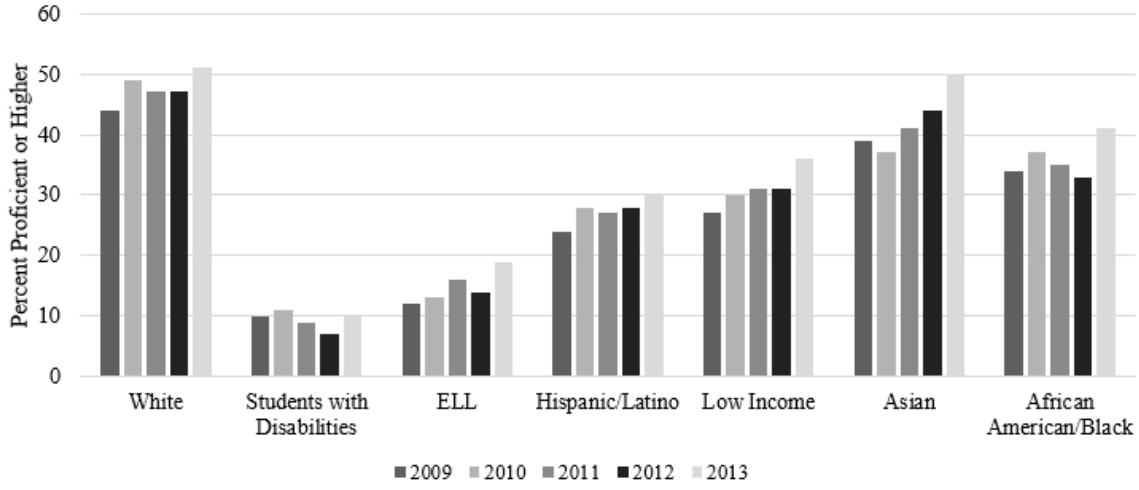


Figure 4.3. New Hope School District's Mathematics MCAS Results



attending Jamie's Level 3 school. Although the performance of students in these subgroups seems to fluctuate from year to year (rather than demonstrating steady gains), their performance has regularly met or exceeded the state's performance.

Graduation rates. Between the years of 2009 and 2012, approximately 70% of students attending the New Hope School District graduated. When data on graduation rates is disaggregated by student subgroup, differences once again emerge. Table 4.3 further illustrates the disparities in graduation rates that exist for Students with Disabilities, Hispanic/Latino students, ELL students, and Low Income Students when

Table 4.2.

Percentage of Students Scoring Proficient or Higher on the State Test

	Ken's Level 1 School									
	ELA Results					Math Results				
	2009	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
White	45	56	53	62	55	53	49	51	59	53
Asian	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
African American/Black	86	81	69	69	-	71	91	69	69	-
Low Income	40	50	46	56	50	49	41	47	53	49
ELL	18	21	22	30	22	23	21	34	40	43
Hispanic/Latino	39	40	36	54	46	43	36	36	47	47
Students w/ Disabilities	22	44	14	23	7	29	28	12	21	24
	Mary's Level 3 School									
	ELA Results					Math Results				
	2009	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
White	49	48	40	41	35	40	55	44	40	43
Asian	13	27	25	55	33	19	9	17	45	41
African American/Black	-	31	47	16	17	-	38	33	23	25
Low Income	24	34	27	27	24	19	37	29	25	34
ELL	12	5	0	0	6	12	9	13	8	21
Hispanic/Latino	30	32	19	16	24	24	31	20	13	30
Students w/ Disabilities	8	6	7	11	5	8	6	7	11	10
	Brian's Level 3 School									
	ELA Results					Math Results				
	2009	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
White	46	50	31	51	51	46	39	44	47	63
Asian	43	21	33	27	40	28	21	33	33	60
African American/Black	31	33	33	36	33	31	25	25	36	41
Low Income	24	30	25	32	33	29	21	27	27	37
ELL	9	14	28	19	16	12	8	10	16	27
Hispanic/Latino	22	29	29	31	28	24	21	26	25	31
Students w/ Disabilities	7	5	2	3	4	9	5	9	3	20

Note. Percentages in a high needs category that have been shaded gray indicate that the percentages were equal to or higher than the state's percentages for that year. [a] A "-" indicates insufficient data. Since data from the state's test was not available for Sharon's high school, her school was not included in the table.

Table 4.2. (continued)

Percentage of Students Scoring Proficient or Higher on the State Test

	Jayden's Level 2 School									
	ELA Results					Math Results				
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
White	-	-	-	-	61	-	-	-	-	50
Asian	-	-	-	-	58	-	-	-	-	50
African American/Black	-	-	-	-	63	-	-	-	-	52
Low Income	-	-	-	-	43	-	-	-	-	37
ELL	-	-	-	-	7	-	-	-	-	13
Hispanic/Latino	-	-	-	-	35	-	-	-	-	32
Students w/ Disabilities	-	-	-	-	12	-	-	-	-	9
	Bill's Level 2 School									
	ELA Results					Math Results				
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
White	-	53	54	60	63	-	40	36	38	45
Asian	-	39	43	68	65	-	31	34	36	46
African American/Black	-	48	59	48	41	-	24	29	28	26
Low Income	-	40	44	47	52	-	22	23	24	29
ELL	-	21	26	20	7	-	12	15	4	10
Hispanic/Latino	-	39	44	43	49	-	22	25	24	25
Students w/ Disabilities	-	12	17	18	19	-	6	6	9	9
	Joe's Level 3 School									
	ELA Results					Math Results				
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
White	69	69	68	60	66	51	55	50	47	52
Asian	56	39	42	55	50	43	45	43	37	43
African American/Black	53	54	61	48	45	41	35	29	29	36
Low Income	45	44	47	43	45	31	34	29	30	34
ELL	13	3	6	6	8	7	10	11	6	10
Hispanic/Latino	43	42	43	41	42	27	32	26	27	27
Students w/ Disabilities	16	13	10	7	10	13	14	6	2	6

Note. Percentages in a high needs category that have been shaded gray indicate that the percentages were equal to or higher than the state's percentages for that year. [a] A "-" indicates insufficient data. Since data from the state's test was not available for Sharon's high school, her school was not included in the table.

Table 4.2. (continued)

Percentage of Students Scoring Proficient or Higher on the State Test

	Jamie's Level 3 School									
	ELA Results					Math Results				
	2009	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
White	75	79	85	84	90	62	79	79	76	78
Asian	50	61	78	100	100	57	72	78	83	82
African American/Black	59	71	60	63	88	59	66	53	38	65
Low Income	48	46	63	64	78	44	50	64	44	58
ELL	25	-	-	-	-	-	60	-	-	-
Hispanic/Latino	41	37	63	58	72	37	43	63	38	51
Students w/ Disabilities	31	14	38	33	54	22	39	38	13	20
	State									
	ELA Results					Math Results				
	2009	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
White	74	76	77	76	76	63	64	65	66	67
Asian	74	75	77	77	78	73	75	77	77	79
African American/Black	47	47	50	50	51	31	35	34	35	37
Low Income	45	47	49	50	50	33	37	37	38	41
ELL	19	22	22	22	21	22	24	26	24	25
Hispanic/Latino	41	43	45	45	45	30	34	34	34	38
Students w/ Disabilities	28	28	30	31	29	20	21	22	21	23

Note. Percentages in a high needs category that have been shaded gray indicate that the percentages were equal to or higher than the state's percentages for that year. [a] A "-" indicates insufficient data. Since data from the state's test was not available for Sharon's high school, her school was not included in the table.

compared to the graduation rates of other student subgroups.

SAT performance reports. Reports of students completing the SAT were compiled and reviewed for discrepancies in student performance. The SAT is a college admissions examination that tests skills students have learned while attending school in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. In essence, "the SAT provides a trusted,

Table 4.3.

Four Year Graduation Rate

	Percentage Graduated				
	2009	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**Ave.**
White	75	74	73	79	**75**
Asian	79	75	90	93	**84**
African American/Black	67	70	77	85	**75**
Low Income	64	62	70	69	**66**
ELL	55	61	71	74	**65**
Hispanic/Latino	59	57	63	64	**61**
Students with Disabilities	55	48	63	65	**58**

globally recognized indicator of…academic readiness for college" (The College Board, 2013). Upon close examination of the available data regarding the number of high school graduates who completed the SAT between 2009 and 2013, it is interesting to note that in the case of White and Hispanic/Latino, the percentage of students taking the test is inconsistent with the percentage of students that make up these subgroups within the district. In other words, while 40% of the total number of students in the New Hope School District is identified as White, an average of 63% of the SAT test takers were White between 2009 and 2013. Alternatively, while 40% of students are identified as Hispanic/Latino, on average only 17% of students belonging to this subgroup took the SAT between 2009 and 2013. This also held true when looking at socioeconomic status. While 65% of the total high school population was defined as low income between 2009 and 2013, only 38% of students belonging to this subgroup completed the SAT during those years. Because the number of students who took the SAT that were classified as ELL and Students with Disabilities was so small, performance data was not available for the purpose of making comparisons. When SAT performance data is disaggregated by student subgroup, disparities once again become evident. Table 4.4 illustrates differences

Table 4.4.

Performance of New Hope Students in Reading and Mathematics on the SAT

	SAT Reading Scores					
	2009	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**Ave.**
White	490	483	472	494	469	**482**
Asian	421	415	387	408	421	**410**
African American/Black	381	425	426	436	402	**414**
Low Income	415	427	409	425	415	**418**
ELL	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Hispanic/Latino	423	445	401	412	412	**419**
Students with Disabilities	-	-	418	-	-	**418**
	SAT Mathematics Scores					
	2009	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**Ave.**
White	505	481	476	491	474	**485**
Asian	474	500	431	448	456	**462**
African American/Black	383	444	413	414	386	**408**
Low Income	428	446	406	427	412	**424**
ELL	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Hispanic/Latino	420	442	394	420	406	**416**
Students with Disabilities	-	-	367	-	-	**367**

among the various student subgroups on the reading and math sections of the SAT.

Across all three indicators (i.e., state achievement tests, graduation rates, and SAT performance reports), discrepancies in the performance of students attending the New Hope School District exist. These disparities in performance correspond to students' race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability.

Chapter 5[5]

Opportunity to Learn: The Role of Prompting Cognitive Shifts in Understanding and Addressing Educational Inequities

Statement of Purpose

Before district- and school-level leaders can address disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and disability, they must first develop their understanding of the nature of the disparities. Why do they exist? What factors may be inhibiting students' opportunity to learn (OTL), and what changes need to happen in order to eliminate these disparities? As leaders seek answers to these questions, they engage in the process of "sensemaking." Sensemaking involves figuring out and assigning meaning to a situation (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 444). The process of sensemaking can also be thought of as the "continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensible, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism" (Weick, Sutcliff, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 415). In other words, the process of sensemaking is ongoing and dynamic. District- and school-level leaders' understanding of disparities in student performance therefore develops and strengthens over time, influenced by new information and new experiences.

As the "the emerging story [of student performance disparities]…becomes more comprehensible," possible causes contributing to the situation, as well as potential solutions for addressing the situation, are often identified. Implementing identified solutions often requires a strategic change effort. Strategic change efforts can be perceived as threatening because they may involve "altering the accepted culture,

[5] Chapter Five was authored by Ann F. Allwarden.

practices, priorities, and goals of the organization" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 444). Therefore, when embarking on a strategic change effort, the work of leadership often focuses on mobilizing people to face the problem (Heifetz, 1996).

Mobilizing people to face a problem usually begins with actions that target building support for needed changes (Huzzard, 2004). During this time, the work of leadership often involves "construct[ing] and disseminate[ing] a vision that stakeholders and constituents could be influenced to comprehend, accept, and act upon to initiate desire [*sic*] changes" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 444). The leadership work of creating and communicating a vision that others will accept and act upon moves leaders beyond the process of "sensemaking-for-self" to "sensegiving-for-others" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 444). Sensegiving, which entails influencing how others make sense of a situation, is an important aspect of leadership work (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

The process of influencing how others make sense of a situation—how others come to understand a situation—can positively impact individuals' perceptions of their work. As a result, sensegiving can potentially serve as a powerful source of inspiration and motivation (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Foldy, Goldman, & Ospina, 2008). This seems to be particularly true for sensegiving accomplished through the creation and communication of a vision (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Conger & Kanungo, 1987). Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996) found that creating and communicating a vision "positively affected congruence between participants' and leaders' beliefs and values, participants' trust in the leader, [and] the extent to which participants were intellectually stimulated and inspired" (p. 45). Furthermore, Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996) found that participants for whom a vision was communicated described their work as "interesting,"

"challenging," and "important" whereas participants who engaged in the same work without the benefit of a vision described their work as "unstimulating," "boring," and "not worthwhile" (pp. 45-46).

As change initiatives are undertaken in an organization, cycles of sensemaking and sensegiving emerge. Sensemaking focuses on developing—or further developing—one's own understanding of the situation. Sensegiving, on the other hand, focuses on influencing how others understand or makes sense of the situation. Therefore, cycles of sensemaking and sensegiving can also be thought of as cycles of acquiring knowledge and taking action (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 443). The relationship between sensemaking and sensegiving provides a powerful lens for examining the work of leadership because it presents leadership as something that is socially constructed, a shared act of meaning-making within the context of a group working collectively to accomplish a common goal or purpose (Drath & Palus, 1994). The adoption of this lens, which recasts leadership as something that is "socially constructed over time as individuals interact with one another" (Schall, Ospina, Godsoe, & Dodge, 2004, p. 3), holds important implications for the research focus and methods.

> A social construction lens leads us to pay attention to the collective work of leadership in context, more than to the behaviors of people called leaders. If leadership is about meaning making, then it is inevitably relational and collective, and therefore, more about the experience people have as they try to make sense of their work and less about individual traits or behaviors (Schall et al., 2004, p. 3).

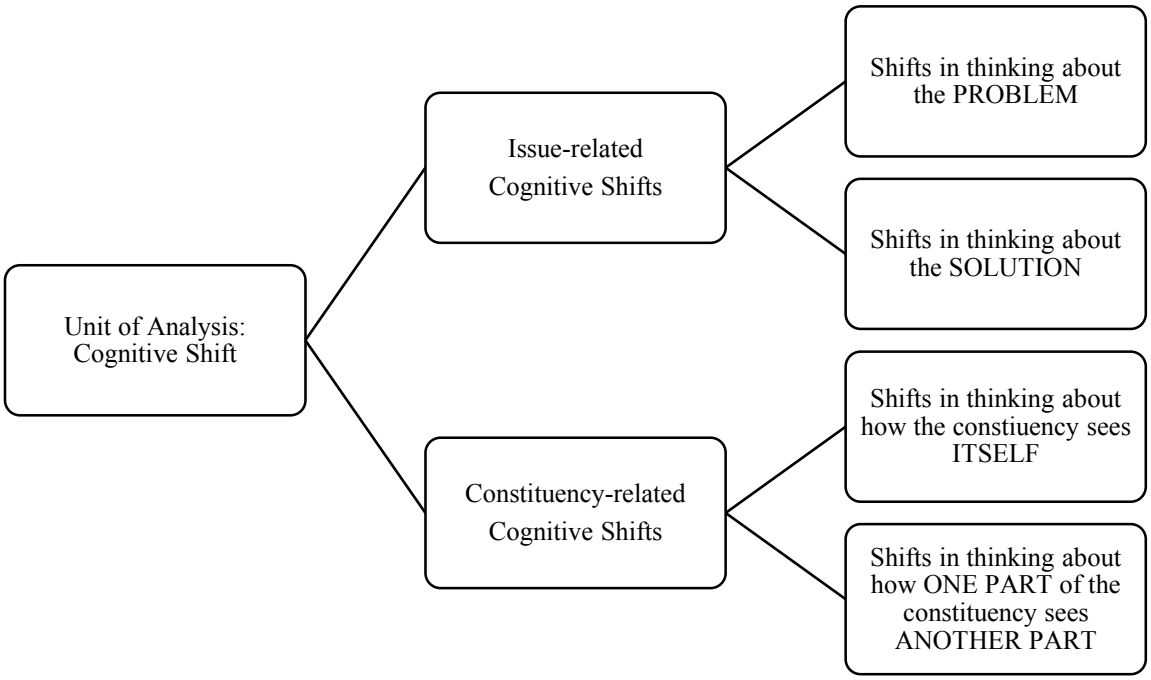
Therefore, guided by a sensemaking/sensegiving lens and a focus on the work of leadership, this portion of the study will seek answers to the overarching research

questions by implementing a methodological approach that identifies and uses the "cognitive shift" as a unit of analysis. A cognitive shift is defined as "a change in how an organizational audience views or understands an important element of the organization's work. A cognitive shift can also be understood as a change in frame (Snow et al., 1986; Goffman, 1974; Schon & Rein, 1994) or mental model (Senge, 1990)" (Foldy et al., 2008, p. 516). Identifying the cognitive shifts that leaders are attempting to prompt in others, as well as the strategies leaders are using to create these cognitive shifts, provides an opportunity to explore both (a) the quality and nature of the desired cognitive shift and (b) the specific strategy being used to prompt the shift.

Foldy et al. (2008, 2009) identify two categories of cognitive shifts: issue-related and constituency-related (see Figure 5.1). District- and school-level leaders attempting to prompt an issue-related cognitive shift try to change the way their audience views either the problem(s) or solution(s) associated with disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability. In their research, Foldy et al. (2008, 2009) identify specific issue-related cognitive shifts, including (a) establishing a new root cause for the problem, (b) intensifying the importance or expanding the scope of the problem, and (c) establishing a new solution for the problem. Some of the framing strategies Foldy et al. (2008, 2009) identify for prompting the issue-related cognitive shifts just mentioned include (a) arguing that the audience is in fact the cause of—or a major contributing factor to—the problem, (b) arguing that this is not a new problem but rather a new way of understanding, thinking about, an existing problem, and (c) arguing that a proposed solution offers a new and potentially better way of effectively addressing the problem.

District- and school-level leaders attempting to prompt a constituency-related

Figure 5.1. Categories of Cognitive Shifts (Foldy et al., 2009, pp. 2-3)



cognitive shift try to change the way their audience views either themselves, their work, or others within the organization (i.e., school district). For example, district- and school-level leaders may try to change the way teachers view themselves and their role in addressing disparities in student performance. They may try to build up teachers' self-confidence and their beliefs about what they can accomplish. District- and school-level leaders may also try to change the way teachers view students. For instance, research on school reform efforts suggests that change efforts are often unsuccessful because educators fail to take responsibility for students' low achievement; instead, the blame is placed upon the students, their families, or the larger community (Berman & Chambliss, 2000; Berman, Chambliss, & Geiser, 1999; Garcia & Guerra, 2004). As a result, district- and school-level leaders may attempt to change the way teachers think about students from low-income or ethnically/racially diverse backgrounds, or students with disabilities. Foldy et al. (2008, 2009) also identify specific strategies from their research that have

been used to prompt constituency-related cognitive shifts, including (a) promoting self-confidence among their audience, (b) strengthening the audience's identification with a group that could serve as a source of power and knowledge, and (c) arguing that everyone is worthy of respect and care.

Identifying the types of cognitive shifts district- and school-level leaders attempt to prompt, as well as the strategies they use as they attempt to prompt shifts, will potentially help leaders to be more deliberate in deciding which cognitive shifts are needed in order to effectively address disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability and broaden students' opportunity to learn. This analysis will also potentially help district- and school-level leaders to select and implement strategies more likely to be successful in prompting a particular kind of cognitive shift. Ultimately, findings from this portion of the study could broaden existing knowledge that details the different kinds of cognitive shifts, as well as the various strategies that could be used to effectively prompt a particular type of cognitive shift.

Research Questions

The study's overarching research questions ask:

1. How do district- and school-level leaders understand disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability?
2. How do these understandings then influence the work of leadership focused on addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability?

One way to address the first research question is to identify explicitly the "cognitive shifts" district- and school-level leaders attempt to prompt in others regarding how they

understand and think about disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability. Since cognitive shifts are distinct changes in thinking or perception (Foldy et al., 2008, 2009; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011), prompting cognitive shifts involves altering how others within the district understand or make sense of a situation. Yet, before leaders can make sense of a situation for others, they must first make sense of the situation for themselves (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Then, in order to help others understand, leaders communicate their own understanding (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). As a result, the messages district- and school-level leaders convey regarding disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability reveal important clues as to how they themselves think about and understand the situation.

Whereas identifying the specific cognitive shifts that leaders attempt to prompt in others provides insight into how district- and school-level leaders understand and make sense of disparities in student performance, examining the specific strategies that leaders use to prompt cognitive shifts addresses the second overarching research question. This research question examines how understanding influences the work of leadership, specifically the work of leadership that focuses on addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability. Examining the strategies that district- and school-level leaders use to communicate meaning and prompt cognitive shifts provides opportunities to examine in-depth the impact of understanding on a specific aspect of leadership work (i.e., the leadership work of influencing how others understand and make sense of disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability). Table 5.1 presents the study's overarching research questions, as

Table 5.1

Research Questions

OTL: Understanding and Addressing Educational Inequities Overarching Research Questions	OTL: Prompting Cognitive Shifts Research Questions
How do district- and school-level leaders understand disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability?	What specific shifts in thinking do district- and school-level leaders identify as needed before disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability can be effectively addressed?
How do these understandings then influence the work of leadership that focuses on addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability?	What specific strategies do district- and school-level leaders use to prompt shifts in thinking about disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability?

well as the specific research questions that will be used in this portion of the study to address those overarching questions.

Influencing how others understand and make sense of a situation is a critically important aspect of leadership work (Pondy, 1978; Zaleznik, 1977), and particularly true during the implementation of strategic change initiatives (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). As leaders define problems, diagnose causes, and offer solutions, they communicate to others particular ways of thinking about and understanding disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability. In essence, leaders are attempting to "manage meaning" for others. Managing meaning involves selecting and highlighting certain aspects of a situation while downplaying or excluding others in an effort to ensure that particular interpretations are accepted and adopted over others (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). When leaders attempt to prompt cognitive shifts, they are, in effect, attempting to manage meaning for others. These efforts rely heavily on the use of language, and therefore, communication becomes an

essential medium for accomplishing—and exploring—the work of leadership (Gronn, 1983).

The following section further explores how the cognitive shift provides a powerful resource for understanding and examining the work of leadership. The review of relevant literature focuses on research that provided the foundation for the development of the cognitive shift as construct and unit of analysis, further clarifying the importance of the cognitive shift as an analytical tool that could further advance the work of understanding and addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability. Key topics include (a) understanding that managing meaning—influencing individuals' thinking or perceptions of a situation—is a critical aspect of leadership work, (b) understanding how contributions from literature on framing play a pivotal role in identifying and analyzing the strategies used by leaders to prompt particular kinds of cognitive shifts, and (c) understanding in greater depth the use of the cognitive shift construct as an analytical tool for empirically exploring the leadership work of managing meaning for others.

Relevant Background

The Work of Leadership: Managing Meaning for Others

In a 1977 *Harvard Business Review* article, Abraham Zaleznik challenged the then prevailing view among researchers and practitioners regarding the essential elements of effective leadership. During a time when the focus of developing leaders concentrated on building individuals' capacity to manage, Zaleznik (1997/2004) challenged the notion that effective leadership depended on strong management skills. Zaleznik argued that leading and managing involve very different skill sets.

Not only did Zaleznik (1977/2004) go on to claim that managers and leaders are indeed different, he argued that underlying motivations driving their efforts and actions work in direct opposition. For managers, goals emerge after identifying a need or problem that exists within the organization. Managers ask: "What problems have to be solved, and what are the best ways to achieve results so that people will continue to contribute to this organization?" (Zaleznik, 1977/2004, p. 75). Motivated by a desire to problem solve, the work of managers focuses on how to most efficiently and effectively direct and coordinate the actions of others (Zaleznik, 1977/2004). Furthermore, the notion of compromise plays a key role in gaining acceptance for solutions. As a result, Zaleznik questioned whether managers "perpetuate group conflicts instead of reforming them into broader desires and goals?" (p. 75). In direct contrast, Zaleznik (1977/2004) presented the work of leaders as active rather than reactive. Instead of responding to ideas, leaders shape ideas. The influence of leaders "changes the way people think about what is desirable and possible, and necessary" (p. 76). Whereas the work of managers incorporates a major emphasis on seeking acceptable compromises, the work of leaders encompasses a major emphasis on re-envisioning what is possible and needed.

Based on Zaleznik's (1977/2004) analysis, managers and leaders view their roles within an organization from very different perspectives, significantly influencing how they attempt to initiate change. Zaleznik explains that managers focus first and foremost on identifying what behaviors and actions need to change. They then follow-up by putting into place structures and processes that they believe will initiate, maintain, and sustain the changes. Zaleznik explains that leaders, on the other hand, focus first and foremost on how individuals think about and understand their current reality, identifying

the shifts in thinking that need to occur in order to generate change. Leaders then facilitate the change process by shaping ideas, ultimately uniting individuals under a common vision, mission, and set of values that drive an organization's work forward (Zaleznik, 1977/2004). Influencing how people view and understand themselves and their work, as well as how they view others engaged in the work, is a vitally important aspect of leaders' work (Fairhurst & Saar, 1996; Foldy et al., 2008; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Gronn, 1983; Pondy, 1978/1989; Zaleznik, 1977/2004).

In "Leadership is a Language Game," Pondy (1978/1989) also explores what it means to be an effective leader. Pondy explains that effective leadership has often been conceptualized as how well leaders get subordinates to act and behave in ways that align with what the leaders have asked of them. Pondy poses the following thought-provoking questions:

- What happens when we force ourselves away from this marriage to behavioral concepts?
- What kind of insights can we get if we say that the effectiveness of a leader lies in his [*sic*] ability to make activity *meaningful*…to give others a sense of understanding what they are doing? (p. 229).

Pondy identifies the capacity of leaders to make work meaningful as critical. Pondy also proposes that tremendous power lies in a leaders' ability to make sense of things in a way that individuals will then be able to express their understanding(s) to others.

Both Zaleznik (1977/2004) and Pondy (1978/1989) identify the managing of meaning as a critical aspect of leadership work. Additionally, Pondy emphasizes the importance of leaders communicating meaning in a way that individuals can then share

their understanding with others, which illustrates how this particular aspect of leadership work can be shared. This is an important consideration as this portion of the research study will examine the leadership work of managing meaning through a distributed leadership framework. As mentioned earlier, critical to this theoretical framework are the interactions among individuals that specifically contribute to the practice of leadership (Harris et al., 2007; Spillane, 2006).

The Role of Framing in Prompting Cognitive Shifts

Fairhurst and Saar (1996) identify the ability to "frame" as an essential tool for effective leadership. They describe the ability to frame as:

> To determine the meaning of a subject is to make sense of it, to judge its character and significance. To hold the frame of a subject is to choose one particular meaning (or set of meanings) over another. When we share our frames with others (the process of framing), we manage meaning because we assert that our interpretations should be taken as real over other possible interpretations (Fairhurst & Saar, 1996, p. 3).

Based on this description, it is probably not surprising that a cognitive shift can also be defined as a change in frame (Foldy et al., 2008; Snow et al., 1986). As mentioned earlier, one of the advantages of identifying the cognitive shift as an outcome of leadership work is the ability to separate the outcome (i.e., the cognitive shift) from the strategies used to prompt the shift (Foldy et al., 2008). Distinguishing the cognitive shift from the strategy, or strategies, used to attain the shift provides an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of a specific strategy on prompting a particular shift.

Existing literature on framing identifies strategies for managing meaning and prompting cognitive shifts. Yet, there seems to be a gap in the research regarding the use of framing strategies to prompt cognitive shifts related to understanding and addressing disparities in students' performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability. Therefore, this portion of the research study holds the potential to further inform efforts that focus on understanding and addressing disparities in student performance. It also holds the potential to further broaden the repertoire of strategies currently available for promoting the work of leadership that focuses on managing meaning for others.

Fairhurst and Saar (1996) clarify the process of framing by asking their readers to consider the work of Dorothea Lange. In her efforts to share with a larger audience the devastating impact of the Great Depression, Lange's iconic portraits captured the hardship being experienced by so many. Lange "framed the Depression in terms of the individuals who were suffering" (Fairhurst & Saar, 1996, p. 3).

> Just like a photographer, when we select a frame for a subject, we choose which aspect or portion of the subject we will focus on and which we will exclude. When we choose to highlight some aspect of our subject over others, we make it more noticeable, more meaningful, and more memorable to others (Fairhurst & Saar, 1996, p. 4).

The work of Entman (1993) expands upon this description by identifying the individual components that make up the process of framing, including (a) defining problems, (b) diagnosing causes, (c) making moral judgments, and (d) offering solutions (Entman, 1993). Similarly, Benford and Snow (2000) present three "core framing tasks." The first core framing task is "diagnostic framing" which involves framing the problem (Benford

& Snow, 2000). The second core framing task is "prognostic framing" which involves framing the solution (Benford & Snow, 2000). And, the third core framing task is "motivational framing" which involves a "call to arms" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 617). In their research, Foldy et al. (2008) used Benford and Snow's three core framing tasks to develop an initial set of codes. During their analysis, Foldy et al. (2008) discovered that "the three-pronged framework muddied an interesting distinction, conflating attempts to frame the issue with attempts to frame the key constituency affected by the problem" (p. 517). This realization led to the development of a new construct, the cognitive shift.

The Cognitive Shift: An Analytical Tool for Exploring the Work of Leadership

While researchers and scholars highlight the importance of leadership work that manages meaning for others, a significant portion of the resulting research focuses on the characteristics and behaviors of individual leaders (Foldy et al., 2008). Recently, there has been a growing interest in moving away from this limiting conceptualization of leadership. Gauthier (2006) draws attention to how other cultures have come to view and understand leadership, specifically the viewpoint held by many non-Western cultures: "Leadership is considered a collective rather than an individual capacity; leadership is defined then as a relationship or process, not a person" (p. 3). Similarly, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) describe leadership "as a capacity or a process residing in relationships between people" (p. 42).

New theories of leadership dramatically shift attention away from a focus on the characteristics and capacities of individual leaders to explore the work of leadership. This shift is important because it broadens our understanding of leadership, as well as researchers' opportunities to study leadership. Yet, even though there is growing interest

on the part of many to learn more about the work of leadership, there remain challenges as to how to study this broader conceptualization of leadership. In response to this identified need for better ways to analyze the work of leadership, Foldy et al. (2008) drew from both the leadership and social movement fields to present the "cognitive shift" as a unit of analysis.

Studying the cognitive shifts that leaders attempt to prompt, as well as the strategies they use to prompt particular cognitive shifts, offers valuable opportunities to explore the work of leadership, potentially revealing ways in which the work of leadership could be strengthened and improved. As noted earlier, one of the governing design principles of distributed leadership emphasizes that "intervening to improve leadership necessitates attention to interactions, not just actions, because leadership practice takes shape in the interactions between leaders and followers" (Spillane, 2006, p. 93). By focusing on how leaders communicate understanding about disparities in student performance, this portion of the study will attend to an important aspect of "interactions between leaders and followers." While the importance of effective communication is widely acknowledged, strengthening the ability to communicate effectively remains an area of need for district- and school-level leaders.

Rorrer and Skrla (2005) stress the essential role of specific leadership responses when working to address disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability. Among the specific leadership responses identified are (a) cultivating relationships and interactions and (b) re-culturing the district and schools. Rorrer and Skrla explain that "relationships and interactions between and among school and district personnel serve as vital organizational linkages through which leaders

communicate and build support for the achievement of all children" (p. 55). They describe the process of re-culturing as "the development of new norms, beliefs, and values…assured that 'everybody is on the same page' and 'talk out loud' about issues concerning children of color and children in and around poverty and their needs" (p. 57). These specific leadership responses focus on the importance of relationships, communication, and changing district/school cultures in efforts to address disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability.

Ingram, Louis, and Schroeder (2004) have also stated that research on school reform efforts has overstressed practices and behaviors and has neglected the importance of school culture, particularly the process of sensemaking around school reform. Ingram et al. (2004) argue that efforts to reform schools fail because there are no concurrent efforts attempting to change the beliefs and assumptions held by educators. Park, Daly, and Guerra (2012) write "reform implementation is not merely executing practices and behaviors; it is also about shifting beliefs and attitudes" (p. 669). All of these scholars emphasize the importance of helping others to understand and make sense of a situation, providing further incentive to use the lens of sensemaking/sensegiving to examine the work of leadership focused on understanding and addressing disparities in student performance and broadening students' opportunity to learn.

Methods

The intent of this portion of the study was to (a) identify and categorize the cognitive shifts district- and school-level leaders specified as needed and (b) identify the particular framing strategy or strategies used by district- and school-level leaders to prompt specific cognitive shifts. While the methodology outlined in the overarching

study was followed, the subsequent sections further detail information specific to this portion of the study.

Data Collection

The methodology outlined in the overarching study focused first (and mainly) on collecting data through the use of semi-structured interviews. The entire research team collected data using the protocol outlined in Appendix A. Table 5.2 shares interview questions which proved particularly helpful in answering the research questions unique to this portion of the study. These questions were developed and asked in an effort to uncover how leaders and others (e.g., teachers and students) within the school district understand—or need to understand—the problems, solutions, and/or constituencies associated with addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability.

Additionally, data collected from interviews was supplemented by the collection of documents recommended by participants during interviews. Among the documents recommended by participants, accountability reports and improvement plans provided relevant information for this portion of the study. School accountability reports presented trends in students' performance on the state test and highlighted specific problems/needs associated with disparities in student performance. Accountability reports also included information on initiatives (solutions/attempts to address needs) undertaken by a school to positively influence student performance and address existing disparities. Accelerated improvement plans further outlined and detailed the problems/needs and solutions/attempts to address the needs associated with disparities in student performance through the development of strategic objectives and aligned action steps.

Table 5.2

Interview Questions on Cognitive Shifts

District-Level Leader Questions
1. How has central office trained school leaders to use student data? 2. What changes have you seen in schools as a result of this training? 3. Have you seen any changes in the central office as a result of this training? 4. Do you believe people have changed the way they think about: a. their professional responsibilities? b. collaborating with others? c. student subgroups? Probes: How do you know? What have you seen? Can you provide an example? 5. Imagine you had a magic wand. What else needs to happen in your district to improve student performance?
School-Level Leader Questions
1. How has central office trained school leaders to use student data? 2. What changes have you seen in your school as a result of this training? 3. Have you seen any changes in the central office as a result of this training? 4. Do you believe people have changed the way they think about: a. their professional responsibilities? b. collaborating with others? c. student subgroups? Probes: How do you know? What have you seen? Can you provide an example? 5. Imagine you had a magic wand. What else needs to happen in your district to improve student performance?

Data Analysis

As mentioned in the overarching methodology section, the analysis of data consisted of (a) reducing data, (b) displaying data, and (c) drawing/verifying conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data reduction. Data reduction involved "selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). For this portion of the research study, the process of data reduction began prior to the collection of data with the development of following research questions:

- What specific shifts in thinking do district- and school-level leaders identify

as needed before disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability can be effectively addressed?

- What specific strategies do district- and school-level leaders use to prompt shifts in thinking about disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability?

The process of data reduction then continued during and after the collection of data as portions of text were identified as relevant and extracted from interview transcripts and collected documents. These excerpts were labeled using a set of codes. Table 5.3 describes the general codes used for this portion of the study. Theoretically-based and drawn from the literature, the description of each code presented in Table 5.3 was adapted from the work of Foldy et al. (2008, 2009).

The process of coding continued through subsequent phases of analyzing and re-analyzing different "sets" of interviews (i.e., district-level leaders, school-level leaders, leaders of Level 1 and Level 2 schools). These successive sets of data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. As mentioned in the overarching methodology section, the constant comparative method "involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. Data are grouped together on a similar dimension. The dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category" (Merriam, 2009, p. 30). Constantly comparing the data for similarities and differences assisted in the further refinement of the initial set of codes. Checking for intra-coder reliability also assisted in the further refinement of the initial set of codes. Checking for intra-coder reliability involved periodically recoding a section of text and then comparing the second attempt at coding against the first attempt. Guidelines established by Miles

Table 5.3

Description of Cognitive Shift and Framing Strategy Codes (Foldy et al., 2008, 2009)

Code	Description
Issue-Related Cognitive Shifts	Issues related to how an audience views problems/needs and solutions/attempts to address needs associated with disparities in student performance
Constituency-Related Cognitive Shifts	Issues related to (a) how the constituency views itself, (b) how one part of the constituency views another part of the constituency.
Framing Strategies	Intentional efforts to influence individual's understanding of a situation

Note. The work of Foldy et al. (2008, 2009) analyzed data collected from community-based, social change organizations. The focus on disparities in student performance is unique to this study.

and Huberman (1994) were followed. Sections were coded and recoded until measures of intra-reliability reached 80% agreement or higher. The following formula was used to calculate intra-reliability: reliability = number of agreements/total number of agreements + disagreements.

Data displays. Creating a data display involved displaying the data as "an organized, compressed, assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). The use of a data display further supported the work of comparing and contrasting data, identifying patterns and themes, detecting trends, and ultimately the drawing of valid conclusions.

This portion of the study relied on the use of a conceptually clustered matrix for displaying data. Initially, the data display design for this portion of the research study focused on a simple interviewee-by-variable matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each row in the matrix contained the following information: (a) the participant's pseudonym,

(b) the issue-related cognitive shifts he or she was attempting to prompt, (c) the framing strategies he or she was using to prompt issue-related cognitive shifts, (d) the constituency-related cognitive shifts he or she was attempting to prompt, and (e) the framing strategies he or she was using to prompt constituency-related cognitive shifts. Comparing and contrasting the responses of individual leaders led to further analysis, which included: (a) clustering together data collected from district-level leaders to compare and contrast against data collected from school-level leaders and (b) clustering together data collected from principals leading Level 1 and 2 schools to compare and contrast against data collected from principals leading Level 3 schools. Clustering and re-clustering the data collected from district- and school-level leaders allowed for the further compressing and assembly of information which eventually resulted in the conceptually clustered data displays presented in Tables 5.4 and 5.5. (The information presented in these displays will be further explored and explained in the results section.)

Conclusion drawing and verification. Conclusion drawing and verification involved deciding "what things mean…noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, casual flows, and propositions" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). Once data were entered into the conceptually clustered data display, the tactics of (a) noting relations between variables, (b) making contrasts/comparisons, (c) clustering, (d) counting, and (e) triangulation were used to both draw and verify conclusions.

As mentioned, the initial interviewee-by-variable matrix listed all the participants, the specific issue- and constituency-related cognitive shifts they were attempting to prompt, and the specific framing strategies they were using to trigger the cognitive shifts. Once completed, the initial matrix fully supported the noting of relationships between

Table 5.4

Trends in the Framing for Cognitive Shifts by District- and School-level Leaders

District-level Leaders			
Issue-related Cognitive Shifts	**Framing Strategies**	**Constituency-related Cognitive Shifts**	**Framing Strategies**
Heighten awareness, increase importance, and create a sense of urgency regarding a problem or need (i.e., lowest performing subgroups, access to general education curriculum).	• Use/Display data to quantify and clarify the problem or need.	How the Constituency Sees Itself: We are responsible for helping *all* children experience high levels of academic success.	• Re-define/Re-envision the constituency's role/responsibilities within the organization.
Accept/Embrace a solution (e.g., data-driven decision making, inclusion).	• Offer proof that the idea works (e.g., share example of success). • Explicitly establish direction (e.g., not a choice/non-negotiable).	How One Part of the Constituency Sees Another: We can learn from one another.	• Focus on building and acknowledging the competency/ capacity present within the constituency.
School-level Leaders			
Issue-related Cognitive Shifts	**Framing Strategies**	**Constituency-related Cognitive Shifts**	**Framing Strategies**
Heighten awareness, increase importance, and create a sense of urgency regarding a problem or need (e.g., the distribution of students across the Response to Intervention tiers).	• Use data to quantify and clarify the problem or need.	How the Constituency Sees Itself: We are responsible for helping *all* children experience high levels of academic success.	• Re-define/Re-envision the constituency's role/responsibilities within the organization.
Accept/Embrace a solution (i.e., data-driven decision-making, writing, collaboration).	• Present as best practice.	How One Part of the Constituency Sees Another: We can learn from one another.	• Focus on building and acknowledging the competency/ capacity present within the constituency.

Table 5.5

Trends in the Framing for Cognitive Shifts by Leaders of Level 1 and Level 2 Schools

Leaders of Level 1 and Level 2 Schools			
Issue-related Cognitive Shifts	**Framing Strategies**	**Constituency-related Cognitive Shifts**	**Framing Strategies**
Heighten awareness, increase importance, and create a sense of urgency regarding a problem or need (i.e., distribution of students across the RtI tiers, the impact of data on teachers' practice, "too many things on the table").	• Use data to quantify and clarify the problem or need. • Present as having leverage (e.g., focusing on the "right" thing, addressing the problem that will make the most difference).	How the Constituency Sees Itself: We are responsible for helping *all* children experience high levels of academic success.	• Re-define/Re-envision the constituency's role/responsibilities within the organization.
Accept/Embrace a solution (i.e., data driven decision-making, student-led conferences, writing, co-planning, co-teaching).	• Connect to the school's mission. • Explicitly establish direction (e.g., not a choice/non-negotiable).	How the Constituency (Students) Sees Itself: We are capable.	• Re-define/Re-envision the constituency's role/responsibilities within the organization.
		How One Part of the Constituency Sees Another: We can learn from one another.	• Focus on building and acknowledging the competency/ capacity present within the constituency. • Promote a collective sense of empowerment.

variables. Each row in the matrix clearly depicted the alignment between cognitive shifts and the framing strategies utilized by leaders. The matrix also supported the analysis of issue- and constituency-related shifts that had been partnered together. For example, a leader may have used a set of framing strategies in an attempt to prompt cognitive shifts related to a problem (e.g., Heighten awareness, increase importance, and create a sense of

urgency regarding students' access to the general education curriculum.), a solution (e.g., Accept/Embrace inclusion.), and a constituency (e.g., We are responsible for helping *all* children experience high levels of academic success.). Reading down each column revealed if the participants were prompting for similar or different issue- and constituency-related cognitive shifts using similar or different framing strategies.

Comparing and contrasting the data collected from individual participants led to comparing and contrasting the data collected from groups of participants. This involved re-clustering the information to compare and contrast the data collected from district-level leaders with the data collected from school-level leaders, as well as re-clustering the information in order to compare and contrast the data collected from leaders of Level 1 and Level 2 schools with the data collected from leaders of Level 3 schools. The use of counting further supported this analysis. For example, the cognitive shifts and framing strategies displayed in Tables 5.4 were used by at least 75% of the participants making up the district- and school-level groups. Since the group of leaders from Level 1 and Level 2 schools was a smaller subset, the cognitive shifts and framing strategies presented in Table 5.5 represent 100% of those participants.

Finally, three forms of triangulation were used to verify this portion of the study's findings, including (a) by method (i.e., interviews and documents), (b) by source (i.e., district-level leaders, school-level leaders, leaders of Level 1 and 2 schools, leaders of Level 3 schools), and (c) by researcher (i.e., multiple researchers collecting and analyzing data) (Denzin, 1978; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Results

The findings from this portion of the case study describe the different types of cognitive shifts that district- and school-level leaders in the New Hope School District were attempting to prompt in others, as well as the specific framing strategies leaders were using to prompt these shifts in thinking. The review of interview and document data (which focused on searching for evidence of leaders explaining how they or others understand—or need to understand—the problems, solutions, and constituencies associated with addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability) revealed that district- and school-level leaders were attempting to prompt a common set of issue- and constituency-related cognitive shifts using a range of framing strategies. The review of interview and document data also revealed a correlation between leaders' use of a particular of framing strategy and their level of leadership (i.e., district or school). In other words, there were common patterns of use unique to each level of leadership. Furthermore, when a school's accountability and assistance status was considered by the researcher (i.e., Level 1, Level 2, Level 3), distinct patterns of strategy use also emerged for the leaders of the district's top performing schools (i.e., Level 1 and Level 2) that differed from the patterns of strategy use that emerged for the leaders of the district's lower performing schools (i.e., Level 3). These findings seem to suggest that certain framing strategies may be more effective than others. (As described earlier, Level 1 status is assigned to the highest performing schools, and Level 3 status indicates that the school is among the lowest performing 20% of schools.) The following sections explore further the relationship between cognitive shifts, framing strategies, and school improvement.

Prompting Issue-related Cognitive Shifts

Issue-related cognitive shifts involve a change in how an audience views problems (needs) and solutions (attempts to address needs) associated with student performance disparities (Foldy et al., 2008, 2009). Table 5.6 presents the issue-related cognitive shifts that district- and school-level leaders in the New Hope School District were attempting to prompt in others, as well as the range of strategies they were using to prompt these particular shifts.

Framing the problem. Both district- and school-level leaders in the New Hope School District framed problems (or needs) associated with disparities in student performance to heighten awareness, increase importance, and create a sense of urgency. The most common framing strategy used by both district- and school-level leaders involved the use of data to quantify and clarify the disparities in student performance. For example, school-level leaders created visual displays of data that highlighted individual students' level of performance in particular subject areas (e.g., reading, writing, and mathematics). Sean, the district's superintendent, explained:

> Every school…[has] a data room, refer to it as the data war room….A lot of the schools use the red, yellow, and green way of marking where students are, red being in need of remediation, yellow being on their way, and green being at the grade or above…. Most of the schools have charts where they actually have little cards with every student's number and dates and picture to really make this all very personal. This is about…knowing where every student is academically in different subject areas…the goal being to move them up from red to yellow to green.

Table 5.6

Issue-related Cognitive Shifts and Framing Strategies

Category	Type	Cognitive Shift	Framing Strategy
Issue-related	Problem	Increase awareness, importance, and sense of urgency.	• Use/Display data to quantify and clarify. • Share anecdotal evidence. • Present as having leverage (e.g., focusing on the "right" thing, addressing the problem that will make the most difference). • Reference research.
Issue-related	Solution	Accept/Embrace a solution.	• Offer proof that the idea works (e.g., share example of success). • Explicitly establish direction (e.g., not a choice/non-negotiable). • Present as best practice. • De-legitimize past practice. • Connect to the district/school's mission.

Note. The framing strategies presented have been sequenced from most to least frequently used.

Sean also explained that the central office had mandated that each school have a "data war room." He then went on to describe how data use practices have evolved in the district:

> At one point it was central office need[ing] to know the data, then it was really central office and the principals need[ing] to know the data, and then there [were] data people… need[ing] to know the data, and now it's every teacher needs to know the data.

Principals at all levels (i.e., elementary, middle, and high) talked about the use of data to increase awareness, heighten importance, and create a sense of urgency among their staff regarding identifying and targeting areas of need. Standing in front of a wall covered with large, tri-colored (i.e., green, yellow, and red) pocket charts, Jayden

explained that the room functioned as the school's data room. He clarified that each color represented a level of performance and described how individual students were sorted into the different levels based on results from district and school determined assessments. He then discussed how this process highlighted specific areas of need.

> Well this is our data room that you sit in….We've been tracking data since 2011….As we place them [students] based on the skills and the proficiency that we're seeking, we're able to also look at programming what they may fall under and what those are….This is the language arts, the mathematics is behind you and that's how we look at skills, but then within that is looking at proficiency gaps that are subgroups….We're targeting the subgroups of English language learners, special education, free and reduced children, and those are delineated in the coding that we look at.

Like Jayden, many of the leaders interviewed identified students with disabilities, students from low income homes, and English language learners as the students most in need of gap-closing instruction. Brian, another school-level leader, noted:

> The gaps with my specific subgroups would definitely be my English language learners, my low income, and my SPED….The biggest gap we would have with all those subgroups would be definitely comprehension. We're definitely seeing there's a really big gap; all our data is showing that. I would say 75% of our students are really fluent readers. About 25% of those are not. But the biggest gap is our comprehension. That's where our kids fall the most….They're [word callers]. That's what we're noticing.

Brian went on to describe how his school's data room allowed him to increase his staff's

awareness of a specific area of need. Brian mentioned that data was displayed using "a four square….The majority of our students [are] up in that right upper quadrant, and that right upper quadrant really signals to us that that's where their comprehension is….that's where our biggest weakness is." When Brian shared this display of data with his teachers, he felt it shifted their thinking.

> They understand how the charts are set up, how the data is set up, and how to read it....It's so visual for them. They now are saying, "Oh, you're really right. We really, really need to focus on comprehension." So now we're using that data to guide our instruction in our small groups and in our whole groups….It's like a big eye-opener for them.

District- and school-level leaders did not rely solely on visual depictions of student performance data. They also "talked" data. Bill, a school-level leader, seemed to leverage the use of data frequently to increase the awareness and importance of making gains for both staff and students.

> The kids have all this information….They should be able to tell you, I'm four points away from proficiency in math, or I'm six points away from being advanced in math or ELA….We want them to internalize it….So it's further than just our training and our understanding, and then teachers training and their understanding. We're actually going back and teaching the kids….That's the level of intimacy that we want our kids to have, and we think that's critical. They're the ones [identifying the areas of need and] setting the goals for improvement.

In this excerpt, Bill described how students were being incorporated into the school's data use practices. He viewed their involvement as "critical." Sean, the

superintendent, pointed out that the district's top-performing schools (i.e., Level 1 and Level 2) had taken significant steps to involve students. In these schools, "every student needs to know their own data, that's the goal, to have every student have ownership of their data." Kaydence, another district-level leader, also spoke about how data use practices were evolving in the district's top-performing schools to include students.

> I think that probably most notably and recently is that even down to the students they're talking about their data….The principal from [the district's Level 1 school has]…a lovely video of this fourth grader who's demonstrating this data wall saying, "Here's where I was, here's where I need to be, [and] these are the things that we're doing."

In a presentation to the district's traveling cabinet, Ken, the principal of the district's Level 1 school, emphasized the importance of continuing "to use student data to inform instruction, with a priority placed upon students analyzing their own data and goal setting." Embedded within this quote is the notion that being strategic involves prioritizing efforts and actions aimed at addressing disparities in student performance. Not only did the leaders of the district's top-performing schools discuss the involvement of students in their data use practices, these leaders repeatedly framed issues as having high leverage. They frequently expressed the need to focus on the "right" issues, to prioritize. Jayden, a leader of a Level 2 school, explained:

> If you try to do [too many things], you'll be the jack-of-all and the master of none, so you have to have some pinpoint focus, which also means you have to have some pinpoint assessment data….When we look at [assessment data], we're…saying okay, where are our high leverage points….That's why our focus

> is writing, and we're going really deep in writing….It's because it's a pinpoint accuracy of using data instead of trying to address a thousand things….It's too much, you know, what are the high leverage points, what's going to make the difference? Well, we've chosen writing across the curriculum because it affects all domains.

As described earlier, the walls in Jayden's data room were covered with students' performance data. Large sections of wall space were devoted to tracking students' performance in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. Yet, in the above excerpt, Jayden explained that he and his staff devoted time to discussing and determining their "high leverage points." In the end, they decided that they would prioritize writing. This did not mean that they would not be paying attention to the other areas (i.e., reading, mathematics), or that they would discontinue tracking students' performance in these areas. Instead, it meant that they were going to prioritize and emphasize writing in each of the subject areas. Jayden and his staff believed this would, in turn, strengthen not only students' writing performance but also their performance in reading and mathematics. For example, as students learned to write summaries of text, they would strengthen their ability to identify main ideas and details, an essential reading skill. When students would have to explain in writing how they solved a math problem, they would become more aware of their ability to successfully apply mathematical skills and concepts. For these reasons, Jayden saw prioritizing writing as strategic, as "working smarter."

Similarly, Bill, the leader of another Level 2 school in the district, frequently expressed the need to be strategic, to focus on issues that would make a difference. Bill repeatedly emphasized the importance of analyzing the relationship between the use of

data and its impact on teachers' instruction and students' learning.

> What is the data telling us about the children we have? And how can we adapt our curriculum, or more importantly adapt our instruction…to meet their needs....I think we've…really started looking at how [assessment data] relates to skills and skill-deficits, and [then] filling those gaps. And that's really where the rubber hits the road.

Focusing in on issues that were seen as having leverage was common among the leaders of the district's top-performing schools. Although present, this framing strategy was not as prevalent among the leaders of the district's Level 3 schools. For some of these schools, the issue seemed to be that they were just on the brink of being able to frame issues as having high leverage. For example, Brian, the leader of a Level 3 school described earlier, had recently organized his students' performance data to highlight comprehension as an area of significant need for the students in his school. Furthermore, he felt his teachers had just developed the understanding that they "really, really need to focus on comprehension." As a result, Brian seemed perfectly poised to frame comprehension as his school's area of high-leverage.

Jamie, the leader of another Level 3 school in the district, discussed the on-going challenges of identifying multiple needs and then determining what to prioritize.

> I think we have to focus in on a few things…at a Level 3 you can get overwhelmed by it all because we are one of those schools where you could put a blindfold on, throw the dart, [and say] "All right, let's start there. We've got to improve that." Everything needs to be improved. It's not like, "Wow, we're doing awesome there. This is just a little thing we've got to fix." No. Everything

needs to be addressed. But you can't do that. You've got to focus in on a few things, I think.

Jamie went on to describe the issues that she and her staff felt would make the biggest difference if addressed successfully. Among their areas of focus was attendance. Jamie stated:

> You have to not get lost in the forest… try to figure out what's most pertinent. For us it was attendance. If we're not getting kids to come to school, then anything we try is really not going be very productive, particularly for bringing up kids who are not performing very well.

Based on the analysis of interview data, identifying the right "levers" and then frequently framing these levers as having significant influence was a characteristic common to the top performing schools in the New Hope School District. As mentioned and described, evidence of this type of framing was present among some of the leaders of Level 3 schools, yet these leaders seemed to be in the very beginning stages of determining and framing issues that they believed to have high leverage. An underlying issue for Level 3 schools was the pressure to make the gains needed to achieve Level 2 status. Logan, a district-level leader, described the pressure school-level leaders were under even if they had identified the "right levers."

> I think one of [Jamie's] concerns is: Am I going to run out of time? Will my school be Level 3 at the end of this year despite all these positive initiatives that I've done? So would [Jamie] be, and I'm just using [Jamie] as an example, in a situation where the state says we're not seeing sufficient progress? And yet, I would say that [Jamie's] putting…[monumental] effort into doing all the right

> things, bringing staff along, has identified the right levers to maximize short-term and long-term gains from subgroups and for the school overall, but will [Jamie] run out of time?

Other framing strategies that were used to heighten awareness, increase importance, and create a sense of urgency regarding a problem or need included sharing anecdotal evidence and referencing research. An example of framing using anecdotal evidence was provided by Veronica, a district-level leader, who was trying to heighten the awareness of curriculum and instructional issues that existed within the district:

> Recurring issues are curriculum and instruction related….For example, in mathematics at grades two [and] three, telling time was a real problem. It sounds simple but…[the] idea of elapsed time, or change over time, is a deeper conceptual issue that impacts science…. We were noticing, even among our early learners, kindergarten, grade one, change over time was a conceptual issue they couldn't grapple with….The schema kids had around time, and understanding how the world works, we were seeing that when we talked at the third or fourth grade…[about] changes of state and life cycles. They really didn't have a schema to understand and build on that for the content. So time was a big math issue.

An example of framing by referencing research was provided by Jayden, a school-level leader, who was trying to create a sense of urgency around existing achievement gaps. "[We need] to close the achievement gap as early as possible. The research shows if you can't close it by fourth grade…you're probably never going to….If you can close it before fourth grade, you've accomplished a huge thing."

The district- and school-level leaders who participated in this study attempted to frame problems (or needs) associated with disparities in student performance to heighten awareness, increase importance, and create a sense of urgency. They did this by amplifying their audience's level of concern regarding underperforming subgroups (i.e., students with disabilities, students from low income homes, and English language learners). As noted, the most commonly used framing strategy involved the use of data to quantify and clarify existing gaps. After presenting measureable gaps in student performance, leaders framed solutions as ways to effectively address long-standing performance disparities.

Framing the solution. Both district- and school-level leaders identified multiple solutions for addressing disparities in student performance, including inclusion, co-teaching, instructional coaches, data meetings, common planning time, specific programs, and student-led conferences. (This is just a sampling of the solutions identified and described by interviewees.) The leaders framed these solutions in hopes that their audience would accept the solution being offered. The most common framing strategies used by district-level leaders when discussing solutions that they wanted others to accept involved (a) explicitly establishing the direction (e.g., presenting as a non-negotiable) and (b) offering "proof" that the solution worked.

Solutions framed as a "non-negotiable" by district-level leaders were both district and state driven. Sean, the superintendent, described a district driven non-negotiable that he saw as heavily influencing the culture within the schools and within the district.

> Last year [the] expectation was that every principal and assistant principal be in the classroom two and a half to three hours a day, and they have to submit a

> log…on Friday showing …what they've done, where they've been, how many hours….That was the biggest change; that changed the whole culture.

An example of a state driven non-negotiable involved the implementation of "district-determined measures." Kaydence, a district-level leader, explained that due to the state's new teacher evaluation system "we have to now incorporate district-determined measures around student achievement and student growth."

Bill, a school-level leader, shared his perspective on implementing non-negotiables:

> I'm a good soldier, and I do what I'm told…I think everyone respects that, and they may disagree with some things, but they know at every level, we answer to someone else. And when our bosses, or our colleagues, share and want us to do something. It's important to do that.

The second commonly used framing strategy by district-level leaders involved offering proof that the idea works (e.g., share an example of success). Furthermore, for many of the district-level leaders, a positive change in accountability and assistance status provided substantial evidence that a school had implemented effective practices. Kaydence, a district-level leader, explained:

> We were fortunate that one of our schools…went to a Level 1 as far as our state accountability system this year, another two of them went to Level 2, and so now we're looking at best practices there. So we've got them there, we've got to keep them there. It's not an easy thing to do.

A school's change in status was highlighted and leveraged time and time again by district-level leaders, offering proof that an idea worked. For example, many district-level

leaders identified inclusion as a solution for addressing disparities in student performance related to disability. Adrianne, a district-level leader, described the impact of inclusion, offering proof that it works by emphasizing that the adoption and implementation of inclusive practices distinguished the successful schools from the still struggling schools.

> It's really changing the whole scope of how we include kids in the general ed. environment. And you'll see principals, if you interview them, talk about special education students as part of all students, they're not separate. The schools we're still struggling with, you may hear them separate out one population of students from another. But the schools that were a success, like I said with the data, they're all incorporated in; it's all students, all the time.

Similarly, Sean, the superintendent, offered proof that inclusion worked by identifying an in-district success story.

> In one of our schools…which has actually had the highest academic success this year going from a Level 2 to a Level 1 school, is the most advanced in terms of an inclusion model so basically showing that inclusion actually produces results….It's also our poorest school demographically with 87% free and reduced lunch, so what they've also put testimony to…it's not about poverty. Poverty is not what holds students back.

Ken, the principal of this Level 1 school, identified improving students' performance in the areas of literacy and mathematics "by fully implementing an inclusive Special Education model" as a strategic objective developed specifically to support the school's continued success. Ken went on to share that the "co-teaching inclusion model is being implemented to help struggling learners access grade-level curriculum and peer

models." For district-level leaders, the success of this school offered considerable proof that the implementation of an inclusive model can make a significant difference.

Although not as common, school-level leaders also used this particular framing strategy. For example, Jayden described the Level 1 school as "doing a great job of [inclusion]." He acknowledged the gains that the school had made and attributed those gains to the implementation of inclusion. He then framed the content to dig deeper. He not only saw the other school's success as proof that inclusive practices work but also as an opportunity to advance his school's progress as they worked to implement inclusion effectively.

> What about inclusion, you know, how is it done? What exactly do you do that we need to learn? And, of course, not wasting that time, you know, they're far down the road. We don't have to start all over. We can pick up right behind them, maybe not at the same point but somewhere quicker down the road to pick up and sharing that information and being able to go to them to bring that back and say here we are.

This example not only illustrates the framing of solutions, it also illustrates Jayden's framing for constituency-related cognitive shifts (i.e., We are capable of implementing inclusion effectively, and we can learn from others.), which will be examined further in the following section.

Whereas district-level leaders frequently used the framing strategies of explicitly establishing direction and offering proof that an idea works, school-level leaders were more likely to frame a solution by presenting it as best practice. For example, all of the school-level leaders interviewed presented the use of data to drive instruction and

improve student performance as a best practice. Ken, a school-level leader, described the importance of data-driven practices for the teachers, administrators, and students in his school:

> Data walls, in both classrooms and the principal's office, have become an integral part of tracking student progress and goal setting. Students analyze their own data, set individual goals, and track their progress. Teachers use this data to form groups, inform instruction, and select appropriate interventions.

Brian, another school-level leader, elaborated on the impact that data meetings have on teachers' practice:

> Teachers are planning more meaningful lessons that are based on the standards—that are based on the data. You can see [it] in their flexible groups. For example, for reading, those students that have been identified…[as needing] phonics work or…comprehension work or…fluency work. You can go in, and you can be like, "Okay, those three kids were…discussed during that data meeting. Look, they are grouping those kids according to need, and they're giving that intense instruction that they need in that area that was identified by the data.

When data from principals leading Level 1 and 2 schools was compared to data from principals leading Level 3 schools, differences were noted. Leaders of Level 1 and 2 schools used two framing strategies more often: (a) explicitly establishing direction (e.g., not a choice/non-negotiable) and (b) connecting to the school's mission statement. In contrast, the leaders of Level 3 schools revealed the use of a strategy that the leaders of Level 1 and 2 schools did not: (a) de-legitimizing past practices of the school and/or the past practices teachers.

Leaders of the district's top performing schools did not shy away from explicitly establishing a direction. For example, Jayden, whose school made the decision to prioritize writing, described a non-negotiable related to school-wide focus on writing.

> On the twenty-ninth the committee that's looking at…writing, they're going to get substitutes, and all five of them are going to sit in a room all day long. So we're buying teacher time to come together to look at the data on a regular basis, and giving them the time to do it. And it's a scheduled thing, and there's no opt-out.

Jayden went on to describe the necessity of establishing non-negotiables related to looking at data, specifically looking at data on students' writing performance.

> Teachers are understanding that it's a data-driven system, and that decisions have to be based on that data. What we're trying to find right now is—what data to drive our systems? And…that has helped us to collaborate….We've realized that if we're all going in the same direction, and we're all looking at—and working on and using that—we overcome barriers. We open up communication lines. We force common planning time. We force co-teaching. Not because we have to force it, because we see the need for it, because we say how can we do these things smarter?

Jayden seemed to see this non-negotiable as both valued and appreciated by staff for whom it impacted. Bill, another Level 2 leader, also framed collaboration as a non-negotiable for his staff. Like Jayden, Bill did not just present the non-negotiable as a "must do." He described the benefits that accompany the non-negotiable, including (if needed) helping his staff get back on the "the good path."

> The professional cultural here around collaboration, and what does that look

like….For two years, and in some cases even a little longer, our teachers [have been] planning together….It takes the isolation out of teaching….It's unfortunate to get behind the door, and shut the door….At times it's easier to go the other direction, and we need to keep forcing… [until] they find that value again, [and they are] on that good path.

The second framing strategy used by leaders of the district's top performing schools involved connecting a solution to their school's mission statement. Bill not only used this framing strategy, he also described how the use of this framing strategy actually illustrates how he has developed and changed as a leader.

> In my earlier years, I think I was like, Jesus, this is a really great program. Well, try it out, see if we have any success with it….We were…all over the place, and…we had marginal success. We really more flat lined, we went backwards in most areas. And then [we] really started to… [say], "You know what? If it doesn't impact the mission statement or that instructional focus, then it shouldn't be done."

The mission of the Bill's Level 2 school was to "ensure that all students benefit from high quality instructional experiences that meet or exceed high standards for preparing children to progress towards college and career readiness." This mission statement was then paired with an instructional focus of having all students "demonstrate measurable growth in their ability to read nonfiction text and express understanding through clear and well-organized writing." As a result of this mission statement and instructional focus, two of the solutions Bill presented to his staff were Word Generation and the Collins Writing Program. Word Generation is a research-based vocabulary program that incorporates the

use of nonfiction text, specifically passages about "controversies that are currently under debate in this country" (Strategic Education Research Partnership, 2011). The Collins Writing Program focuses on teaching students how to compose five different types of writing. The students in Bill's school were working on the first three types—capturing ideas on paper, responding correctly to a specific question, and composing an extended response to an assignment that requires "substantive content" (Collins Educational Associates, 2013).

Whereas the leaders of the district's top performing schools more frequently applied the framing strategies of explicitly establishing direction and connecting to their school's mission statement, the leaders of Level 3 schools applied a framing a strategy that the leaders of Level 1 and 2 schools had not: de-legitimizing past practices of the school and/or the past practices teachers. Jamie, the leader of a Level 3 school, identified increasing the enrollment of students in Advanced Placement (AP) courses as a solution for addressing disparities in student performance. She then framed the solution by presenting the demographic make-up of students enrolled in college prep classes and students enrolled in advanced placement courses to her staff.

> I just did a snapshot of…the enrollment of one of our typical college prep-level classes. I didn't put any names up…. And I said, "Here's a typical snapshot of an AP class that we offer." The CP level was 92% free and reduced lunch, and it was like 85% minority. The AP class was 25% free and reduced lunch and like 40% minority. Our population is 75% free and reduced lunch…and we're a majority minority student population. Something is not right here.

Based on the changes in students enrolling in AP courses, this framing strategy proved to

be effective.

> That first year prior to [the presentation]…we had seven Latino students taking an AP class, at least one. We had 26 low-income. In one year, we went to 92 low income and 35 Hispanic/Latino.

Whereas this example seems to focus on a school practice, Jamie went on to discuss the challenges that often accompany changing established school policies and practices that govern the enrollment of students in AP courses:

> So it's a big union issue to get this because they do things with merit pay, and all that isn't typically popular with unions. But our staff bought in, and so the major initiative behind it is certainly to increase AP enrollments, but to reduce the achievement gap.

This quote highlights the important role teachers play in sustaining—or changing—policies, practices, and programs that create educational barriers based on race/ethnicity and class. Interestingly, students with disabilities (who made up approximately 20% of the school's student population) were not mentioned by Jamie as she discussed the shifting make-up of students enrolled in AP courses.

Brian, the leader of another Level 3 school, identified the analysis of student performance data as a solution for improving ineffective instructional practices. As he talked, Brian delegitimized the past practice of teachers working within his school:

> Our school has been a big worksheet type school with packets of worksheets, and teachers really just doing what was comfortable for them and not following standards or data. So they would kind of just fly by the seat of their pants before. The kids would be busy, but it was nothing meaningful, nothing appropriate to the

standards, and nothing was data driven before.

Jamie then went on to describe how things were changing under his leadership:

> I'm a really data-driven principal, so I have to teach them what I'm expecting them to do and give them time to do it. That was a big thing, too. They never had time to do this work before. Now, at our weekly grade-level meetings, that's what we're doing; we're focusing on the data, and planning instruction based on what the data says that our students need.

Prompting Constituency-related Cognitive Shifts

Constituency-related cognitive shifts involve a change in how an audience views themselves, their work, or others within the organization (i.e., school district) (Foldy et al., 2008, 2009). Table 5.7 presents the constituency-related cognitive shifts that district- and school-level leaders in the New Hope School District were attempting to prompt in others, as well as the range of strategies used to prompt these particular shifts.

Framing how the constituency sees itself. Both district- and school-level leaders described the need for individuals working within the district to see themselves as responsible for helping *all* children experience high levels of academic success. The notion of responsibility seemed to be emphasized more than any other, and the framing strategy used most commonly by both district- and school-level leaders was to redefine/re-envision the constituency's role/responsibilities within the organization. Sean, the superintendent, pointed out that a change occurred at the central office after he was hired:

> And I said to the people who stayed….you need to be in the school and you need to work side by side with the principals, you need to be part of the solution and

Table 5.7

Constituency-related Cognitive Shifts and Framing Strategies

Category	Type	Cognitive Shift	Framing Strategy
Constituency-related	How the Constituency Sees Itself	We are responsible for helping *all* children experience high levels of academic success.	• Re-define/Re-envision the constituency's role/responsibilities within the organization. • Set/Establish clear goals and expectations. • Promote the idea that everyone has an important role to play.
		We (the students) are capable.	• Re-define/Re-envision the constituency's role/responsibilities within the organization.
Constituency-related	How One Part of the Constituency Sees Another Part	We can learn from one another.	• Focus on building and acknowledging the competency/capacity present within the constituency. • Promote a collective sense of empowerment.

not part of the problem. And I think in too many school districts the central office is seen as part of the problem, not part of the solution.

Interestingly, in this excerpt Sean not only attempted to influence how his audience (i.e., other district-level leaders) viewed themselves and their work, he also revealed how he wanted others within the organization to view the central office. He wanted district-level leaders to be seen as part of the solution. In order for this to happen, Sean believed that district-level leaders needed to be working "side-by-side with the principals."

Whereas Sean described a shift in professional responsibilities within the central office, most of the district- and school-level leaders focused on teachers' responsibilities. Adrianne, a district-level leader, acknowledged that there had been a shift in how individuals at the school- level viewed their professional responsibilities. "There are

some people who really do believe differently, that they have to act differently, that their ownership and responsibility for all kids, that profile has increased." Adrianne went on to describe that efforts to increase teachers' sense of responsibility was an "an uphill battle." She mentioned, "If they [teachers] don't take a professional responsibility for all the students sitting in front of them than it becomes somebody else's problem."

The notion of responsibility also emerged at the school-level. Bill, a school-level leader, explained how the use of data changed the way teachers thought about their professional responsibilities. His explanation emphasized how data and the accompanying accountability placed the responsibility on teachers to teach in ways that enabled students to learn.

> Teachers now look at [data] and the progress monitoring piece of that, and it impacts my instruction and my responsibility because it's so, it's so obvious…where we need to make gains, or where potentially we really want to make gains, and then having that, and I don't want to say that accountability piece as an negative, but that accountability slash assessment piece provides you with that information that you can look at and say, "Geez, you know, my children are making great gains, or I'm a little frustrated that Johnny and Susie aren't making the gains so maybe we can go back and change something within my instruction." So that use of data has made it, I think, increasingly clear for teachers around their practice.

Similar to Bill, Sharon, another school-level leader, also spoke of the responsibility of teachers to use data to inform their practice. Additionally, Sharon also seemed to be emphasizing that teachers cared about helping students succeed.

> I think there's been a lot of changes in the way that we teach with differentiating our instruction, the way that we present ourselves. We've got to look at this data and find out, what can we do to make these changes in students so that they can be successful? The student, who couldn't stay in school, didn't want to read, hated math. We're looking at this data and saying, "How can we present math better? How can we be more user friendly?"

Other framing strategies used to foster a sense of responsibility towards helping *all* children experience high levels of academic success included (a) setting/establishing clear goals and expectations and (b) promoting the idea that everyone has an important role to play. Many of the goals and expectations that had been established at both the district- and school-level involved the use of data to improve instruction and achievement. Sean, the district's superintendent, described the expectation established for schools to present to the traveling cabinet. The cabinet was made up of central office administrators. Every other week the cabinet traveled to a school where the hosting school would present their data.

> The school knows we're coming and they're supposed to present their data, where they are, what are they doing with their data teams, what's their biggest weakness, how are they going to address that, and then basically what do you need, what more do you need to do your work.

This specific expectation was tied to a strategic objective from the District's Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP). The objective aimed to "further develop the skills of the superintendent and administrators to identify and promote effective teaching and improve student achievement."

Just as district-level leaders visited schools with the intent of hearing and seeing how data was being used to improve teaching and learning, school-level leaders visited classrooms to look for evidence that data was influencing instructional practices and providing students with the opportunities they needed to learn. Brian, a school-level leader, stated:

> They know that I'm watching and looking for that. So, yes, because they know that I'm watching, and I'm coming in and expecting that, that's my expectation….So the fact that I'm visible, and I'm in the classrooms ensuring that this is happening…making sure that these flexible groups are based on what the data says these kids need.

The last framing strategy used by district- and school-level leaders to foster a sense of responsibility towards helping *all* children experience high levels of academic success involved promoting the idea that everyone has an important role to play. Jamie, a school-level leader, discussed confronting her staff after comparing the average performance of students on open response questions against the state average. "Hey, look at the state average on open response, guys, and then look at ours. We're a full two or three points off here. Why? What is it about?" Jamie then explained how writing had been addressed mainly by the English teachers and the need for all teachers to be teachers of writing. Following the implementation of a school-wide emphasis on writing, Jamie's school experienced a 12 percentage point increase in the number of students scoring proficient or higher. Jamie credited the gains to all teachers, regardless of their content area, understanding that they had an important role to play in helping students to improve their writing.

Interestingly, the leaders of the district's top-performing schools not only framed for constituency-related cognitive shifts among staff, they also framed for constituency-related cognitive shifts among students. Specifically, the leaders of the district's top-performing schools wanted students to see themselves as capable, and they used the framing strategy of redefining/re-envisioning the students' role/responsibilities within the organization to prompt this shift. For example, Bill discussed how the public display of data evolved to include students in the school's data use practices:

> What started as this philosophy around posting, publicly posting [performance data]…we took it to a different level….We said, "We don't just want to have it on the wall. We want the kids to know it. We want the kids to be able to interact with it." So…in our interventions when [students] do their progress monitoring, they'll get a marker and they'll walk up to their data sheet, and they'll color in their little bar graph that shows what their fluency was today versus what it was two weeks ago, and they can come back and say, "Geez it went up five words, and I only made one mistake….I'm really making gains towards my benchmark." And that's the level we want to get to. So, I think the greatest change is looking at our use of it, but then making it so public and so internalized by the children that they can understand it.

Framing how one part of the constituency sees another part. District-level leaders seemed to think that schools viewed each other as resources from which they could learn. Sean, the superintendent, stated, "The good news is…we've been collaborating. I can ask them to look at one another. I find out they talk to each other a lot, they call each other. They copy things that one another is doing right." Sean's

comment seemed to imply that collaboration was happening regularly among the different schools. Alicia, another district-level leader, also framed schools, specifically the more successful schools, as resources. She described schools as reaching out to one another, visiting one another, asking questions. Alicia went on to demonstrate the type of thinking and investigation that she believed was going on in the district: "Okay, this is what it looks like here. What does it look like there? How have you been able to achieve that?"

Interestingly, the school-level leaders of the district's top-performing schools attributed learning from other schools as having played a part in their success. For example, Bill, the leader of a Level 2, explained:

> We have been able to look at schools, look at what they're doing, kind of duplicate some of the successes that we've seen out there. And quite frankly, I think that several schools have come here and tried to replicate the systems that we have in place, which is always nice too.

Although Bill did not specify exactly which schools they were able to look at or which schools visited his school, the interviewer believed he was talking about schools beyond the New Hope School District's boundaries.

Other school-level leaders interviewed identified schools within the district as potential resources from which they would like to learn, yet these leaders also felt they did not have the opportunity or access to utilize the identified schools as effective resources. For example, Brian, a school-level leader, talked about listening to another principal in a meeting.

> You'll hear him say, "This is what I'm doing at my school." Sometimes I'll be

like, "Oh, that'd be great if I could come over there and see you." But that's never offered or not an expectation that's been set by the district, that you can go over and collaborate with other principals. That's never been said that that's allowed to do.

Jayden, a school-level leader, expressed similar feelings and thoughts as he talked about the Level 1 school in the district:

> I want to see it, not hear about it. I want to see it, and I want to talk about it. And then I want to bring a group of people over here and say how do we replicate that, because our schools [are] different but… not that much different.

In contrast, Joe, the leader of a Level 3 school in the district that needs to compete against two other schools for students, expressed that he did not view the other schools as resources.

> The district is really set up like silos….It's not like I'm going to ask one of the other…principals, well, how did you do this?...You know, if I said how do you do this, nine times out of ten it's going to be something that I don't have here anyways, and the other ten times out of ten they're going to be like, "Yeah so, my enrollment's already down this year, why should I help you get better so your school is going to be in the pick?....What's in it for me?

Whereas the district-level leaders framed the schools as resources from which to learn, many of the school-level leaders either did not feel this was true or felt it was true but that they did not see the schools as accessible resources. Therefore, most of the school-level leaders did not frame other schools as resources from which they could learn. Instead, they focused on framing individuals and groups within the school as

resources from whom they could learn. Furthermore, the top-performing schools seemed to promote the idea that they could learn from one another by fostering a collective sense of empowerment. For example, Bill focused on emphasizing the power and benefits of collaboration.

> [When] I say cultural, I mean the professional cultural here around collaboration, and what does that look like….For two years, and in some cases even a little longer, our teachers [have been] planning together. And they've found the value in sharing insight, but more importantly, sharing the load. You know, there's a lot that goes into being an efficient and effective professional educator, and if you can share that load among two or three other people. So geez, you plan the assessments, I'll plan the learning activities, and you plan the launch to the lesson. And then you can come together, and put that all together. That's meeting the needs on so many different levels. It takes the isolation out of teaching.

Patterns that Emerged from the Clustering and Re-clustering of Data

Distinct patterns emerged as a result of clustering and re-clustering the data collected from district- and school-level leaders. The preceding sections described in detail two of the patterns that emerged: (1) There was a correlation between leaders' use of particular framing strategies and their level of leadership (i.e., district or school). (2) Unique patterns of strategy use surfaced for the leaders of the district's top performing schools (i.e., Level 1 and Level 2). These patterns are summarized and displayed in Tables 5.8 and 5.9. Also displayed in Tables 5.8 and 5.9 are the patterns of cognitive shift pairing that emerged as the data collected was clustered and re-clustered.

As district- and school-level leaders were attempting to prompt cognitive shifts

Table 5.8

Patterns in the Framing for Cognitive Shifts by District- and School-level Leaders

District-level Leaders			
Issue-related Cognitive Shifts	**Framing Strategies**	**Constituency-related Cognitive Shifts**	**Framing Strategies**
Heighten awareness, increase importance, and create a sense of urgency regarding a problem or need (i.e., lowest performing subgroups, access to general education curriculum).	• Use/Display data to quantify and clarify the problem or need.	How the Constituency Sees Itself: We are responsible for helping *all* children experience high levels of academic success.	• Re-define/Re-envision the constituency's role/responsibilities within the organization.
Accept/Embrace a solution (e.g., data-driven decision making, inclusion).	• Offer proof that the idea works (e.g., share example of success). • Explicitly establish direction (e.g., not a choice/non-negotiable).	How One Part of the Constituency Sees Another: We can learn from one another.	• Focus on building and acknowledging the competency/ capacity present within the constituency.
School-level Leaders			
Issue-related Cognitive Shifts	**Framing Strategies**	**Constituency-related Cognitive Shifts**	**Framing Strategies**
Heighten awareness, increase importance, and create a sense of urgency regarding a problem or need (e.g., the distribution of students across the Response to Intervention tiers).	• Use data to quantify and clarify the problem or need.	How the Constituency Sees Itself: We are responsible for helping *all* children experience high levels of academic success.	• Re-define/Re-envision the constituency's role/responsibilities within the organization.
Accept/Embrace a solution (i.e., data-driven decision-making, writing, collaboration).	• Present as best practice.	How One Part of the Constituency Sees Another: We can learn from one another.	• Focus on building and acknowledging the competency/capacity present within the constituency.

Note. Information shaded in gray highlights differences between district- and school-level leaders.

Table 5.9

Patterns in the Framing for Cognitive Shifts by Leaders of Level 1 and Level 2 Schools

Leaders of Level 1 and Level 2 Schools			
Issue-related Cognitive Shifts	**Framing Strategies**	**Constituency-related Cognitive Shifts**	**Framing Strategies**
Heighten awareness, increase importance, and create a sense of urgency regarding a problem or need (i.e., distribution of students across the RtI tiers, the impact of data on teachers' practice, "too many things on the table").	• Use data to quantify and clarify the problem or need. • Present as having leverage (e.g., focusing on the "right" thing, addressing the problem that will make the most difference).	How the Constituency Sees Itself: We are responsible for helping *all* children experience high levels of academic success.	• Re-define/Re-envision the constituency's role/responsibilities within the organization.
Accept/Embrace a solution (i.e., data driven decision-making, student-led conferences, writing, co-planning, co-teaching).	• Connect to the school's mission. • Explicitly establish direction (e.g., not a choice/non-negotiable).	How the Constituency (Students) Sees Itself: We are capable.	• Re-define/Re-envision the constituency's role/responsibilities within the organization.
		How One Part of the Constituency Sees Another: We can learn from one another.	• Focus on building and acknowledging the competency/ capacity present within the constituency.
			• Promote a collective sense of empowerment.

Note. Information shaded in gray highlights unique trends found among the leaders of Level 1 and Level 2 school.

that resulted in heightening the awareness, increasing the importance, and creating a sense of urgency regarding a problem or need related to disparities in student

performance (e.g., lack of access to the general education curriculum for students receiving special education services), they were also likely attempting to prompt cognitive shifts that would result in the constituency seeing themselves as responsible for helping *all* children experience high levels of success. Similarly, as district- and school-level leaders were attempting to prompt cognitive shifts that resulted in the acceptance of a solution (e.g., the implementation of an inclusive model), they were likely attempting to prompt cognitive shifts that would result in one part of the constituency seeing another part of the constituency as a resource from whom they could learn.

Interestingly, the first set of issue- and constituency-related pairings matched together shifts in thinking about problems with changes that focused on the constituency's "internal" understandings of self (i.e., their sense of responsibility). The leaders seemed to be attempting to appeal to and strengthen the constituency's intrinsic motivation to face and confront challenges. In contrast, attempts to shift thinking about solutions were partnered with the notion that we can learn from one another, which focused on how one part of the constituency viewed another part. This second pairing seemed to put the emphasis on shifting the constituency's understanding of "external" resources, resources within the school or district environment, as a way for leaders to guide collective action.

Discussion

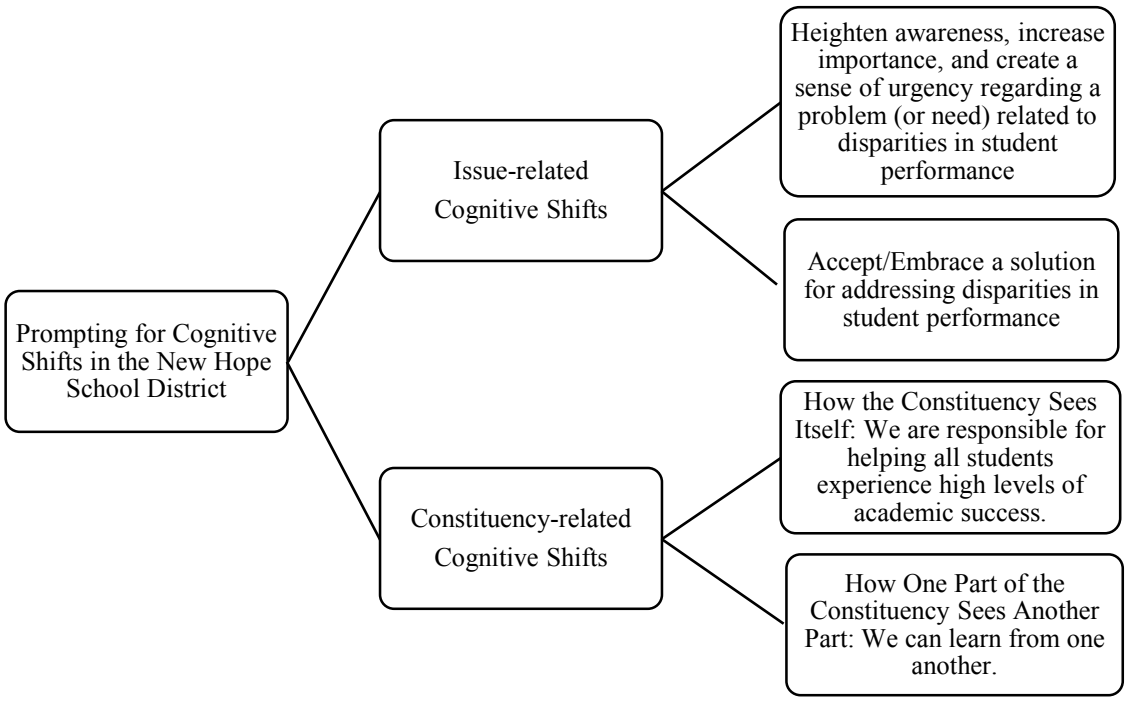
Drawing on previous research which introduced the cognitive shift as a unit of analysis for studying the work of leadership (Foldy et al., 2008, 2009), this portion of the research study sought to identify (a) the cognitive shifts that district- and school-level leaders were attempting to prompt and (b) the framing strategies district- and school-level

leaders were using to prompt these shifts. Findings revealed that district- and school-level leaders in the New Hope School District were attempting to prompt a common set of issue- and constituency-related cognitive shifts (see Figure 5.2).

When attempting to prompt for issue-related cognitive shifts, district- and school-level leaders' choice of framing strategies revealed similarities and differences. Whereas both district- and school-level leaders used data to quantify and clarify the magnitude of a problem in order to heighten awareness, increase importance, and create a sense of urgency, district- and school- level leaders differed in their use of framing strategies for getting their audience to accept a solution. District-level leaders focused on offering proof that the idea worked and explicitly establishing the direction, and school-level leaders concentrated on presenting solutions as best practice. Additionally, data collected from leaders of Level 1 and Level 2 schools revealed that these leaders also focused on framing issues as having leverage and connecting solutions to their school's mission.

The framing strategies that district- and school-level leaders used to prompt constituency-related cognitive shifts were the same. In order to foster a sense of responsibility for helping *all* children experience high levels of academic success, leaders focused on redefining and re-envisioning the constituency's role and responsibilities within the organization. In order to promote the idea that we can learn from one another, leaders concentrated on building and acknowledging the competency and capacity present within the constituency. While the framing strategies used by district- and school-level leaders were the same, important differences were noted regarding the cognitive shift that emphasized learning from one another. Whereas district-level leaders spoke of the schools learning from one another, school-level leaders spoke of learning from

Figure 5.2. Prompting for Common Issue and Constituency-related Cognitive Shifts



individuals, or groups of individuals, within their school. Another notable difference emerged with the disaggregation of data collected from leaders of Level 1 and Level 2 schools. These leaders used the framing strategy of redefining the students' role and responsibility within the organization to prompt the following cognitive shift among students: We are capable.

Cycles of Understanding and Action

Guided by a sensemaking/sensegiving lens and a focus on the work of leadership, the findings from this portion study were used to address the following overarching research questions:

- How do district- and school-level leaders understand disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability?

- How do these understandings then influence the work of leadership focused on addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability?

In order for district- and school-level leaders to understand disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and disability, they must engage in the process of sensemaking. As mentioned earlier, sensemaking involves figuring out and assigning meaning to a situation (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 444). The process of sensemaking (a) starts with chaos, (b) involves bracketing and noticing, (c) is about labeling, (d) is retrospective, (e) is about presumption, (f) is social and systemic, (g) is about action, and (h) is about organizing through communication (Weick et al., 2005). The following sections examine each of these features in greater detail and (b) apply each of these features to the New Hope School District case study.

Sensemaking starts with chaos. The assignment of Level 3 status proved to be a disruptive force within the New Hope School District. To make sense of disruptions, "people look first for reasons that will enable them to resume and stay in action" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). Looking for reasons involves noticing and bracketing "possible signs of trouble for closer attention" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 411). As a result of the New Hope School District's assignment of Level 3 status, the district mandated that each school set up a "data war room." This mandate ensured the explicit noticing and bracketing of student performance disparities. As discovered in this portion of the research study, the district- and school level leaders then used the bracketed student performance disparities (e.g., talked about and displayed the data) as a strategy for heightening awareness, increasing importance, and creating a sense of urgency regarding a problem related to

disparities in student performance.

Sensemaking involves noticing and bracketing. Noticing and bracketing is influenced by the mental models individuals develop through work and life experiences (Weick et al., 2005). Mental models are "deeply held internal images of how the world works" (Senge, 1990, p. 163). Mental models often "set up an ideal, a standard, or an exemplary case that we use to compare against current circumstances" (Fairhurst & Saar, 1996, p. 38). Comparing current circumstances against an ideal provides individuals with an opportunity to notice and bracket any signs of trouble that may need closer attention.

An ideal circumstance for the New Hope School District would have been for every school to reach Level 1 status. Sean, the superintendent of the New Hope School District, stated in his interview, "My goal is to make this a level one school district. So, if you have a school that's a level three and you're not doing anything to move it up, that's not going to work because we will always be the level of our lowest performing school." Since the accountability and assistance level for each school was based on proficiency gaps that separated their "high needs" group (i.e., students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL)/Former ELL students, low income students) from their "all students" group, district- and school-level leaders noticed and bracketed the proficiency gaps found in student performance data generated from state and local assessments.

Findings from this portion of the research study discovered that the prompting of cognitive shifts often paired together an issue-related cognitive shift with a constituency-related cognitive shift. As district- and school-level leaders framed bracketed proficiency gaps to heighten awareness and create a sense of urgency, they also attempted to influence how the constituency viewed itself: We are responsible for helping *all* children

experience high levels of success. Although not explicitly stated in the quote above, Sean's statement implies a sense of collective responsibility (i.e., "we will always be the level of our lowest performing school"). His statement also hints at the need to re-define/re-envision the constituency's role/responsibilities within the organization (i.e., "if you have a school that's a level three and you're not doing anything to move it up, that's not going to work").

Sensemaking is about labeling. Labeling can play a key role in helping people to "find common ground….labeling ignores differences among actors and deploys cognitive representations that are able to generate recurring behaviors" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 411). The labeling of bracketed proficiency gaps by district- and school-level leaders was diagnostic in nature in that the assigned labels seemed to recommend or advocate for particular solutions. For example, consider the proficiency gap that separated the performance of students with disabilities from the performance of other student subgroups in the New Hope School District. Most of the district- and school-level leaders interviewed explained that the proficiency gap experienced by students with disabilities resulted from their limited access to the general education curriculum. This explanation could be considered a diagnostic label that district- and school-level leaders assigned to an existing proficiency gap. As mentioned, diagnostic labels often seem to suggest particular solutions. In this case, the solution proposed by district- and school-level leaders in the New Hope School District was the implementation of an inclusive model.

Sensemaking is retrospective. Noticing, bracketing, and labeling "follows after and names a completed act, but the labeling itself fails to capture the dynamics of what is happening" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). Therefore, sensemaking involves contemplating

the past, thinking about decisions, situations, events, etc. that took place in the past. Consider once again the proficiency gaps experienced by students with disabilities in the New Hope School District. After these gaps were noted, bracketed, and labeled, hindsight offered district- and school-level leaders an opportunity to look back at past practices and policies. Some of these policies and practices were likely put into place in an effort to offer greater levels of support to students with disabilities, yet ultimately they resulted in creating barriers that further inhibited the students' opportunity to learn. Retrospection played a role in deepening district- and school-level leaders understanding of why gaps exist.

Evidence from this portion of the research study uncovered specific evidence that district- and school-level leaders were retrospective. Leaders in the New Hope School District thought about past policies and practices that contributed to the development and sustaining of proficiency gaps. Additionally, they used insights gained from hindsight as a framing strategy (i.e., de-legitimizing past practices) in their attempts to get their audience to accept/embrace a solution. This particular framing strategy proved successful for Jamie, a school-level leader. As described in an earlier section, after presenting demographic information on the school's student population and demographic information on students enrolled in AP courses, Jamie was able to effectively highlight an unjust situation and gained the support of her staff to make changes.

Sensemaking is about presumption. Retrospection offers an opportunity to deepen one's understanding. Knowing what worked or did not work in the past contributes to the decision-making process focused on what actions should be taken in the present. Presumption often accompanies decisions to take new action. Presumption

involves believing something to be true. After leaders in the New Hope School District noticed, bracketed, labeled, and reflected on disparities in student performance, they attempted to match appropriate solutions to identified problems. Matching solutions to problems involved making presumptions about the most effective ways to address—and eventually eliminate—disparities in student performance. For example, in the New Hope School District, many of the leaders presumed that the implementation of an inclusive model would effectively address the performance disparities experienced by students with disabilities.

As district- and school-level leaders engaged in the process of sensemaking, their work unfolded "as a series of approximations and attempts to discover an appropriate response" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). This "unfolding" was revealed time and time again in the interview transcripts as leaders discussed efforts to focus on the "right" things, addressing the problems and implementing solutions that would make the most difference. This "unfolding" involves "local context and concrete cues" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). It was the local context and concrete cues that led Brian's school to focus on comprehension, Bill's school to focus on writing, and Jamie's school to focus on attendance. Additionally, the data revealed that this unfolding can be used effectively to heighten awareness and create a sense of urgency by presenting issues as having high leverage.

Sensemaking is social and systemic. Sensemaking does not happen in isolation. It is "influenced by a variety of social factors" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412), including the actions of—as well as interactions with—others working within the organization. As district- and school-level leaders met regularly to examine and discuss student

performance data, including greatest areas of need and efforts to address these needs, sensemaking was distributed across the school system. Knowledge of the most effective response does not reside within one individual. Through interactions with others, knowledge of effective practices has the potential to grow within and across individuals working within a system. By developing structures and routines that supported interactions focused on addressing issues of disparities in student performance, district- and school-level leaders in the New Hope School District contributed to a "stronger…coordination and information distribution among [constituencies working within the district]" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412).

Although many of the school-level leaders felt as though they did not have the opportunity or access to utilize other schools within the district as effective resources, evidence collected from interviews suggested the interaction of district- and school-level leaders, which the established structures and routines supported, contributed to a shared understanding of (a) existing proficiency gaps and (b) potential ways to address existing proficiency gaps. For example, most of the district- and school-level leaders identified the disparities in student performance experienced by students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL), and low income students. This serves as evidence that the focus was on the performance of student groups that made up the "high needs" group. Although present, the proficiency gaps experienced by Hispanic/Latino students and African American/Black students were rarely mentioned. Furthermore, although schools implemented solutions specific to their context, district- and school-level leaders mentioned the same set of solutions when describing appropriate possible responses (e.g., inclusion, co-teaching, data-driven instruction, student-led conferences). Interactions

among district- and school-level leaders had clearly led to a common understanding of proficiency gaps and appropriate responses. These understandings, therefore, had been distributed across the district. This distribution of understanding was likely further supported by district- and school-level leaders' attempts to prompt the common set of issue- and constituency-related cognitive shifts identified in this portion of the research study:

- heighten awareness, increase importance, and create a sense of urgency regarding a problem (or need) related to disparities in student performance;
- accept/embrace a solution for addressing disparities in student performance;
- how the constituency sees itself: we are responsible for helping *all* students experience high levels of academic success;
- how one part of the constituency sees another part: we can learn from one another.

Sensemaking is about action. Sensemaking involves cycles of acquiring knowledge and taking action (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Sensemaking pairs together the questions "what's going on here?" and "what do I do next?" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). This feature of sensemaking addresses the ways in which understanding influences the work of leadership focused on addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability. As leaders interacted with one another, their presentations and discussions contributed "a continual, iteratively developed, shared understanding of the diagnosis" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). This shared understanding, in turn, influenced the actions of both district- and school-level leaders as they worked to guide and support the implementation of identified solutions.

As noted earlier, one of the governing design principles of distributed leadership emphasizes that "intervening to improve leadership necessitates attention to interactions, not just actions, because leadership practice takes shape in the interactions between leaders and followers" (Spillane, 2006, p. 93). Whereas the routines and structures put into place by the New Hope School District provided opportunities for interactions and guided the focus of those interactions, examining the cognitive shifts that district- and school-level leaders were attempting to prompt opened opportunities to explore how the work of leadership focused on developing a shared understanding that supports collective action could be distributed across a system.

Sensemaking is about organizing through communication. The leadership work of creating and communicating a vision that others will accept and act upon moves leaders beyond the process of "sensemaking-for-self" to "sensegiving-for-others" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 444). Sensegiving, which entails influencing how others make sense of a situation, is an important aspect of leadership work (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Sensegiving involves communication that takes "place in interactive talk and draws on resources of language in order to formulate and exchange through talk….As this occurs, a situation is talked into existence and the basis is laid for action to deal with it" (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 58).

In an earlier section, the following question was posed: "What kind of insights can we get if we say the effectiveness of a leader lies in his [*sic*] ability to make activity meaning…to give others a sense of understanding what they are doing?" (Pondy, 1978/1989, p. 229). The managing of meaning for others is a critical aspect of leadership work. The district- and school-level leaders in this study engaged in the process of

sensemaking which helped them to strengthen their own understanding of disparities in student performance. As described, understanding and action do not unfold in a linear fashion, rather they occur in iterative cycles. As understanding develops, new actions are taken. As new actions are taken, understanding develops. This portion of the study used the cognitive shift as a unit of analysis, which allowed the researcher to study how district- and school-level leaders attempted to distribute understanding across a school district, influencing how others understood the problems and solutions related to disparities in student performance, as well as themselves, their work, and/or others within the organization.

Contributions to Theoretical and Practical Knowledge

Foldy et al. (2008) initially proposed the use of the cognitive shift as a construct, describing it as both "flexible and robust" (p. 514). Foldy et al. (2008) argued that the cognitive shift construct offers both a theoretical and methodological approach to analyzing the leadership work of making meaning, or managing meaning, for others. In support of their argument, Foldy et al. (2009) outlined multiple benefits associated with defining the cognitive shift as a theoretical construct and using it as a unit of analysis, including:

- offers a systematic approach to analyzing the sometimes elusive leadership work of managing meaning, regardless of whether the leadership work is accomplished by an individual or individual(s);
- offers a means for exploring *empirically* the leadership work of managing meaning for others;
- offers opportunities to address deficiencies in scholarship to date;

    - Previous scholarship focuses primarily on the characteristics and behaviors of individual leaders. The cognitive shift construct provides researchers with a way to study the *work* of leadership.
- offers opportunities to consider and explore multiple types of cognitive shifts—e.g., individuals' shifts in thinking about their work, about themselves, and about others involved in the work;
- offers the ability to discriminate between the desired cognitive shift and the particular strategies used to trigger or justify the shift.

Findings from this portion of the study confirm and expand this theoretical knowledge base, as well as contribute to the practical knowledge base. By identifying the cognitive shift as a construct and unit of analysis, findings from this portion of study indicated that the work of leadership, specifically the work of managing meaning for others, can be effectively shared and distributed across individuals within an organization, leading to a stronger, more coordinated response to addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and disability.

Limitations and Future Areas for Research

This portion of the research study focused on the issue- and constituency-related cognitive shifts that district- and school-level leaders were attempting to prompt in the New Hope School District. This portion of the research study also focused on identifying the strategies that district- and school-level leaders used in their efforts to prompt cognitive shifts. The intent behind this focus was to capture the extensiveness to which district- and school-level leaders were engaged in the work of leadership centered on manage meaning for others. Specifically, leaders' efforts to manage meaning for others as

they worked to address disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability and broaden students' opportunity to learn. This study did not focus on determining whether or not the cognitive shifts actually occurred. Therefore, an area for further research would be expanding the design of this research study to include individuals representative of the leaders' key audiences (e.g., teachers, students) to determine if (a) cognitive shifts have been prompted in key audiences, (b) cognitive shifts led to changes in behavior, and (c) cognitive shifts led to improved student performance and enhanced opportunities to learn.

Another limitation involved the scope of the research participants. During the selection of a school district, the research team determined that a small to medium-sized school district (i.e., five to ten schools) would provide the greatest opportunity to conduct both comprehensive and in-depth interviews of district- and school-level leaders. Furthermore, the research team believed that the ability to conduct both comprehensive and in-depth interviews of district- and school-level leaders would provide a richer, more insightful understanding of the case, as well as increase the credibility of the study. Ideally, the research team had hoped to interview all of the central office administrators and all of the principals. In the end, eight out of the eight district-level leaders participated in the study, and six out of the eight principals participated in the study. Since this portion of the study "re-clustered" the data set to compare and contrast the responses from district-level leaders with the responses from school-level leaders, as well as the responses from leaders of Level 1 and Level 2 schools with the responses from leaders of Level 3 schools, the absence of two principals was a limitation.

Another area for future research includes investigating how "informal" leaders

working within a school district frame problems, solutions, and constituencies related to disparities in student performance. Whereas this research study only interviewed individuals in "formal" leadership roles, it would be interesting—and important—to compare and contrast how individuals in both formal and informal leadership positions frame the problems, solutions and constitutions related to disparities in student performance. It could be helpful to surface the particular shifts individuals in formal and informal leadership positions "are attempting to create—across issue and constituency—and see if they fit together, or act at cross purposes. Mapping the cognitive work they are already doing could enable them to be more strategic and forward-thinking" (Foldy et al., p. 527).

Chapter Six[6]

Discussion and Recommendations

This research study applied the distributed leadership theoretical framework to explore the following research questions: How do district- and school-level leaders understand disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class and/or disability? How do these understandings then influence the work of leadership that focuses on addressing disparities in race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability? The distributed leadership framework allowed for a focus on interactions and the practice of leadership (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2004; Spillane et al., 2009; Sherer & Spillane, 2011). Specifically, the practice of leadership focused on the interactions of district- and school-level leaders and aspects of their work such as the tools and routines utilized to address disparities in student performance and broaden students' opportunity to learn (Spillane, 2006; Sherer & Spillane, 2011).

In this study, four researchers (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014) examined specific actions of district- and school-level leaders as they engaged in the work of understanding and addressing barriers to students' opportunity to learn. In an attempt to answer the overarching research questions, each researcher examined separate aspects of the central phenomenon, including:

- The specific shifts in thinking that district- and school-level leaders identified as needed before disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability could be effectively addressed, as well as the strategies district-

[6] Chapter Six was co-authored by Ann F. Allwarden, Phillip J. Potenziano, Sujan S. Talukdar, and Karen J. Zaleski.

and school-level leaders used in their attempts to prompt these shifts in thinking (Allwarden, 2014).

- The professional learning leveraged by district-level leaders for school-level leaders as an action to further learn about, understand, and address the barriers that may be inhibiting students' opportunity to learn (Talukdar, 2014).
- The data analysis structures and routines that district- and school-level leaders perceived to be essential in understanding and addressing disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability, as well as promoting students' opportunity to learn (Potenziano, 2014).
- The influence that interactions between district- and school-level leaders had on their understanding of barriers to students' opportunity to learn, as well as the influence that existing ties between district- and school-level leaders had on their practice aimed at improving students' opportunity to learn (Zaleski, 2014).

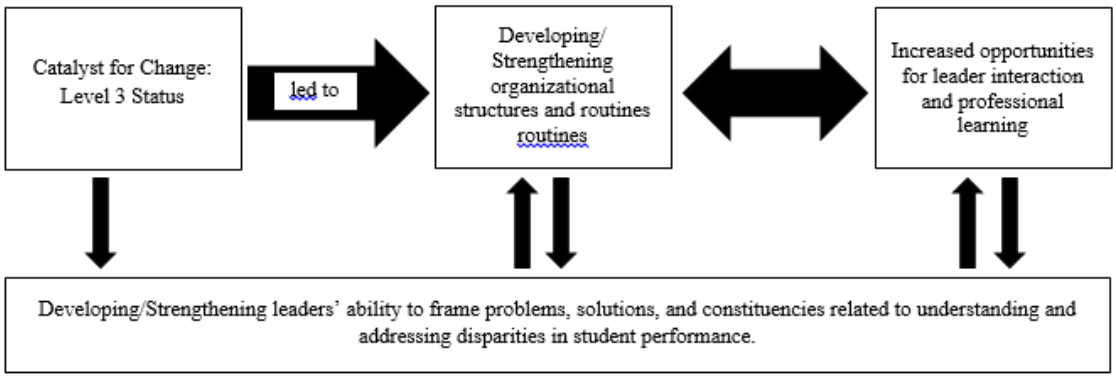
The following discussion synthesizes insights drawn from the four individual studies. These insights were gained by searching for complementary results based on the "complementarity model of triangulation" (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003, p.469). Applying the complementarity model of triangulation involved reviewing the individual studies for findings that complemented one another. Because the complementary findings were drawn from individual studies that highlighted very different aspects of the central phenomenon, these findings offer a stronger depiction of the topic being analyzed (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003) and further inform current understandings about the work of leadership focused on addressing disparities in student performance and enhancing students' opportunity to learn.

Complementary Findings

Level 3 status: Catalyst for change. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) emphasized that initiating change often triggers cyclical patterns of acquiring knowledge and taking action. Insights from across the studies revealed that the designation of Level 3 state accountability and assistance status served as a catalyst for change in the New Hope School District. The assignment of Level 3 status led to the development of new organizational structures and routines, which, in turn, supported patterns of acquiring knowledge and taking action. Specifically, the development of new organizational structures and routines led to (a) increased opportunities for leaders to interact with one another and (b) enhanced opportunities for leaders to engage in professional learning (Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Furthermore, since the structures and routines described by district- and school-level leaders occurred regularly (e.g., weekly, monthly, quarterly), leaders were provided with ongoing support as they grappled with understanding—or further developing their understanding—of barriers hindering students' opportunity to learn (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Additionally, the development of new organizational structures and routines provided leaders with a forum for presenting their plans for addressing disparities in student performance, as well as presenting the outcomes that resulted from actions taken. Ultimately, the opportunities that accompanied the establishment of new organizational structures and routines further supported and strengthened the development of shared understandings among district- and school-level leaders regarding why particular student performance gaps exist and how to most effectively address existing performance gaps (Allwarden, 2014).

Figure 6.1 depicts the relationship between the catalyst for change, the

Figure 6.1. The Interrelationship of Elements Studied



development of organizational structures and routines, and the increased opportunities for leader interaction and professional learning (Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Figure 6.1 also illustrates the relationship between these three elements and leaders' ability to frame problems, solutions and constituencies related to disparities in student performance (Allwarden, 2014). While the individual researchers of this study looked at specific aspects of leadership in isolation, Figure 6.1 offers a broader, more complete picture of how these elements interacted and influenced one another in real life.

As a result of the Level 3 status, district-level leaders sought out and established a partnership with the District and School Assistance Center (DSAC), a state sponsored organization. This partnership led to the establishment of new structures and routines which afforded on-going opportunities to conduct in-depth analyses of (a) disparities in student performance, (b) barriers in the learning environment, and (c) organizational challenges related to students' opportunity to learn. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) emphasize the importance of analyzing situations in an objective fashion and framing issues from a different perspective when working to address long standing disparities in

student performance. The partnership with DSAC led to the construction of structures and the development of routines that supported this aspect of leadership work.

As leaders came together to analyze disparities in student performance, barriers in the learning environment, and organizational challenges related to students' opportunity to learn, the learning environment within the district was further enhanced. The interactions that took place within this learning environment between district- and school-level leaders were examined as a critical element relating to school improvement (Daly & Finnigan, 2010, 2011, 2012). The New Hope School District's superintendent, Sean, offered a statement that captures the value of these interactions: "The DSAC team assisted the district by meeting with school and district leaders monthly, and sometimes more often, and has supported and assisted us with collaborating, analyzing data, and creating the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP)." Frequently, interactions between district- and school-level leaders occurred during Administrative Council (ADCO), Full Administrative Council (FADCO), and traveling cabinet meetings (Zaleski, 2014). These meetings offered leaders regular opportunities to engage in professional learning that enhanced their capacity to (a) identify and describe gaps in student performance and (b) consider and explore potential barriers to student learning (Allwarden, 2014; Talukdar, 2014). In other words, these meetings offered leaders opportunities "to engage in continuous and sustained learning about their practice in the setting where they actually work...confronting similar problems of practice" (Elmore, 2004, p. 127).

Finnigan and Daly (2010) remind us that sharing knowledge and mobilizing resources embedded in individual interactions is critical to influencing practice and enhancing success in "purposive action" (p. 180). The assignment of Level 3 status

triggered the mobilizing of resources to develop new structures and routines which then enhanced leaders' ability to share knowledge and take purposive action (Potenziano, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Purposive action taken by district- and school-level leaders included attempts to prompt a common set of shifts in thinking, which focused on distributing across the district a shared understanding that would support collective action (Allwarden, 2014). The actions taken were deliberate (thought about and discussed), developmental (designed to assist with growth and bring about improvement), and progressive (kept moving forward), with the intent of ensuring that students' opportunity to learn was enhanced. These actions supported understanding student performance disparities and informed solutions to address barriers to students' opportunity to learn.

The leaders in the New Hope School District also used organizational routines and structures to help distribute leadership responsibilities (Spillane, 2006). Prior to the Level 3 designation, structures and routines were in place that required district- and school-level leaders to meet. However, leaders were not required to collectively identify and develop a shared understanding of achievement disparities. Following Level 3 designation, enhanced and newly created structures and routines helped promote collaboration and build robust intra-organizational ties (Honig, 2004; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). The use of the structures and routines also played a critical role in guiding the New Hope School District in their development of a clearly aligned vision and mission (Harris et al., 2007; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Structures and routines led to shared understandings and collective action. New Hope School District leaders described specific structures and routines that had been set in place to support collaboration between district- and school-level leaders, as well as

to support data use practices. The Administrative Council (ADCO), Full Administrative Council (FADCO), traveling cabinet, DSAC meetings, and the Accelerated Improvement Plan (AIP) were examples of structures and routines put in place to support collaboration and data use among district- and school-level leaders (Potenziano, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). In addition, these structures allowed leaders to engage in ongoing professional learning (Talukdar, 2014). Spillane (2006) describes this leadership practice as "a product of the joint interactions of school *leaders*, *followers*, and aspects of their *situation* such as tools and routines" (p. 3).

According to the distributed leadership framework, the structures used within the New Hope School District can be thought of as tools and routines because they involved recurring patterns of "interdependent actions, involving multiple actors" (Feldman & Pentland, 2003, p. 311). For instance, the traveling cabinet structure supported the routine of leaders meeting regularly to engage in ongoing professional learning that involved the frequent review and analysis of student performance data (Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014). Established structures and routines also sought to allow district-and school-level leaders to develop an understanding of the opportunity gaps present in the learning environment (Allwarden, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). The action planning template and the AIP that leaders created in partnership with DSAC facilitated this understanding (Zaleski, 2014). As a result, leaders' ability to recognize barriers was evident in the areas of leadership skills, curriculum alignment and implementation, and instructional practice. More specifically, leaders identified barriers specific to students with disabilities, students from low income households, Latino/a students, and English language learners (ELL).

Additionally, the implementation of enhanced and newly developed structures and routines helped to expose inequitable practices in the New Hope School District. District- and school-level leaders interviewed consistently referred to students receiving special education as the sub-group most impacted by the achievement gap in the New Hope School District. Research findings revealed that one of the barriers to student learning for students with special needs was inequitable access to the general education curriculum (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Greene (1983) explains that equality in education focuses on "inputs" and ensures that the same is provided to all, while equity places emphasis on "outputs" and focuses on achieving the same outcomes for all. Lindsey et al. (2009) contend accommodations that account for differences, such as race and ethnicity, language, and ability, are sometimes needed in order to achieve educational equity.

Students receiving special education services in the New Hope School District were often educated in separate settings. Research evidence revealed there were some schools that deliberately encouraged equitable learning environments for students receiving special education services. When comparing schools across the district, data indicated that schools utilizing co-teaching and inclusion models earned higher state accountability ratings than those that did not. By differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students within the general education classroom, school staff moved closer to creating educational equity while improving students' opportunity to learn.

When examining how district-level leaders sought to leverage professional learning opportunities in the New Hope School District, leaders took advantage of improved structures and routines resulting from the DSAC partnership (Potenziano,

2014; Zaleski, 2014). Knapp (2003) reported "professional learning could involve changes in one's capacity for practice (i.e., changes in professionally relevant thinking, knowledge, skills, and habits of mind) and/or changes in practice itself (enacting the new knowledge and skills in one's daily work)" (pp. 112-113). New structures and routines, such as traveling cabinet meetings, not only resulted in increased interaction between leaders (Zaleski, 2014), but also offered occasions for leaders to build their data analysis and decision-making capacity (Talukdar, 2014). Further, structures and routines promoted sustained, job-embedded professional learning (e.g., ADCO, FADCO, and traveling cabinets meetings, learning walks, and 9-day instructional coaching cycle) and allowed for frequent collaboration and discussion of factors influencing teaching and learning (Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Given the evidence of deficit thinking that existed among school staff, particularly as it related to students with disabilities, district leaders also sought to leverage professional learning to prompt needed shifts in thinking (Talukdar, 2014).

As district- and school-level leaders' understanding developed, so did their ability to influence how others understood factors contributing to disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability (Allwarden, 2014). Influencing how others understand a situation is a critical aspect of leadership work, and the ability to effectively frame the problems, solutions, and constituencies related to disparities in student performance related to race/ethnicity, class, and/or disability becomes a powerful means for shifting the thinking of others. When effectively done, influencing how others understand a situation can positively impact individuals' perceptions of their work and provide a powerful source of inspiration and motivation

(Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Foldy et al., 2008). The interactions that occurred among district- and school-level leaders as a result of new structures and routines not only led to a shared understanding of student performance gaps and appropriate responses, they also contributed to leaders' attempting to prompt a common set of issue- and constituency-related cognitive shifts, which included:

- heighten awareness, increase importance, and create a sense of urgency regarding a problem (or need) related to disparities in student performance;
- accept/embrace a solution for addressing disparities in student performance;
- we are responsible for helping all students experience high levels of academic success;
- we can learn from one another (Allwarden, 2014).

As leaders attempted to prompt this set of cognitive shifts, the work of leadership (which includes the managing of meaning for others) was further distributed across the district.

The interactions and professional learning that occurred among leaders as a result of the structures and routines that were in place not only led to an understanding of the nature of the gap, it also led to an influence on their work, which focused on addressing disparities in student performance (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Specifically, leaders recognized that ongoing data analysis was critical to teaching and learning improvements. The task of analyzing data was distributed among all leaders for the specific purpose of improving the professional capacity to identify gaps in learning with the goal of eliminating barriers. For instance, when looking at data, one building leader recognized that low income and Latino students lacked opportunities pertaining to course placement; it was then brought to the attention of a district leader

who subsequently mandated that all students take at least one Advanced Placement course prior to graduation. Similarly, as a result of student performance data analysis, several building-based accelerated improvement plans were strategically created and utilized as tools across the district to enhance the learning environment.

The Accelerated Improvement Plan included specific initiatives and objectives that were designed by school and district leaders as tools to guide their work in an effort to eliminate identified barriers and enhance students' opportunity to learn. Harris et al. (2007) remind us that school improvement based on a distributed leadership model is not automatic, rather, "much depends on the way in which leadership is distributed, how it is distributed and for what purpose" (p. 9). The strategic approach utilized to address barriers in the learning environment in the New Hope School District as mentioned above reinforces that they subscribed to a distributed leadership model.

Student learning is enhanced regardless of tie relations. District- and school-level leaders revealed that they were engaging in a variety of practices to enhance students' opportunity to learn at the school and district level. This was evident regardless of whether or not trusting ties were formulated and existent between individuals (Zaleski, 2014). For example, to prompt shifts in thinking and practice among principals and school staff, district leaders fostered and leveraged professional learning activities (Talukdar, 2014). Interview responses suggested professional learning played a role in the way some thought about and in-turn approached their work with particular sub-groups of students (e.g., students with disabilities). In addition, some district- and school-level leaders appeared more willing to learn from the best practices of schools realizing academic growth. One of the ways in which these educators were able to learn more

about successful schools was through professional learning activities (e.g., book studies, belief surveys, case studies, and resource sharing) (Talukdar, 2014). Another example was that although Jamie shared no outgoing tie connections with building leaders, she acknowledged that she engaged in efforts with Bill and Joe to create a school within her school to address students and subgroups with risk factors such as poor attendance, retention, and high discipline referrals (Zaleski, 2014).

Finally, the systems and structures (i.e., ADCO, FADCO, traveling cabinet) supported leaders with enhancing students' opportunity to learn across the district. One school in the district moved from Level 2 to Level 1 status last year; this is the highest performance rating assigned by the state. District leaders were working diligently with principals to narrow gaps in performance via the structures in place. The superintendent, Sean, worked with principals on improvement planning at the building level, and district leader Alicia worked with principals on attendance, dropout rates, and graduation rates within a four-year period of time. Although there was a lack of tie relations at the building and district level, this did not result in initiatives being stalled (Zaleski, 2014). Rather, despite the nature of relations in the New Hope School District, the organizational structures in place resulted in both building and district leaders being actively engaged in practices that were intended to support enhancing students' opportunity to learn. Both group and individual findings informed researchers (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014), resulting in the development of recommendations for practitioners, policy makers and research.

Recommendations for Practice

First and foremost, we recommend that the New Hope School District keep

organizational structures intact. ADCO, FADCO, and the traveling cabinet offer building leaders direct oversight and support from central office leaders. Spillane (2013) states that the advantages of organizational structures and routines are that they: "allow efficient coordinated action; provide a source of stability; [and] reduce conflict about how to do work" (slide 10). Furthermore, the use of organizational structures/routines that district- and school-level leaders institute have significant potential to enhance students' opportunity to learn. This was best evidenced in the New Hope School District when district- and school-level leaders analyzed student data with uniformity district wide K-12, resulting in at least one school narrowing achievement gaps and advancing to Level 1 status.

Any school district with an opportunity to learn gap should consider developing and implementing the types of structures and routines found in the New Hope School District. These types of structures and routines increase the likelihood that interaction among administrators will take place which will allow knowledge and resources to flow through the network of leaders, ultimately informing the work of practitioners (Daly & Finnigan, 2010). Sustainability is also likely enhanced when these structures and routines are in place. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) emphasize "sustainable leadership matters [as it] preserves, protects, and promotes deep and broad learning for all in relationships of care for others" (p. 23).

Varying tie relations in the New Hope School District may also be a result of competitive pressure at the local level to perform and meet accountability demands (Zaleski, 2014). Daly (2009) points out that as a result of high stakes accountability, relations between school and district leaders tend to become less collaborative and more

official and organized. One way to remedy this is by fostering the professional growth of leaders and differentiating supports for principals depending on their needs as instructional leaders. Daly and Finnigan (2010) highlight that "leadership development programs both outside and within districts have the unique opportunity to create the space for reflection and dialogue for leaders to explore these tensions and how they may be brought into balance" (p. 520). Therefore, it is essential that the New Hope School District add a component to their existing professional development plans that specifically promotes the building of relationships among leaders across the district in a way that supports collaboration (Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). The National Institute for School Leadership Program (NISL) is one example of a program designed to assist leaders with collaborating and enhancing their skills in the face of accountability demands (NISL, 2013). Participation in the NISL program also holds the potential to increase the social capital among leaders and assist with policy implementation at the local level (Daly & Finnigan, 2010).

District-level leaders in the New Hope School District should also consider creating opportunities for school-level leaders to strengthen relations and formulate new ties (Zaleski, 2014). Allowing leaders' time to meet and discuss building based concerns without a central office driven agenda may enhance relations. Daly and Finnigan (2010) point out in a related study that "district[s] will have to avoid the trap of merely providing time and directives to work together as this does not necessarily result in meaningful collaboration between leaders" (p.128). Therefore, practitioners working within the New Hope School District should heed the advice of DuFour and Burnette (2002) by developing improvement plans that focus on developing the collective efforts of the team

and not merely the work of individuals. In an effort to enhance relations, increase support from central office leaders to building leaders and enhance success at the building level, it is recommended that the New Hope School District consider creating prescribed structures/routines that require school-level leaders to visit each other's schools to analyze data together and observe successful practices (Potenziano, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). In doing so, school-level leaders are also less likely to feel unsupported and isolated from one another.

Enhancing connections at the district level in the New Hope School District, as well as in other districts with an opportunity to learn gap, will assist with building relations across the district, ultimately improving the overall school climate (Zaleski, 2014). Curtis and City (2009) agree that collaboration is critical and begins at the central office level stating:

> Central office departments create teams to do their work most effectively. The superintendent convenes a senior leadership team to shape and drive the direction of the system's work. Effective collaboration is critical to success at all levels of the organization. Yet the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for collaboration are seldom taught. It is deeply ironic that a skill students need to ensure their future opportunities is one that the adults responsible for their education often do not possess and have not had the opportunity to learn (p.38).

In order for the central office team to be considered high functioning, there must be a "high level of trust, a willingness to be vulnerable, and comfort with conflict" (Curtis & City, 2009, p.56). District leaders in the New Hope School District and those with opportunity to learn gaps are encouraged to implement and facilitate team building

activities to work on strengthening partnerships with each other. Incorporating time on meeting agendas for district- and school-level leaders to engage in activities focused on developing authentic relationships is a suggested activity (Curtis & City, 2009). For instance, Curtis and City (2009) suggest leaders complete the Meyers & Briggs Personality Inventory and share results in an effort to enhance relations and build trust. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) emphasize that "investing resources in training, trust building, and teamwork" (p. 267) is a function of sustainable leadership that has long lasting effects.

New Hope District leaders are also recommended to expand liaison support to all principals, and not limit this resource to struggling schools alone (Zaleski, 2014). Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, and Newton (2010) point out that central office can engage in efforts to support the teaching and learning environment entirely by "taking the case management and project management approaches to their work"(p.7). Honig et al. (2010) emphasize that the case management approach enables district leaders to utilize their expertise to fully support "the specific needs, strengths, goals, and character of each individual school in their case load" (p. 8) with the goal of working to provide "high-quality, responsive services appropriate to their individual schools"(p.8). Likewise, the project management approach results in district leaders directly "solving problems that promised to help schools engage in teaching and learning, even if those problems cut across multiple central office units" (p.8).

District-level leaders working within the New Hope School District should also consider expanding professional learning opportunities intended to eliminate deficit thinking (Talukdar, 2014). The New Hope School District superintendent took positive

steps to support principals in their efforts to dismantle deficit thinking and enhance some of the skills needed to assume responsibility for teaching and learning improvements. Moving forward, the superintendent must deepen the dialogue around instructional issues beyond data review. In light of the success of schools that ensured students with disabilities had full access to the curriculum, consideration should be given to expand the full-inclusion teaching model across the district.

Consideration should also be given to implementing multicultural and anti-racist professional learning opportunities in order to continue to prompt shifts in teacher beliefs (Talukdar, 2014). While anti-racist and multicultural education are closely related in the goal to improve student outcomes, Kailin (1998) believes that multicultural education is a non-threatening way to address the gaps in student performance because it is focused around building teachers' and students' cultural awareness rather than tackling structural aspects of racism. Kailin (1998) further argues that an anti-racist approach to education must focus on the deliberate dismantling of racism, whereas multicultural education strives to broaden teachers' understanding of the diverse histories of students they serve as a means to empower them. It is important to note, however, that ultimately multicultural education and anti-racism both seek to raise the academic achievement of students of color while nurturing the growth of all students. By implementing multicultural and anti-racist professional learning opportunities, administrators of the New Hope School District will be better equipped to learn about, understand, and address the undeniable correlation between students' race and ethnicity and disparities in student performance.

There are prevailing approaches to multicultural and anti-racist professional

development and learning that espouse to reduce the achievement gap while transforming teacher beliefs (Ferguson, 2007; Howard, 2007; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009). Ferguson (2007) is responsible for putting forth a conceptual framework titled the Tripod Project, which aims to close the achievement gap by addressing the three legs of the "tripod": content, pedagogy, and relationships. He argues that in order to reduce achievement gaps, content must be accessible and culturally relevant, pedagogy must involve varied approaches to meeting students' needs, and teachers must develop meaningful relationships with students while maintaining high expectations for all students. Skrla et al. (2009) describe the use of "equity audits" as a means to creating equitable and excellent schools. They contend that by assessing the equity and inequity of programs, as well as teacher quality and achievement, school leaders will be better prepared to develop an action plan that uncompromisingly promotes educational equity. They describe particular skills teachers must develop to improve their practice that include clearly communicating expectations, stimulating students with high-level tasks, and using an asset-based approach when working with diverse populations.

While experienced, high-quality teachers within the New Hope School District may already possess many of the skills needed to serve most students effectively, Singleton and Linton (2006) argue that in order to reduce the "racial" achievement gap, educators must be willing to engage in courageous conversations about race. Additionally, they and many others (Gay & Howard, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Nieto, 2000; Tatum, 1997) believe it is critical for teachers to explore their own racial identities and consider how it affects their teaching of students, particularly students of color (e.g., Asian American, Hispanic/Latino, Black/African-

American, Multiracial and Native American). The research of Singleton and Linton (2006) indicates when white teachers were able to relate to their diverse students' experiences, and as they developed cultural awareness or competence, a narrowing of the achievement gap occurred. Given over 90% of administrators and teachers in the New Hope School District are white while over 60% of students identify as students of color, and in light of the existing racial achievement gap as measured across three performance indicators (i.e., state achievement tests, graduation rates, and SAT performance reports), serious consideration should be given to implementing multicultural and anti-racist professional learning opportunities (Talukdar, 2014).

Recommendations for Policy Makers

Cohesive relations between district- and school-level leaders are often hindered by accountability policy demands (Daly, 2009). This often complicates the job of leaders trying to effect change in schools (Zaleski, 2014). Daly and Finnigan (2010) point out that "effectively responding to state and federal accountability policies at the local level may require a more collaborative relationship among and between central office and school administrators to allow for the diffusion of innovation and knowledge" (p.131). In an effort to strike this balance, district leaders in the New Hope School district and those in districts with an opportunity to learn gap need to develop systems and structures to enhance collaboration within school districts (Potenziano, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). New Hope School District leaders implemented structures to support collaboration in an effort to enhance students' opportunity to learn. Their efforts yielded evidence that some schools were making progress. This supports the research claim that school culture, namely interactions, is a valuable consideration when enhancing student opportunities to

learn. Policy makers are recommended to be mindful of this consideration and recognize that accountability demands alone do not promote equitable opportunities to learn (Harris & Herrington, 2006).

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study contributed to theoretical knowledge and provided a practical contribution to the field of education, future research areas must be noted. First, conducting an exploration of interactions among leaders using an external social capital lens (Leana & Pil, 2006) may prove beneficial. The external partnership with DSAC in this study was instrumental in assisting leaders with responding to accountability demands beyond standardized testing through the development of the Accelerated Improvement Plan. A deeper exploration of external partnerships may yield findings in relation to the importance of these relations when attempting to enhance students' opportunity to learn. Second, given the potential that leader relations may be "bureaucratic" due to accountability pressures (Daly & Finnigan, 2010, p.131), it may be worthwhile to conduct a similar study with a focus on examining the impact of roles and hierarchy on relations in a district that is attempting to enhance student opportunities to learn. Third, future research should include multiple districts with similar demographics in an effort to enhance generalizability.

Finally, because the research team members sought to understand how district- and school-level leaders learned about, understood, and addressed barriers to students' opportunities to learn, interviews were limited to district- and school-level leaders. This had potential implications for the overall conclusions drawn. Future research efforts

involving staff at all levels could help to address this limitation and assist in uncovering the true impact of efforts aimed at eliminating barriers to students' opportunity to learn.

Overarching Study Limitations

A few limitations are noted in this study (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). The New Hope School District was a small district comprised of eight district-level leaders and eight school-level leaders. As aforementioned, researchers were unable to interview two school-level leaders. This hindered the overall analysis and conclusion of findings for the overarching study. Additionally, researchers relied on the strategy of snowball sampling as outlined by Creswell (2012) and Merriam (2009) to interview participants. Because the researchers relied on the superintendent and assistant superintendent to recommend individuals whom they felt could best describe efforts aimed at impacting students' opportunity to learn and performance gaps, key individuals were not recommended and were therefore not interviewed. Mentors, coaches, DSAC members, teachers, and students may have been able to provided information which might have enhanced the overall findings.

Conclusion

The literature portrays a multifaceted depiction of how many factors have the potential to impact district- and school-level leaders understanding of the nature of the gap and how these understandings then influence the work leadership focused on addressing disparities in student performance. It was the intent of the research team to enhance insight in this area for practitioners. It is evident that leaders' interactions and framing of events coupled with how they practice has the potential to enhance the school climate and increase students' opportunity to learn (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014;

Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Additionally, the purposeful distribution of leadership work provides the opportunity to enhance collaboration and collective action (Allwarden, 2014; Potenziano, 2014; Talukdar, 2014; Zaleski, 2014). Conversely, without proper district-level leadership and leader distribution, effectively addressing disparities in student performance may be hindered.

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End Note

[1]Due to differences in student populations, as well as variation found among the states' policies and practices for identifying and including SD and ELL students in NAEP testing, comparisons of performance results for SD and ELL populations may not accurately reflect increases and decreases over time (NCES, 2011). This likely explains why less attention has been focused on reporting discrepancies between students with and without disabilities (Foorman & Nixon, 2006), as well as between native English speaking students and English language learners. In an effort "to ensure that NAEP results accurately reflect the educational performance of all students in the target population and can continue to serve as a meaningful measure of U.S. students' academic achievement over time" (NCES, 2011, p.100), the National Assessment Governing Board recently adopted a new policy that focuses on testing and reporting on SD and ELL students.

Appendix A

District-level Leader Interview Questions

1. To begin, please briefly describe your educational background, as well as your current role and your history in the school district.
2. Please describe any gaps in student performance that your district is focused on eliminating.
3. How has central office trained school leaders to use student data?
    a. Are there any other supports offered?
    b. What else helps people to learn how to use data in this district?
4. What changes have you seen in schools as a result of this training?
5. Have you seen any changes in the central office as a result of this training?
6. Do you believe people have changed the way they think about:
    a. their professional responsibilities?
    b. collaborating with others?
    c. student subgroups?
    d. Probes: How do you know? What have you seen? Can you provide an example?
7. What should schools be doing regularly when it comes to analyzing student data? How is central office supporting this?
8. Who do you go to for advice regarding work (if anyone)? Why?
    a. What do you talk about? Give me an example of a recent conversation you have had?
    b. Have you talked about gaps in student performance?

c. Have any actions been taken as a result of these discussions?

    i. Which student subgroup(s) have been/will be impacted by these actions?

9. Are there others you should be able to go to, but do not? Explain.
10. Imagine you had a magic wand. What else needs to happen in your district to improve student performance?
11. Are there any specific documents related to what we have just discussed that you would recommend for us to review?

School-level Leader Interview Questions

1. To begin, please briefly describe your educational background, as well as your current role and your history in the school district.
2. Please describe any gaps in student performance that your district is focused on eliminating.
3. How has central office trained school leaders to use student data?
    a. Are there any other supports offered?
    b. What else helps people to learn how to use data in this district?
4. What changes have you seen in your school as a result of this training?
5. Have you seen any changes in the central office as a result of this training?
6. Do you believe people have changed the way they think about:
    a. their professional responsibilities?
    b. collaborating with others?
    c. student subgroups?

    d. Probes: How do you know? What have you seen? Can you provide an example?

7. What should schools be doing regularly when it comes to analyzing student data?
    a. How are you supporting this?
    b. How is central office supporting this?
8. Who do you go to for advice regarding work (if anyone)? Why?
    a. What do you talk about? Give me an example of a recent conversation you have had?
    b. Have you talked about gaps in student performance?
    c. Have any actions been taken as a result of these discussions?
        i. Which student subgroup(s) have been/will be impacted by these actions?
9. Are there others you should be able to go to, but do not? Explain.
10. Imagine you had a magic wand. What else needs to happen in your school to improve student performance?
11. Are there any specific documents related to what we have just discussed that you would recommend for us to review?