Leadership Practices that Affect Student Achievement: Actions of the School Principal When Building Capacity in a High Performing Urban Elementary School

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LEADERSHIP PRACTICES THAT AFFECT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:
ACTIONS OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL WHEN BUILDING CAPACITY IN A
HIGH PERFORMING URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Dissertation in Practice
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Abstract

It is widely accepted that school leadership has both a direct and indirect impact on student achievement. Hitt and Tucker's (2016) unified leadership framework summarized a decade of work by numerous researchers identifying the five most effective leadership domains that influence student learning. Using that work as a conceptual framework, this qualitative case study analyzed one of the five interdependent leadership domains in an urban elementary school that succeeded in educating traditionally marginalized students and outperformed other schools with similar demographics in the district.

This study identified and explored the second leadership domain which is described as *building professional capacity*, focusing specifically on the principal's actions. Building professional capacity is defined in this study as developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of teachers and is important for expanding leadership responsibility for student learning and increasing student achievement. The study resulted

in identifying all seven dimensions of the domain present in practice at the school and explored the actions taken to embed them into the culture.

Data were gathered through the review of district and school level documents and open-ended interviews with district leaders and members of school administration, faculty, and staff. Findings indicated that the school principal performed several specific and tangible actions to build professional capacity in the school including implementing professional practice, messaging consistently high expectations with faculty and staff, modeling expected professional behaviors and habits, and coaching faculty and staff. Many staff believed the success of the school was a result of the culture of collaboration, dedication, and high expectations forged by the principal. Recommendations for building upon this work included selecting and hiring teachers who offer evidence of effective instruction despite different philosophical viewpoints, addressing levels of trust with those who express conflicting levels of collaboration and commitment, and expanding the effective leadership practices with other school leaders throughout the district.

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Introduction

Statement of Problem and Purpose

Studies of urban schooling are often grounded in what has come to be known as the achievement gap and focus on disparities of academic achievement when disaggregated by race, ethnicity, disability, and socioeconomic status (Allen, 2008; Brown, 2003; Laprade, 2011). While the legacy of societal injustice plagues traditionally marginalized students across a variety of contexts (Milner, 2012), it is often most profound in urban schools with high concentrations of black and Latino students. In such schools, policies and practices have been laden with deficit-thinking for decades and resources remain scarce (Anderson, 2007; Blanchett, Mumford & Beachum, 2005; Braun, Wang, Jenkins, & Weinbaum, 2006; Lewis, James, Hancock & Hill-Jackson, 2008).

Reform models employed by urban school leadership teams frequently focus on addressing technical practices, such as improving pedagogy, that have demonstrated positive results albeit often in dissimilar contexts (Books, 2007; Mehta, 2013; Wiggan, 2008; Wiggan, 2014; Wiggan & Watson, 2016; Williams, Greenleaf, Albert & Barnes, 2014). Research on urban schools suggests, however, that improving instruction alone is insufficient (Page & Kemp, 2015; Silverman, 2014; Ma, Shen & Krenn, 2014) if not coupled with other factors such as instilling the belief in staff members that all students

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[1] This chapter was jointly written by Nicole Gittens, Tara Gohlmann, James Reilly, David Ryan and Kris Taylor.

can truly achieve (Jager & Denessen, 2015; Milner, 2008). Other conditions that empirical literature links to improving student achievement in urban schools include school climate (Weijun, Vaillancourt, Brittain, Krygsman, Smith, Haltigan & Hymel, 2014; Ramsey, 2015), principal instructional activities (May & Supovitz, 2011), teacher instructional practices (Stone & Lane, 2003; Lyons & Barnett, 2011), and the overall quality of instruction (Blazar, Litke & Barmore, 2016). The job of the urban school leader is to determine which of these conditions are in most dire need of change and to then implement leadership practices that will promote improvement in these areas and impact student achievement. As a result, student achievement can hinge on the decisions a school leader makes. However, because each school context is different, school leaders often have little guidance as to how and where they should focus their efforts. This could be the reason academic success varies greatly from school to school in many urban districts. Regardless, it is clear that some schools provide better opportunities for learning than others, and that these high performing urban schools, and the leaders of these schools, may approach student learning in a way that should be emulated by their lower performing peer institutions.

Variation in school performance is particularly evident in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts where the ten largest urban school districts are all considered underperforming by virtue of their state accountability standing (MA DESE: School and District Profiles, Accountability Report, n.d.). However, each of these districts also has at least one school with 80% or more of its students classified as high needs[2] that is out-

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[2] High needs refers to a student who is "designated as either low income…economically disadvantaged... ELL [English Language Learner], or former ELL, or a student with disabilities. A former ELL student is a student not currently an ELL, but had been at some point in the two previous academic years" (MA DESE:

performing schools with similar demographics within the same district. This phenomenon calls for attention and gives signs of hope for other schools seeking to improve (MA DESE: School and District Profiles Accountability Report, n.d.; Griffin & Green, 2013).

The variation in school performance demonstrated in Massachusetts' largest urban districts raises the question as to what makes high performing schools different. Understanding why some urban schools outperform others that are serving similar student populations would benefit school leaders working towards improving student achievement goals for all. Further, district administrators would better understand the specific school leadership practices that create successful learning environments in order to implement system-wide change (Rorrer, Skrla & Scheurich, 2008; Honig, Lorton & Copland, 2009; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010). Therefore, the overarching aim of this collective study was to identify the school leadership practices that existed in a high performing school that encouraged improved outcomes for all students and broke the cycle of underperformance and discrepancies in achievement embedded in many large urban districts. Our study was guided by one overarching research question: What leadership practices were present in a high performing, urban elementary school?

It is widely accepted that school leadership has both a direct and indirect impact on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Jacobson, 2011; Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Sun & Leithwood, 2015; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, Anderson, Michlin & Mascall, 2010; Sammons, Gu, Day & Ko, 2011; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). Hitt and Tucker (2016)

Profiles Home, n.d.). Economically disadvantaged students are designated by the state. We use the term "high needs" throughout this study to mirror MA DESE's definition, though the term is deficit-laden.

created a unified leadership framework informed by a decade of research on the most effective leadership practices that influence student learning. This study identified 5 domains and 28 dimensions of quality school leadership. Domains are the overarching categories that summarize the leadership practices and dimensions are a set of specific behaviors engaged by the school leader. The goal of this research project was to learn whether or not the dimensions identified in Hitt and Tucker's Unified Framework were present in a high performing, urban elementary school. Historically, urban schools have struggled to educate traditionally marginalized students and the aim was to study how an urban school was able to rise above the challenges and attain academic success despite the obstacles.

Context

The primary driver of this study was to apply, in practical terms, Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework to an urban school and to determine to what extent the leadership practices, particularly the dimensions that comprise the five domains, were evident given the complexity of an urban environment. A Brookings Institution (2011) report illustrates a significant shift in the American child population and the challenges that come with such a shift. The report contends that between 2000 and 2010, the national population of white children decreased by 4.3 million while the total number of Hispanic and Asian children increased by 5.5 million. In addition, Shin & Ortman (2011) report that by 2020, 62% of those who speak a language other than English will be Spanish speakers. Finally, another United States Census Bureau report shares data on historical poverty showing that 22% of all black families and 20% of all Hispanic families live in poverty (U.S. Census, 2015). These numbers increase significantly if a family is led by a

single mother; the percentages increase to 36% and 37%, respectively (U.S. Census, 2015). Given the change in demographics and the challenges of the urban poor, the task for urban public school districts is great but not without hope. As previously noted, at least one school in each of the top ten districts in Massachusetts is performing on par with the highest achieving schools in the state.

When considering top-level schools within an urban district, it is important to understand how Massachusetts assigned performance levels to districts during the time period of this study. The Massachusetts Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) linked the overall performance of a district to its lowest performing school. For instance, a district could include several high performing or Level 1 schools; however, if the lowest performing school was designated Level 3 or 'in need of improvement', the entire district was considered a Level 3 district. Levels range from 1 to 5, where Level 5 required state receivership. Additionally, a district or school is considered to be making progress toward narrowing proficiency gaps when the cumulative performance on state assessments reaches certain targets as defined by MA DESE. Using accountability levels to portray student achievement has been a standard practice in education since educators began dividing publicly available data by subgroups (Brown, 2003; Jennings & Sohn, 2014; Hammes, Bigras & Crepaldi, 2014), a practice that led to the identification of a performance gap between demographic groups (Harris & Herrington, 2006; Ipka, 2003).

The ten largest urban districts in Massachusetts were all classified as Level 3, 4 or 5. Each of these districts faced significant challenges in that they all reported more than two thirds of their population as high needs. This study used the MA DESE high needs

designation to identify schools with challenging demographics because high needs students were part of traditionally marginalized groups. There was normally a high number of students of color attending schools in low performing districts. Two of the top ten Massachusetts school districts with the highest percentages of students of color, Boston and Lawrence, were Levels 4 and 5 respectively. A similar relationship existed in two Level 5 districts currently under state receivership, Holyoke and Lawrence, which served high percentages of high needs students. In order for marginalized populations to receive a high-quality education, it is imperative that urban districts figure out how to successfully educate an array of student populations.

Within each of the largest Massachusetts urban districts, there was at least one high performing school that figured out how to educate a diverse student population with high needs; however, the variation in performance across schools in these districts raised the question, "what makes the high-quality schools with large numbers of high needs students different?" While the literature is flush with analyses of effective schools and effective districts (Maas & Lake, 2015; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Trujillo, 2013), we followed Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework to help answer our research question: What leadership practices are present in a high performing, urban elementary school? We believed this was best accomplished by performing a case study analysis of the leadership practices at one of these "positive deviant" urban schools (Bryk, Gomes, Grunow & LeMahieu, 2016).

Literature Review

Despite the challenges that faced urban districts and as mentioned in the previous section, there were some schools having a positive impact on student outcomes. This

section first explores empirical literature establishing the importance of utilizing positive deviance as an approach when examining school reform. It then provides a summary of the importance of leadership in promoting student achievement, both generally and in the unique context of leading an urban school. These bodies of literature introduced the conceptual framework that grounded our analysis of leadership practices linked to improved student achievement.

Positive deviance. The focus of our study was the exploration of an urban school that had outperformed others with similar demographics in an effort to assess the school's effectiveness. A key ingredient in understanding school improvement was understanding the conditions contributing to improved student learning. Bryk et al. (2016) propose "more systematic approaches to…improvement" (p. 19). They note that school improvement work in the United States has been underway for decades and, while the educational system as a whole appears to be getting better on average, there still seems to be a growing disparity between excellent schools and districts and underperforming schools and districts. They further suggest that widening the chasm is the conundrum of increasing societal expectations of schools to not only advance learning and increase graduation rates, but to also reduce the costs of doing so. In light of these expectations, there is an emphasis on "understand[ing] sources of variations in outcomes" and "responding effectively to them [which] lies at the heart of quality improvement" (p. 35). In other words, the need to identify and implement practices that promote improvement in a timely and effective manner becomes even more paramount as the demands and constraints on our educational institutions increase.

The concept of 'positive deviance' is one way to describe a school that is able to promote student achievement in a context where similar institutions fail: "Positive deviance… is founded on the premise that at least one person in the community, working with the same resources as everyone else, has already licked the problem that confounds others" (Pascale, Sternin, & Sternin, 2010, p. 3).

LeMahieu, Nordstrum and Gale (2017) describe a positive deviance improvement method as an asset-based improvement technique that identifies a case where certain outcomes are well beyond what other cases within the same system are able to achieve. LeMahieu et al. incorporate the components of positive deviance into a methodology that they believe is practical for use in education. It is based on a two-step process. The first step is to find out where other school leaders who work in schools with similar demographics have made headway, and the second is to use the successful case to promote system-wide improvement. We applied the first part of this approach to our own study by identifying the leadership practices employed at an urban school in Massachusetts that is outperforming others within the same district. This study may also address the second goal by informing other schools how to improve.

Influence of leadership on student achievement. Empirical literature suggests that leadership is an essential element to promoting student achievement and equity, critical conditions for success in urban schools. This is often established through a leader's role in the development of excellent teaching and by the implementation of school-wide reform (Sanzo, Sherman & Clayton, 2011). Bedard and Mombourquette (2015) state that "connecting school leadership to student learning is part of a moral imperative" (p. 237) because it facilitates the closing of learning gaps among students

who historically experience failure. Yet, this same literature base has not always agreed with how these conditions are created and supported by school leaders. Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) warn, "unless these processes are identified and understood, policy makers and practitioners will have difficulty creating the necessary elements required to achieve the desired effects" (p. 669).

During the Effective Schools Movement of the 1970's and 1980's, scholars took note of the salient role leaders play in impacting student achievement (Edmonds, 1982; Lezotte, 1991; Cawelti, 1984). These findings were bolstered by international studies focused on the impact of school leadership that reached similar conclusions (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010). Yet the majority of these studies suggest the influence of leaders is largely indirect and hard to quantify through actual leadership practices (Dutta & Sahey, 2016; Hallinger, 2010). For instance, scholars found an indirect impact of leadership on student achievement through improvement in working conditions such as teacher job satisfaction, school culture, and climate (Dutta & Sahey, 2016).

In an attempt to make the connections between school leadership and student outcomes more explicit, some scholars have focused on gathering evidence of leadership practices related to specific theories of leadership. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006), for instance, found that utilizing a transformational leadership approach was strongly correlated to influencing a positive teacher work setting and improving teacher motivation, and had a moderate to significant impact on teacher classroom practices. The authors suggest the cumulative impact of these changes on teachers led to improvements in student achievement. For the purpose of their study, Leithwood and Jantzi defined

transformational leadership practices as: (1) setting directions or building a vision; (2) developing people; creating opportunities for intellectual stimulation; and (3) redesigning the organization; creating a collaborative school culture. Other researchers have similarly identified a transformational leadership approach, especially when combined with instructional leadership practices, as essential to improving student learning (Robinson et al., 2008; Marks & Printy, 2003).

Transformational leadership has not been the only leadership theory linked to improved student achievement. Reed and Swaminathan (2014), for example, found that a successful urban high school principal increased student achievement by using a combination of practices associated with both distributive and social justice leadership. The tenets of distributive leadership practices such as shared decision-making and collaboration amongst teachers has been supported by other authors as well (Hallinger, 2010; Sanzo, Sherman & Clayton, 2011).

Some studies have attempted to delineate specific leadership practices, not just approaches attributed to leadership theories. In 1990, Levine and Lezotte released a report through the National Center for Effective Schools that named the characteristics of unusually effective schools. The report listed nine such characteristics, one of which was *Outstanding Leadership*. The authors went on to describe the characteristics of outstanding leadership as evidence of the vigorous selection of teachers, faculty protection from negative external influences, personal monitoring of school activities, devotion to school improvement, support for teachers, acquisition of resources, and effective use of instructional support personnel. While the report offers the important moves of leadership, Levine and Lezotte do not prioritize the most important practices in

which principals of effective schools should engage. They further report, and in contradiction to some other researchers (Waters et al., 2003), that "[n]o...set of actions is right for every school" (p. 582).

In a study commissioned by Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), Waters et al. (2003) aggregated 30 years of research to quantify which leadership practices have the greatest impact on student achievement as measured by standardized testing. Their framework recognizes that "[e]ffective leaders understand how to balance pushing for change while at the same time protecting aspects of culture, values, and norms worth preserving" (p. 2). The authors applied specific criteria to narrow their data set to 70 empirical studies and used them to identify 21 leadership practices linked to student achievement. These practices were codified to create their Balanced Leadership Framework, a leadership model to help school leaders improve their own practice as a reflection of the research of effective principals. Of the 21 principles, having situational awareness, promoting intellectual stimulation, acting as a change agent, and allowing teachers' input were found to impact student outcomes the most. The McREL report found that principals who were aware of the "details and undercurrent" (p. 12) within the school were current on instructional practice, were willing to change the status quo, and involved teachers in the decision-making process. When using this information, they were best able to positively impact student outcomes as measured by scores on standardized testing.

Before embarking on their own six-year study to identify how to improve student outcomes, Louis et al. (2010) reviewed the existing empirical literature and found "leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning"

(p. 9). The authors extended the aforementioned seminal work of Waters et al. (2003) who found "a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement" (p. 3). Louis et al. concluded that "there is no improvement without talented leadership" (p. 9) and ultimately identified two core functions of an effective leader: direction and influence. While Louis et al. did not reach conclusions on an effective leadership in an urban setting, other scholars have addressed the practices in which urban school leaders must engage to improve student performance.

Leadership in an urban context. Many scholars have concluded that leaders of urban schools must adapt and evolve traditional practices to meet the unique needs of these institutions (Aveling, 2007; Benham, 1997; Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor & Wheeler, 2006; Cooper, 2009; Khalifa, 2012). These adaptations are based on an understanding of the out-of-school factors that impact urban students and families and the implementation of strategies that respond to these factors. Milner, Murray, Farinde, and Delale-O'Connor (2015) conducted a review of empirical literature and identified four external factors that impact urban schools: poverty, geography, funding, and parental involvement, each described below.

Poverty. The first of these factors, poverty, was found not only to impact attendance, but to lead to decreased attention and concentration in the classroom and to compromise successful interactions with others (Milner et al., 2015). The impact of poverty was further exacerbated when students were homeless or were exposed to physical or emotional trauma. Geography and social contexts was another factor cited. Many urban neighborhoods offered students limited access to resources and often increased exposure to hazardous environmental conditions such as pollution. Schools that

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do not recognize the impact of these realities diminish their ability to build positive

relationships with students and promote achievement (Milner et al., 2015).

Geography. The second factor is the geography of the school, a proxy for whether

the school is located in a safe location. In his research, Antrop-Gonzalez (2006) asserted

that when urban schools promoted safety in schools to minimize outside influences such

as gang activity, students not only felt safe, but trusted their teachers were aware of what

was happening in their neighborhoods. This feeling of safety had a positive impact on

student outcomes.

Creating safe and supportive school-wide environments often falls under the

purview of administrators. In their two-stage multiple case study, Jacobson, Brooks,

Giles, Johnson and Ylimaki (2007) examined the leadership practices of three urban

elementary school principals whose schools demonstrated a history of improved student

achievement. Identified practices or actions of these individuals included establishing a

safe and responsive school environment, setting high expectations for all students, and

holding students, faculty, teachers, parents, and administration accountable for meeting

these expectations. The authors noted that these exemplary leaders of urban schools

"[made] sure that students felt safe and cared for...so that they could comfortably avail

themselves of the opportunity to learn" (p. 309).

Funding. A third out-of-school factor critical for urban school leaders to

understand is that funding is often applied under the premise of equality and not equity.

In other words, schools often receive funding not based on their specific needs but rather

general guidelines from ill-conceived policy. For example, schools may receive a set

level of funding because a population is present in the school (for example, English

language learners) without taking into account how many students are part of this population and how close the students are to English proficiency. Counteracting these conditions often requires a social justice orientation and ingenuity (Milner et al., 2015). For example, in the aforementioned case study of three highly effective urban principals, Jacobson et al. (2007) noted that these leaders found and used any available funding to support professional development and to work individually and collectively with their staff.

Parental involvement. Finally, it is important to understand that while urban families may not access traditional means of school involvement, many parents are invested and care deeply about providing opportunities for their children to succeed (Milner et al., 2015). Many urban school leaders do not make this connection and instead rely on their own narrow definition of what it means to be an involved parent. Watson and Bogotch (2015) used Critical Race Theory to examine how teachers and administrators interpret challenges with parent involvement at an urban high school. They found that many staff members still employ dominant narratives to define these relationships and unfairly minimize parent investment in education. For example, when a parent fails to attend a parent meeting, but the student is in school each day, administrators and teachers may not recognize the parent's commitment to education by ensuring the child is in school on a daily basis. Instead, school staff attribute the missed parent meeting to ultimately define the parent's support for their child's education. Watson and Bogotch assert there must be a willingness on the part of the school to activate the hidden strengths of families and this broader way of thinking is supportive of improved student outcomes.

Khalifa (2012) found that a principal's commitment to be a visible part of the community and advocate for community causes has a direct impact on levels of trust and rapport with community members, including parents. Relationships that had been antagonistic were transformed and this ultimately led to improved academic outcomes for students. Specifically, Khalifa found three practices or behaviors supported this work including creating meaningful opportunities for personal exchanges with parents and students, home visits, and mentoring or directly challenging exclusionary teachers.

Jacobson et al. (2007) found that successful leaders of high-poverty urban schools recognized that their staff needed "opportunities to build their intellectual and experiential capacity" (p. 311) in order to be successful in what they were expected to do. In their efforts to build capacity in their staff, the principals "role modeled best instructional practices and wherever possible, redesigned organizational structures, policies and practices to facilitate the higher level of performance" (p. 311). Klar (2012) studied how principals in three urban schools worked to foster distributed instructional leadership by providing increased opportunities for it by asking department chairs to "assume a much larger role in the instructional leadership of their schools" (p. 373).

Some urban schools and districts have created opportunities for teacher leaders to act in a capacity as an instructional leader. The teacher leader is in a nonsupervisory instructionally oriented position who brings his/her expertise to classroom teachers and school administrators (Portin, Russell, Samuelson & Knapp, 2013). Teachers who become teacher leaders report having three-pronged roles that improve student performance by increasing rigorous instruction, creating opportunities for teachers to talk about teaching and building a "culture of expectation and achievement" (p. 231). It is

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important to note that these teacher leader positions were, for the most part, full-time positions that were dedicated to in-classroom mentorship/coaching and leadership in professional development (p. 232).

This literature review identifies the literature supporting our approach to examining a positive deviant school and the overall literature supporting leadership as it promotes student achievement both generally and specifically in a challenging urban context. These bodies of literature serve to introduce our conceptual framework that grounded our analysis of leadership practices identified in the literature as leading to improved student achievement.

Conceptual Framework

In an effort to achieve clarity and promote the effective implementation of empirically driven best practices, researchers Hitt and Tucker (2016) created a Unified Framework which merges years of robust research into a single model for understanding effective leadership to improve student performance. They state:

> Although high-quality teachers remain our best resource for promoting student learning, it is talented leaders who will take student success to scale. Our knowledge about what effective school leaders do to support teacher effectiveness and promote student achievement in the past 10 years has grown substantially. This Unified Framework is an effort to synthesize what we know about leader practices and provide a schema for future research. Organizing what we know about leadership is one way to become more deliberate and strategic in our efforts to improve the conditions for student achievement. (p. 563)

The framework stands on the shoulders of three pioneering leadership frameworks: The Ontario Leadership Framework (Leithwood, 2012), the Learning Centered Leadership Framework (Murphy, Elliott, Goldring & Porter, 2006) and the Essential Supports Framework (Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton & Luppescu, 2006). Hitt and Tucker (2016) chose these frameworks after a thorough review of empirical studies published between 1971 and 2006 that focused on the impact of leadership on student achievement. Each of the chosen frameworks identifies specific domains and dimensions of effective leadership that contribute to student achievement. The domains are used to describe broad areas of leadership and the dimensions describe specific leadership practices. The Ontario Leadership Framework identifies five domains and 21 dimensions. The Learning Centered Leadership Framework identifies eight domains and 31 dimensions and the Essential Supports Framework lists five domains and 16 dimensions.

The Unified Framework synthesizes the three frameworks into a thoughtful model that reflects the research of several scholars. It narrows the work into five domains and 28 dimensions by rephrasing, combining, and unifying effective leadership behaviors. Hitt and Tucker (2016) meticulously analyzed 56 empirical studies of leadership practices and categorized similar behaviors into phrases to represent the aggregate. Before identifying a domain, the following criteria were established: (1) the practices needed to be present in all other frameworks; (2) the practice indirectly influenced student learning by utilizing the organizational context; and (3) the practice indirectly influences student achievement by focusing on effective classroom instruction. The Unified Framework does not exclude any practice highlighted in the seminal leadership frameworks; however, it creates newly

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synthesized domains conveyed in a manner that can be easily understood and applied by practitioners whose common purpose is to improve student achievement.

This study utilized Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework of key leader practices that influence student achievement as a conceptual framework to understand leadership practices in a positive deviant school, or a school outperforming others, within an urban school district. This conceptual framework is built upon the notion that positive deviants, or schools that positively vary from the norm, will lead us to better understanding the reasons one urban school is outperforming its peer schools within an underperforming district. Each researcher in the collective study investigated one of the five domains or leadership practices described in Table 1.1 to determine if it was present in the school selected for study.

Table 1.1

Hitt and Tucker's Unified Framework

Domains or Leadership Practices	Dimension Summary
Establishing and conveying the vision	Establishing practices that are aligned to a purpose consistent with the articulation of the mission and vision.
Building professional capacity	Creating the process to develop leadership and teaching capacity.
Creating a supportive organization for learning	Building an organization where individuals are supported and valued.
Facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students	Developing a high-quality instructional program.

| Connecting with external partners | Building productive relationships with families and external partners and anchoring schools in the community. |

Given the 28 dimensions or leadership practices spread across the five domains, each individual investigator combined or adapted the dimensions within a domain to create better alignment to the individual research topic. For example, the first domain is establishing and conveying a vision. Within this domain, Hitt and Tucker (2016) outline several leadership practices beyond the articulation of a mission and vision. Dimensions within this domain include setting goals, modeling ethical practices, using data, fostering accountability and the communication of the mission and vision. The investigator for this domain primarily studied the importance of clarifying goals, building consensus, and communicating a shared vision. All five investigators adapted the framework to specific research needs and have clarified this in the following pages. The methodology that each of the five researchers utilized to investigate a domain or leadership practice is described below.

Establishing and conveying the vision. In order to achieve high goals, such as eliminating achievement gaps for urban students, district leaders, school leaders and teachers must first share this as a priority and identify the necessary steps to achieve the goal (Sun & Leithwood, 2015). This is the reason mission, vision, and goal setting are important; these ideas not only shape beliefs, but also behaviors (Robinson et al., 2008).

District leaders and school leaders play a central role in shaping the learning environment for students and with helping schools remain true to their ultimate purpose,

which is ensuring a quality education for all students. The role of district leaders and school leaders is to clarify the mission, collaboratively develop the vision or the way to achieve the school's purpose, and celebrate practices consistent with the goals and targets identified by the organization (Hallinger, 2010; Murphy & Torre, 2014). Hitt and Tucker's (2016) analysis of three prominent leadership frameworks in creating the Unified Framework consistently show the significant role leaders have in clarifying what is important. Without such guidance, it is difficult for schools and individual educators to measure progress.

The investigator for this domain primarily focused on the importance of clarifying goals, building consensus to create and implement a shared mission and vision, and broadly communicating the shared mission throughout the organization. These elements have been adapted from Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework, which also includes modeling ethical practices, promoting the use of data and holding others accountable.

Building professional capacity. Principals who lead successful schools understand that no one person can improve student achievement and that teacher quality matters most in improving student outcomes (Good, 2008). The effective school principal thus seeks to build the professional skills and disposition of the classroom teacher and set conditions for success. Hitt and Tucker's (2016) framework outlines those conditions that have been studied in highly successful schools. In an effective school where students are achieving at high levels, the principal's actions for building professional capacity should be evident in their work to promote professional learning for all staff. The dimensions, or actions, are observable and conditions are palpable (Ryan, 2018).

The actions of school leadership under this domain that were studied included selecting teachers for the right fit, providing individual consideration, building trusting relationships, providing opportunities to learn, supporting, buffering and recognizing teachers, creating communities of practice, and engendering responsibility for learning.

Creating a supportive organization for learning. Creating a supportive organization for learning includes seven dimensions, which were combined into the five attributes or specific leadership practices to eliminate overlap. The five attributes are as follows:

1. Strategic resource allocation focused on mission and vision

2. Considering context and valuing diversity

3. Collaborative decision-making processes and shared leadership

4. School culture strength and optimization

5. High standards and expectations

This section captured an investigation of each of these attributes to determine their presence in the school selected as part of this study. Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework identifies these attributes as the key, specific practices which indicate that a school's leadership is creating a supportive organization for learning.

Creating a supportive organization for learning as a leadership practice is important because just as teachers need to establish a sense of well-being and trust for students to learn in their classroom, administrators must establish the same sense of trust and comfort to create an environment where teachers can teach at their highest capacity (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Singh & Billingsley, 1998). Singh and Billingsley further express that "the principal not only has a direct influence on teachers' commitment, the

principal enhances commitment through fostering a collegial environment" (p. 238). Hitt and Tucker (2016) summarize this leadership domain as follows:

> This domain builds on instructional, transformational, and integrated approaches to leadership by identifying practices leaders employ to concurrently demonstrate a concern for teachers and press for results that ultimately yields benefit for both individuals and the organization…[and that] [t]his is accomplished by finding ways to involve teachers in the broader definition of organizational culture and decision-making, and by establishing trusting relationships with all constituencies. (p. 552)

The five attributes underlying creating a supportive organization for learning address how a leader creates and builds capacity in his or her organization to support the instructional goals of the school. This capacity to support instruction leads to improved student outcomes.

Facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students. According to Hitt and Tucker (2016), there are five key components of facilitating high-quality learning experiences for students: (1) maintaining safety and orderliness; (2) personalizing the environment to reflect students' backgrounds; (3) developing and monitoring the curricular program; (4) developing and monitoring the instructional program; and finally, (5) developing and monitoring the assessment program.

Hitt and Tucker (2016) found that "[e]ffective leaders protect the learning environment by instilling safety and order, and balancing a press for student achievement with a concern for individual student realities. It is important to note that marginalized youth need to feel a sense of security in school in order to be successful. With this in

mind, there has been a movement over the past decade to create schools as "sanctuaries for youth of color" (Antrop-Gonzalez, 2006). The components of "school as sanctuary" are (1) caring student-teacher relationships; (2) provisions of [violent-free] safe spaces; and (3) racial/ethnic and nationalist political affirmation (p. 287).

Hitt and Tucker (2016) assert that in order to provide a high-quality learning experience for students, the school environment should reflect and value students' backgrounds. This includes designing opportunities for "mentoring and advising students as well as creating ways for students to engage in personally engaging learning experiences" (p. 557). Antrop-Gonzalez (2006) found that both Latino and African-American students believed that having a teacher who had the same ethnic background as them meant that someone on the staff would understand and respect them. Students also felt that teachers of the same race had higher academic expectations as well as provided them with more academic "chances." Additionally Antrop-Gonzalez found that schools that were successful with marginalized students offered formal courses that reflected students' heritages.

Researchers have found that *odds-beating schools* have principals who are instructional leaders (Hallinger, Bickman & Davis, 1996; Borko, Wolf, Simone & Uchiyama, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008). Hitt and Tucker (2016) argue that "[e]ffective [school] leaders focus efforts on the curricular program by requiring rigor and high expectations of all students" (p. 557). They also believe that "[e]ffective leaders emphasize the instructional program through equipping themselves with a deep knowledge of pedagogy and devoting a large portion of the time to...advancing teaching" (p. 558).

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Finally, within this domain, Hitt and Tucker (2016) found that effective "[l]eaders regard assessment as pivotal to the measurement of student progress as well as the development of data from which to make programmatic adjustments" (p. 558). It is important for principals to know what students should know and be able to do at each grade level, understand effective instructional practices, understand what interventions are necessary for struggling students, understand when to use which assessments (or data), and know how to create learning cultures (Goldring, Huff, Spillane & Barnes, 2009). Further, Goldring et al. found that there is direct correlation between principal expertise in data-based decision-making and how often data-based decision-making [for instruction] is ultimately supportive of student success.

Connecting with external partners. Families and communities are essential to children's learning and development (Epstein, 1987). Connecting with external partners focuses on the leadership practices that both promote parent and community partnerships and influence student achievement (Leithwood, 2012; Sebring et al., 2006). Hitt and Tucker (2016) identify three primary practices in this domain: (1) building productive relationships with families and the community; (2) engaging them in collaborative processes to strengthen student learning; and (3) anchoring schools in the community.

Making the school welcoming and inclusive is one example of how leaders may build productive relationships with families. Another is facilitating the faculty's understanding of cultural dynamics to help build trust. Involving families in the decision-making process in areas such as policy-making, budget expenditures, and improvement plans are some ways leaders can engage families in collaborative processes that influence student achievement. The third practice, anchoring schools in the community, may be

evidenced by school leaders connecting families in need with appropriate community resources. It also may include engaging with other school leaders to discuss ways that home, school, and community efforts can be aligned. The primary investigator for this domain collected similar evidence across all three of the primary practices identified by Hitt and Tucker (2016).

The Unified Framework provides practitioners, policy makers, and institutions developing future leaders a tool to improve academic outcomes for students. For this study, the framework served as the lens for identifying those critical leadership practices documented in the study site.

Chapter Two[3]

Research Design and Methodology

This study determined to what extent the leadership practices highlighted within Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework were evident in a high performing, urban elementary school. The research team collaboratively designed the methods for this study to explore the five domains of leadership practices emerging from Hitt and Tucker's synthesized model. Each member of the research team answered his or her individual research question(s), focused on one domain of leadership practice. All researchers on this team participated in the methods outlined in this chapter (See Figure 2.1). The data gathered from these methods, however, varied in relevance to the emerging themes and patterns identified in individual research work (Cheng & Yeng, 2011). The research team worked together closely and shared all data, analysis, and synthesis; however, the coding and analysis of those data pertaining to each individual researcher's study and related findings were completed by the individual researcher. The team's collective findings in Chapter 4 are the product of a collaborative effort. This chapter first outlines the study design, specifically discussing the site selection and data collection methodologies, and then reviews the process for data analysis.

Study Design

This collective study utilized a qualitative case study research design to analyze a high performing elementary school in an urban district located in Massachusetts. The

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[3] This chapter was jointly written by Nicole Gittens, Tara Gohlmann, James Reilly, David Ryan and Kris Taylor.

study used a bounded case study design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and analyzed leadership practices in a single high performing elementary school within the selected district. The choice of design was reinforced by Yin (2008) and his observation that it is most advantageous to the researcher to study a phenomenon within its context. The study explored leadership practices in the organization framed by dimensions of practice included in a conceptual framework comprised of five domains.

The conceptual framework was based upon Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework for effective leadership practices that have been found to influence student achievement. This study examined whether Hitt and Tucker's leadership practices were present at the selected site but was not designed to determine if these practices contributed toward student achievement. Correlating the leadership practices to the levels of student achievement fell beyond the scope of this particular study.

Site selection. The site selection process consisted of two steps. The first step was to select a district and the second was to select a school within that district. The study team chose a district that was listed as urban and underperforming in accordance with the state's accountability rating system. The district had many schools with varied levels of achievement with the greatest number of schools at the elementary level. The team selected an elementary school that outperformed the other elementary schools in the district. As outlined in Chapter 1, Massachusetts used an accountability system that classified school districts in accordance with their lowest performing school, therefore while the school district may be classified as underperforming, not all schools in the district were underperforming. The study used the accountability system as a guide in identifying and studying the selected school.

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The site was selected as an example of a school that positively deviates from the norm by outperforming other similar schools within the district. The selected school was rated Level 2 by the MA DESE. The school enrolled a similar number of traditionally marginalized students or students with high needs, students of color, and students with disabilities comparable to the rest of the district. The study site selection process included assistance and agreement from the school district's superintendent and school principal.

District description. The district studied was Evergreen Public Schools, an urban public school district that is one of the ten largest districts in Massachusetts serving students in grades Pre-K to 12. The superintendent was a veteran educator having been a classroom teacher and school principal for many years. The central office staff included one assistant superintendent who supervised principals along with two other district leaders who also supervised principals.

The average per pupil expenditure was just under the state average for per pupil spending (MA DESE, School and District Profiles, Finance, n.d.). Virtually all teachers were licensed to teach their class assignments and the student to teacher ratio was 14:1 (MA DESE, School and District Profiles, Teacher Data, n.d.). Evergreen was racially and linguistically diverse, as detailed in Tables 2.1 and 2.2. The district's students identified as special populations are outlined in Table 2.2.

Evergreen Public Schools was accountable to the state department of education's formula for identifying students with high needs. As mentioned in Chapter 1, high needs is defined as students who belong to one or more of the following populations: (1) English Language Learner or former English Language Learner; (2) students with a disability; and (3) economically disadvantaged. Based on this definition, Evergreen

Public Schools served a student population that was more than 75% high needs, as noted in Table 2.2.

Publicly available data showed that students struggled to achieve academic proficiency in the Evergreen Public Schools. At the time of this study, the state implemented a new system for tracking student performance and the district had not yet received an accountability rating. However, under the old state accountability system, Evergreen had been considered a low performing school district due to low student aggregate scores across the district and having at least one school with a Level 4 designation. State accountability levels ranged from 1 to 5. Level 1 designations were reserved for high performing districts while Level 5 designations required intervention from the state, including complete takeover of district responsibilities including all school operations.

Under the new accountability structure, Evergreen students performed below the state on accountability assessments. Composite Performance Index (CPI) scores were used to describe the performance of all students across the state. In the Evergreen Public Schools, on the English Language Arts assessment, K-5 students collectively earned 75 points (out of a possible 100 points) (MA DESE, School and District Profiles, Accountability Report, n.d.). District-wide, elementary students earned an average of 68 points on the math assessment and 65 points on science assessments (MA DESE, School and District Profiles, Accountability Report, n.d.). Across the state, CPI scores were calculated by assigning 100 points to every student who scored proficient or advanced on the state assessment. Students who did not score proficient or advanced were given a

score of 75, 50, 25 or 0. Failing scores were assigned a 0 (MA DESE, School and District Profiles, Accountability Report, n.d.).

To be classified as a Level 1 district, or a high performing district by the state, cumulative scores of students, including high needs students, must total 75 CPI points or higher (MA DESE, School and District Profiles, Accountability Report, n.d.). Given that cumulative scores for Evergreen students did not meet the bar for all three state assessments and there was at least one Level 4 school, Evergreen was considered a low performing, urban public school district.

School description. The elementary school selected, the Standmore School, included a population of more than 300 racially and linguistically diverse students in preschool through grade 6. The Standmore School was considered a neighborhood school in that the majority of students walked to the campus. The school leader had been the principal for more than three years and previously served as a teacher and assistant principal elsewhere in the district. Many of the teachers taught previously at other schools in the district and arrived at the school following the most recent change in leadership. Virtually all teachers and school leaders were white, spoke English as their first language, and did not mirror the student population in terms of racial or linguistic diversity.

The Standmore School has a black population similar to that in the district. However its Hispanic and Asian population exceeds the district's. Table 2.1 specifies the demographics of the state, district and school.

Table 2.1

2017 Student Race and Ethnicity Data

Demographic Group	State	District	School

Black	9%	20%	20%
Asian	7%	10%	10%
Hispanic	19%	40%	50%
White	61%	30%	20%
Multi-race, Non-Hispanic, Native American, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	4%	<5%	<5%

Note. Data from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. School and District Profiles: The numbers in all tables related to the district and school have been rounded to promote the anonymity of the participants in the study. Accountability Report. Retrieved January 19, 2018 from: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu.

As shown in Table 2.2, the percentage of students who reported that English was not their first language and those qualifying as English Language Learners was higher than the overall district's percentage. These differences were also noted in the number of economically disadvantaged students and those identified as high needs.

Table 2.2

2017 Selected Populations Data

Selected Populations	State	District	School
First Language not English	20%	50%	70%
English Language Learner	10%	30%	50%
Students with Disabilities	17%	20%	20%
High Needs	45%	80%	90%
Economically Disadvantaged	30%	60%	70%

Note. Data from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. School and District Profiles: The numbers in all tables related to the district and school have been rounded to promote the anonymity of the participants in the study. Accountability Report. Retrieved January 19, 2018 from: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu

Despite scoring below the district in the Composite Performance Index (CPI) both in ELA (school score 71; district score 75) and in Math (school score 67; district score 68), Standmore earned a higher CPI in Science (school score 73; district score 65) and

earned a Level 2 designation based on the state accountability system due to the

significant growth in student achievement since 2013, as noted in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3

Four Year Standmore School Accountability Levels and Performance

Subject	2013	2014	2015	2016
Accountability Level	3	3	3	2
School Performance	5%-10%	10%-15%	10%-15%	20%-25%

Note. Data from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. School and District Profiles: Accountability Report. The numbers in all tables related to the district and school have been rounded to promote the anonymity of the participants the study. Retrieved January 19, 2018 from: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu

The accountability level in Table 2.3 represents that Massachusetts state

accountability level as described in more detail above. The school performance

percentage shows the percentile that the Standmore School performed overall compared

to schools that serve the same grade levels across the state. In 2013, the Standmore

School was performing in the bottom 5 to 10% of similar schools in the state, but by 2016

had significantly improved their performance to 20 to 25% using this measure.

Data collection. Data collection took place between September 2017 and

December 2017. Prior to this phase, each member of the research team completed

individual Institutional Review Board (IRB) certification and the project was approved

by both the Boston College IRB and the study site's IRB authority. Data collection

consisted of two specific methods beginning with document review and followed by

open-ended interviews. The pool of research subjects was limited to adults and each

subject completed a Boston College Adult Informed Consent Form (Appendix A). As

stated previously in this chapter, all members of the research team participated in

performing on-site interviews with identified participants and collecting and analyzing

documents and artifacts. This collaborative approach to data collection afforded the team

the necessary time and energy to complete both phases of data collection on time. Figure

2.1 is a design map depicting how data sources contributed to the findings for each

research topic and helped answer the collective research question. As the design map

shows, there were five domains framing each researcher's individual study while also

serving as one-fifth interdependent variable in the overall study. These five domains each

have a code associated with them that were used when reviewing documents. Using Hitt

and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework as a conceptual framework to guide the project

shaped the logic of the design and strengthened the potential for meaningful findings.
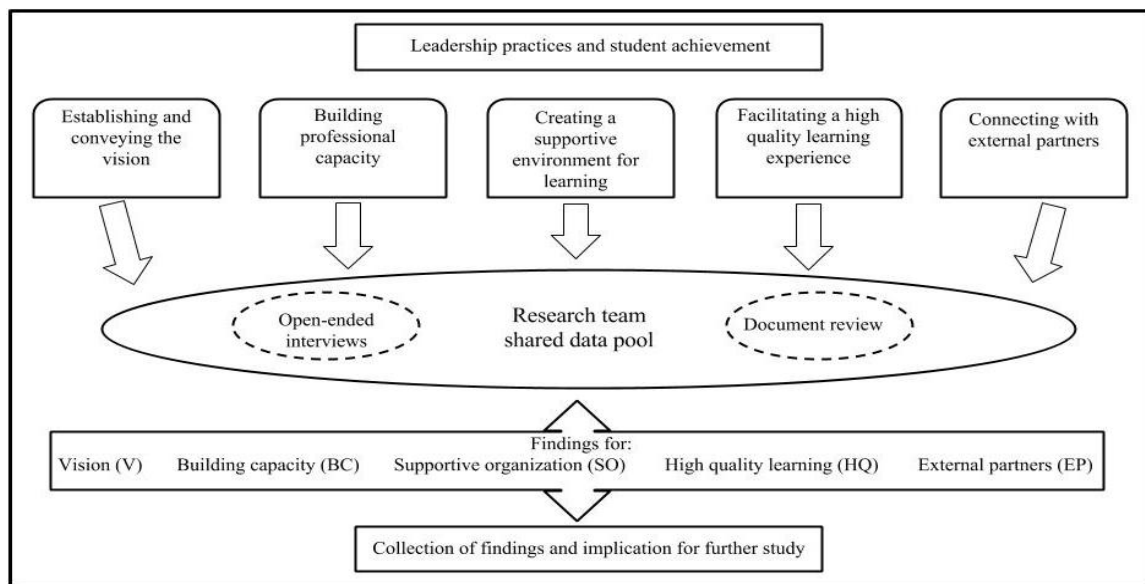

Figure 2.1. Research design map. This figure illustrates the research methods used and their connection to answering the research question.

Document review. Aside from sometimes being difficult to obtain, Creswell

(2012) supported the use of documents as data because "they provide the advantage of

being in the language and words of the participants, who have usually given thoughtful attention to them" (p.223). Documents reviewed included those identified in Table 2.4.

Data collection began with research team members visiting the school district, school, and state department of education websites in search of documents that would inform the study. These public documents were reviewed using an *a priori list* (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014) to determine if they would be helpful and then electronically downloaded into a Google folder on the Boston College network. In addition to the publicly available information, the principal provided some documents from the school for review. These documents were also reviewed upon receipt using the same *a priori list* and stored in the Google folder.

According to Boston College Information Technology Services staff (Boston College, 2017), the network hosting the Google folder was secure and the information contained in it was protected. This study fell under the confidential classification according to the Regulated University Data Chart (Boston College, 2017) and the storing of these public documents in this manner was acceptable.

As district and school level documents were collected, and after they had been placed in a storage folder, they were reviewed by each member of the research team and separated according to the specific domain under which they fell. Hitt and Tucker (2016) specifically used terms and phrases such as vision, building capacity, high-quality learning, supportive organization, and external partners to organize the domains in their framework. These terms and phrases served as codes for each of the domains. Each member of the research team applied their code (see "Findings for:" in Figure 2.1) to relevant documents and moved a copy of those documents to a folder named after their

domain. All folders with the elements of the specific domains and/or dimensions were shared among the team, and Table 2.4 illustrates how those documents were coded. In some cases, documents that were collected were not used. Since the document review was the first method of data collection, information from the documents helped refine and/or create additional research questions for the open-ended interview process (Creswell, 2012) and further informed the selection of subjects to be interviewed.

Table 2.4

Alignment of Documents to Codes

Type of document	Code
Mission statement	V, SO, HQ, EP
Vision statement	V, SO, HQ, EP
Organizational structure	
2017 District and School Budget	SO
Superintendent goals	V
Superintendent 100 Day Plan	V
School-wide goals for past 3 years	HQ
District Instructional Focus	V
Job postings	
Job descriptions	
Teacher evaluation plan	HQ,
Professional development master plan	HQ,
Standmore Staff News	SO, HQ, EP
School level achievement reports*	SO, HQ, EP
Grade level assessment scores*	SO, HQ, EP
School Accountability Plan	V, HQ, EP
School Instructional Focus	HQ
Teacher turnover rates*	
Administrator turnover rates*	
Principal career experience (total)	
Staff tenure rates	

Note: The five codes are abbreviated as follows: vision (V), professional capacity (BC), supportive organization (SO), high-quality learning (HQ) and external partners (EP).
Note: *for previous three (3) years

Open-ended interviews. The second stage of data collection was open-ended interviews. The research team first reviewed some of the documents that helped develop thoughtful probes for interviews. As a result, the team was able to focus on specific areas in the interview phase that lacked clarity or suggested the need for further data gathering. This approach permitted the team to be most efficient with its time and thoughtful with its interview protocols germane to answering the study's research question.

Three district level administrators, one site council member, and 11 school level administrators and teachers were interviewed using five different interview protocols. Of those five protocols, four were used at the school level while one was used at the district level to capture data supporting the five domains of Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework. The Standmore School principal and assistant principal were interviewed twice on two separate occasions using two different school level interview protocols. Appendix B identifies the interviewees by their pseudonyms and their assigned roles in the school and district. Two different interview protocols were utilized for interviewing school level personnel. Interview Protocol for School Level Personnel – A (Appendix C) focused on the leadership practices of establishing and conveying the vision and building professional capacity. Interview Protocol for School Level Personnel – B (Appendix E) focused on the leadership practices of creating a supportive organization for learning and facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students. Both protocols included questions for the leadership practice of connecting with external partners. Interview Protocol for District Level Personnel (Appendix F) was used with the three district interviewees and focused on the leadership practices of establishing and conveying the

vision and building professional capacity. The Interview Protocol for External Partners (Appendix G) was used with the site council member and focused on the leadership practice of connecting with external partners. The protocol used for each interview was selected at random based upon the availability of the interviewee and researcher.

The team designed interview protocols that drew from key information that directly reflected the dimensions of each researcher's individual study domain. This information was initially coded according to the five potential categories as illustrated in Table 2.4.

The research team conducted 45 to 60 minute interviews in an open-ended format that permitted the interviewer and respondent to engage in an informative discussion (Yin, 2008; Hoffmann, 2007). Table 2.5 lists respondents as school leadership, district leadership, administrative staff, teacher-leaders, and external stakeholders.

Table 2.5

Interview Respondents

Respondents	Interview Team
District Leadership	Taylor, Ryan
School Leadership	Gohlmann, Gittens, Reilly, Taylor
School Administrative Staff	Gittens, Gohlmann, Reilly, Taylor, Ryan
Teachers	Ryan, Gohlmann, Gittens, Taylor, Reilly
External Stakeholders	Reilly

Selection was based on the research team's belief in the respondents' understanding and experience they may have had with the phenomenon being studied. Following this logic,

the research team believed that these respondents held the highest probability of providing useful information for answering the study's research question.

Table 2.5 also outlines the responsibilities of interview team members. Interview teams were chosen and assigned to interview respective respondents based on the likelihood of the team members' individual research interests being addressed. Each interview team ranged in size from one to four members. On teams greater than one, a single team member acted as interviewer and was chiefly responsible for asking initial questions as well as probes and follow up questions. The other team member(s) was responsible for ensuring the recording device was working properly, scribing field notes, proposing follow up questions, offering probing questions as appropriate, and lending support to the interviewer and respondent as needed.

Prior to conducting interviews, one team member engaged in cognitive interviews (Desimone & Le Floch, 2004) to validate the intent of the questions and sought assistance from his colleagues and peers in the field to conduct think-alouds (Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer & Tourangeau, 2011). Based upon responses and respective probes and follow up, the interview questions were refined.

Data Analysis

The team chose Dedoose as its qualitative research analysis software for its ease of collaboration, low cost, intuitive functionality, and Web-based accessibility for anytime, anywhere connectivity using cloud-based technology. Team members uploaded documents and transcripts into the software as they were collected and initially coded them (Saldaña, 2013). There were four cycles of analysis that involved collective and individual coding efforts.

Data were initially coded from the document review and open-ended interviews according to the five domains of Hitt and Tucker's (2016) framework as abbreviated in Table 2.4: vision (V), professional capacity (BC), supportive organization (SO), high-quality learning (HQ), and external partners (EP). This was the first cycle. This work, while accomplished separately by team members, was compared to ensure consistency in understanding how data were being coded under these initial themes and to establish a baseline of understanding. This comparison of coded data was done electronically by sharing a single account on Dedoose and all team members had access to the same account.

The second cycle of analysis involved the cross-referencing of data from the document review and interviews to uncover common patterns and themes. In this cycle, the research team again coded data individually, however here it was according to the several dimensions of leadership practices under each of the five domains. The coded data were once again shared among the team under the same Dedoose account as well as discussed at several research team meetings. The third and fourth cycles of analysis were conducted by the individual researchers as described in Chapter 3.

The data collection effort demonstrated consistent evidence from the different respondents and document reviews. This consistency lent further credibility that the evidence supported answering the research questions. The data in the document review was triangulated with the data from the school level and district level interviews. Triangulation of data (Creswell, 2012) was also achieved through similar patterns of evidence found across the different transcripts. In comparing different interview

responses to the same question, common themes were supported by similar emerging data.

In maintaining the spirit of collaboration, the research team constructed a process memo in the fall of 2016 and relied on it throughout the project. The memo was a string of comments posted through the Google documents platform and maintained a chronology of suggestions for edits, additions, and deletions to the sections of this dissertation-in-practice. The team also employed analytic memos about the project and maintained its reflectivity in its development (Phillips & Carr, 2007). As data were collected and ultimately coded, the sharing of code lists and review of each other's work was ongoing in a supportive and professional manner.

Chapter Three

Problem, Purpose and Research Findings

School improvement work has been going on for decades, yet there remains a wide gap between those schools that are performing at high levels and those that are not (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton & Luppescu, 2010). Even in large school districts, one or two schools achieve at levels higher than the others despite student demographics, curriculum, and funding remaining relatively the same among them. Many conditions appear to be significant and common predictors for this variance include school climate (Weijun, Vaillancourt, Brittain, Krygsman, Smith, Haltigan, & Hymel, 2014; Ramsey, Spira, Parisi, & Rebok, 2016), principal instructional leadership activities (May & Supovitz, 2011; Brown III, 2016), teachers' instructional practices (Stone & Lane, 2003; Lyons & Barnett, 2011), quality of instruction (Blazar, Litke & Barmore, 2016), and teachers' behaviors and attitudes toward students (Jager & Denessen, 2015).

Hitt and Tucker (2016) assert that the differences in school performance can be traced to certain practices of key leaders in the school and organized these practices into five overarching domains. This framework remains untested in schools and does not indicate linkages to types of schools where these practices are found or would be most helpful. For instance, the data are not coded to public, private, or charter schools; elementary, middle, or high schools; suburban, urban, or rural schools. This illustrates a gap in scholarship and a need to conduct research in the field to determine if the newly Unified Framework is being practiced in an effective school.

Accordingly, this study embarked on a qualitative case study that explored

conditions established through the leadership practices in one high performing elementary school in a Massachusetts urban school district where other demographically similar schools were labeled as underperforming by statutory accountability standards. Using the domain of "building professional capacity" from Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework for effective leader practices as a theoretical framework, this study explored the actions taken by the school principal to implement the seven dimensions of this domain in the school. For the purpose of this study, the scope of the term "leader" was limited to the school principal. As such, the purpose of the study was to explore the principal's actions in building professional capacity in a high performing urban elementary school. The question guiding this study was: What actions does the school principal take when building professional capacity in a high performing urban elementary school?

Building Professional Capacity

Before moving forward it is important to establish what is meant by professional capacity. This study followed the definition offered by Youngs and King (2002) which is "the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of individual teachers" (p. 646). Since principals who lead successful schools understand that no one person can improve student achievement alone and that teacher quality matters most in improving student outcomes (Good, 2008), building professional capacity is critical. There are seven practices, or dimensions, that when enacted support the building of professional capacity (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). In order to recognize actions taken by the principal to build professional capacity, the study summarizes below the literature regarding principal actions relative to the seven dimensions in the framework.

Selecting faculty and staff for the right fit. An important practice in building professional capacity is choosing the right people and ensuring the fit is mutual. Hiring the right teacher may be one of the most important functions of the school principal, yet is especially difficulty as education continues to face a crisis in the form of a hiring shortage of quality teachers (Bourke & Brown, 2014). In addition, there is no one way to ensure a quality hire (Kersten, 2008). Principals want to make sure the teacher they've hired is excellent at their craft as well as able to grow and improve it. After all, teachers are known to have the greatest impact on student learning (Mertz, 2010), a fact that requires the principal to take a confident position in deciding who is best for the future of the school. Leithwood and Levin (2004) describes this as the principal's ability to influence the organization through the people and structures they put in place, a key component of effective school leadership and change that has a direct effect on the potential for student achievement.

Leithwood and Levin (2004) urge principals to base their hiring decisions on the alignment of the kinds of people they see as effective teachers and their vision for improving student learning. Ingle, Rutledge, and Bishop (2011) reinforce this in their observations of hiring practices based on personal characteristics of candidates instead of professional capacity for the job. They assert that personal beliefs and individual preferences for specific characteristics should play a less important role in hiring teachers than how the teacher can help advance the mission of the school. Ruitenberg (2011) takes the argument one level deeper in her report on teacher education programs and the lack of scientific clarity related to the disposition of teacher candidates. Her concern is the heavy reliance on teacher candidates' predispositions instead of their professional dispositions,

claiming the former will outweigh the latter when tough decisions are to be made. Ruitenberg asserts that this is "a dangerous and unacceptable conclusion, and one that would have far-reaching consequences for the way we conceive of pluralist liberal democracy" (p. 45).

As hiring authorities seek to find the right fit for their schools they tend to give much more attention to personal attributes instead of professional preparation. In Texas, for instance, a study found that principals typically seek teacher candidates with particular personal characteristics such as the ability to work on teams, "passion for teaching, strong first impression, and a focus on student-centered teaching" (Hynes, Sullivan, & Yeager, 2011, p. 49). Only two professional qualifications were highlighted as notable hiring characteristics (content knowledge and four year degree) with applicant GPAs and field experience evaluations given no weight.

Similarly, Cranston's (2012) study of hiring practices in Manitoba determined that while there is no consistent hiring method throughout the province, what was consistent was the overwhelming importance placed on personal characteristics and the little to no significance given to the applicant's academic preparation or academic reputation as reported by a university transcript or recommendation for employment. At issue in the Manitoba study is the apparent disconnect between a reliance on the "predictive validity and reliability" (p. 355) of the candidate's academic preparation program and insignificance of it in the hiring decision.

The introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 added complexity to the hiring process and subsequently skewed the research on hiring for the right fit. Cohen-Vogel (2011) conducted a correlational study of hiring practices in high

performing and low performing schools in each of five school districts in Florida. Their findings demonstrate that hiring practices shifted to meet the accountability expectations under the new law. For instance, schools were found to have employed testing results as a driver in staffing patterns, specifically stating that "school leaders in Florida today do not hire on 'instinct' and 'good fit' alone" (p. 498). Personal characteristics were no longer as great a factor in hiring as were statutory requirements.

Principals can screen teacher candidates using advanced interviewing protocols and eliminate the practice of hiring based just on likeability, intuition, and assumption (Schumacher, Grigsby, & Vesey, 2015). In their study of those interview protocols that best predict the classroom behaviors and impact of prospective teachers, Schumacher et al. surveyed 600 working teachers. They found that high scores in each of the four measured domains (classroom management and organization, organizing instruction, implementing instruction, and monitoring student progress) aligned with their degree of success as illustrated by the levels of student achievement in their classrooms. Mason and Schroeder (2010) wrote of the "reduction of uncertainty" (p. 186) model in which several steps are taken in growing degrees of scrutiny to understand the professional and personal attributes of the teacher candidate.

Finding teachers and staff whose traits and instructional practices best fit the cultural and professional expectations of the school is what Kersten (2008) found to be effective in his study of hiring practices of Illinois school principals. In a related study, DeArmond, Gross, and Goldhaber (2010) researched urban school districts where principals took either a passive or active approach to hiring for their school, the latter of which proving to be more fruitful in their results. These principals and associated staff

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were found to be relatively more "engaged in the recruitment of teachers and more consistent and coherent about the experience, skills, knowledge, and dispositions it was looking for" (p. 333).

Engel and Finch (2015), in their study of the hiring practices of 31 principals in the Chicago Public Schools, differentiated DeArmond et al.'s (2010) two categories of passive and active hiring to show the correlation of high achievement in schools where principals network and recruit candidates as compared to principals in lower achieving schools that "rely more on the hiring resources of the district" (p. 12). Active recruiting and networking can be slowed by systems constraints, however, and principals who are highly qualified themselves to hire may be impeded by their context and disjointed support in their school district structure (Donaldson, 2013; Papa & Baxter, 2008).

Providing individualized consideration. Another step toward building professional capacity is identifying and involving individual teachers' strengths for whole school improvement (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Some teachers are proficient in a particular area of teaching while others excel in other areas. Rarely are all teachers equally proficient in all aspects of instruction. In seeking to provide meaningful professional learning opportunities for teachers, particularly in those areas that still need to be mastered, the principal pairs them as mentors to each other. This pairing is designed to help each teacher strengthen areas of weakness in a non-evaluative, low stakes climate where they learn from each other (Koballa Jr., Bradbury, & Deaton, 2008). This is a different approach to mentoring which tends to be more a function of new teacher induction programs and a means for mitigating the loss of new teachers (Parker, 2010; McCann, Johannessen, & Leibenberg, 2010). In the typical mentor matching scenario, the

principal identifies the different proficiency levels among veteran staff and matches them with teachers new to the school or new teachers recently graduated from teacher preparation programs. This type of mentor matching is critical to the success of both teachers and students (Lozinak, 2016) as it broadens the new teacher's repertoire while expanding and sustaining best practices in classrooms.

Providing opportunities to learn for whole faculty to include leader(s). Principals who build the professional capacity of teachers provide opportunities for professional learning for their entire faculty, including themselves. There is scarce scholarship about which professional learning activity works best, but there are suitable data supporting the importance of providing them (Rice, 2014; Wayne, Kwang Suk, Pei, Cronen, & Garet, 2008). The principal designs whole faculty learning models with three outcomes in mind: (1) it must be sustained over time, (2) it must provide time for peers to learn together, and (3) it must be transferable so that collaboration on the new knowledge can occur in the field (Brown & Militello, 2016).

In building whole faculty learning models, the principal identifies a common instructional need of the students and then the content learning requirements of staff to meet those needs (Cannon, Tenuto, & Kitchel, 2013; Li, Hallinger, & Ko, 2016). Engaging in a whole school model of professional learning (such as literacy development training) requires the principal to plan with teams of teachers and other administrators (Lumpkin, 2008; Rhodes, Camic, Milburn, & Lowe, 2009; Freeman, Wertheim, & Trinder, 2014) and then learn alongside them (Evans, 2014; Drago-Severson, 2007). While teachers have been identified as "the most important people in the workforce" (Crum & Sherman, 2015, p. 567), principals should participate in the professional

learning so that they can share in the professional culture of their teaching staff, model the importance of the learning (Whitworth & Chiu, 2015), and influence teachers' behaviors that ultimately bring about changes in classroom practice. In participating with the staff, the principal amplifies the importance of the activity as well as learns the content herself (Spillane, Healey, & Parise, 2009). Principals who introduce learning opportunities with a specific purpose and then participate in the learning themselves construct a new perspective about their role in the eyes of the staff, a phenomenon found in many high performing schools (Ringler, O'Neal, Rawls, & Cumiskey, 2013; Ovando & Ramirez, 2006).

Principals effective at building professional capacity identify and understand the individual and collective learning needs of teachers and staff, build a sustainable professional learning program that influences and shapes behavior in the classroom, and participate in learning programs to demonstrate the importance of developing their own content knowledge.

Building trust. Building trust in school leadership is a critical component of building professional capacity in schools. Without trust in the principal, school effectiveness and teachers' willingness to make changes is jeopardized (Price, 2011). Leithwood and Wahlstrom (2008) see this trust building process as a means of generating collective efficacy which, in turn, inspires the internal states of teachers to influence their practice in their classrooms. Principals who are effective at building capacity are almost experts at building relational trust between themselves and teachers (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Principals establish trust by modeling specific behaviors, setting conditions for a climate of safety and professionalism, and using reflection as a tool for decision-making (Ghamrawi, 2011). There are specific principal practices that evoke feelings of trust and followership from teachers and staff such as shared leadership, fostering a professional community, employing practices that equate to trustworthiness, demonstrating competence, being consistent and reliable in decisions and actions, displaying openness, and showing respect for all (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Handford & Leithwood, 2013).

Trust has proven to be a critical factor in building stronger schools and is evident in high performing schools where teachers learn to take risks in their practice (Cosner, 2009; Cranston, 2011; Daly, 2009; Leis & Rimm-Kaufman, 2015; Chughtai & Buckley, 2009). Teachers and staff members who are empowered and inspired by principals to take risks in the classroom and employ innovative practices develop a deeper sense of loyalty to leadership and improve their professional efforts (Moye, Henkin, & Egley, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). These types of principals are considered to be authentic leaders (Bird, Wang, Watson, & Murray, 2012). Without establishing trust in visible, authentic ways, principals risk failing at building professional capacity, which may translate to lower student achievement.

Supporting, buffering, and recognizing individuals. Building professional capacity in people is as much helping them develop self-efficacy as it is giving them time to work at it. Demonstrating value and respect for people by outwardly supporting them is considered just as important as any of the other dimensions in this domain of building capacity (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). When considered under this domain, principal support encompasses the actions of buffering and recognizing individuals.

Supporting individuals is not a new concept, especially when teachers and staff are new to the craft or the school. Principals who are successful at supporting them are proactive in their approach, committed to professional growth, and extend support for the dual purpose of improving the teacher or staff member's confidence in teaching, as well as student achievement (Brown & Wynn, 2009). By modeling values and teamwork outwardly, principals have a higher rate of teacher retention and stronger professional culture (Lumpkin, 2008; Rhodes, Camic, Milburn, & Lowe, 2009; Rice, 2014).

Support from principals is also shown through leading and collaborating on professional functions such as learning how to improve pedagogy, curriculum, or other issues related to student learning (Stosich, 2016). Effective leadership strategies could include leading the development of sustainable pedagogies, promoting "conversations with people to learn and grow from one another's diverse practices in an increasingly complex and global environment" (Veel & Bredhauer, 2009, p. 604), or participating in learning teams that are improving their own content knowledge (Gaffney & Farragher, 2010). Scheduling the time in the teacher's day to make this learning available as well as participating in the learning with the teachers demonstrates the support that has been associated with improvement in teachers' effectiveness and the degree of commitment to their craft (Goddard, Neumerski, Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky, 2010).

Principal support is also exhibited through the principal's protection of teachers' time. Scheduling effectively to promote professional learning and permitting collaboration are two examples of how to protect time. Brown and Militello (2016) conclude that "good administrators need to know how to establish a schedule that identifies and prioritizes the necessary tasks and activities and puts people in a position to

execute them to increase student achievement" (p. 109). A strong instructional leader also wards off disruptions such as classroom visits from other adults, loudspeaker communications, fire drills, and abbreviated classes for school assemblies (Leonard, 2008). While indirect and sometimes unnoticed by the classroom teacher, buffering individuals from interruptions and providing the time they need to pursue professional learning opportunities, prepare their lessons, and participate in other collegial activities promotes a stronger culture in which more can be accomplished (Francera & Bliss, 2011).

Another example of principal support is the act of recognizing individuals for their work. Motivation is developed through the recognition of good work, and effective principals take the opportunity to share encouraging words, written or otherwise to motivate people (Rayfield & Wilson, 2009). Recognizing people also happens in the form of empowerment, an effect of the trust and confidence a principal has in the teacher or staff member to lead or complete something of importance. In empowering people, principals recognize teachers for their results as well as their professional commitment to achieving those results (Avidov-Ungar, Friedman, & Olshtain, 2014).

Teachers and staff members need to feel the support of their principals in order to develop self-efficacy. Through the actions of protecting instructional time, promoting the great work that is accomplished in the classroom, and empowering people with opportunities to share their skill and expertise with their colleagues, principals build professional capacity by helping individuals become more confident and stronger professionals in their craft (Zeinabadi, 2014).

Creating communities of practice. Building professional capacity is not something a principal can do alone and therefore requires the fostering of a culture of collaborative learning in which teachers and staff members participate in developing their own efficacy. This is known as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). The principal's chief responsibility is to embed the importance of collaborative learning in the culture of the school and even model participation in a community of practice. Faculty and staff grow to learn that they are their own best resource and can grow as professionals by seeking out their own learning groups and participating with unlimited flexibility (MacGregor & Vavasseur, 2015).

Communities of practice motivate teachers and staff and enable them to flourish as professional practitioners. They have been proven to be an effective means for professional development and can be established in multiple formats (Wenger, 1998; Vangrieken, Meredith, Packer, & Kyundt, 2017). Growing in popularity over the last 10 years is the concept of the online community of practice. With the advent of social media, the ability to establish and participate in online learning communities as part of a personal learning network is rapidly advancing this particular dimension of building one's capacity given the ease of access and abundance of opportunities (Siemens, 2014).

There is tremendous cultural value in the principal introducing and participating in the collaborative learning activities. In changing the culture of a school by setting a professional learning vision and creating sustainable conditions for collaborative professionalism, the principal is seen as leading while participating in the effort to increase student achievement (Eilers & Camacho, 2007; Lai, 2015; Printy, 2007; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010; Mestry, Moonsammy-Koopasammy, & Schmidt,

2014; Puzio, Newcomer, & Goff, 2015). This style of leadership is seen to be interdependently related to teacher collaboration, development of subsequent collective efficacy beliefs, and improvement in student achievement (Goddard, Goddard, Kim, & Miller, 2015). Principals who participate in a collaborative and supportive nature are viewed by teachers as authentic, which inspires teachers to innovate their approaches to instruction (Lunenburg, 2010; Kelehear, 2010).

Principals will run into roadblocks when building communities of practice (Wood, 2007). Diffculties in communicating expectations, teacher and staff complacency and lack of effort, failure to connect the work with student achievement, barriers set by accountability models, and lack of faith in sustainability are just some of the obstacles principals will need to overcome. Still, principals are more successful than not in their pursuit of building capacity through the creation of communities of practice. They are seen by faculty and staff as authentic and purposeful, which motivates them to improve their own practice.

Engendering responsibility for learning. Principals who are successful at building capacity of teachers believe in helping teachers accept the responsibility for their students' learning, and not just their own teaching. Understanding the factors that contribute to learning, positive or otherwise, is an important concept for principals and teachers to embrace and it is the principal's responsibility to hold teachers accountable to doing so. In deepening teachers' understanding of learning and promoting high expectations for all students, principals are shaping teachers' behavior (Arlestig & Tornsen, 2014).

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Setting expectations and goals with teachers for their students' learning is an approach to school leadership that impacts student achievement (Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, & Ylimaki, 2007). There are three key actions principals can take with teachers to implement this practice: (1) set goals and plans to achieve student learning goals, (2) offer professional learning opportunities aligned to improving student learning, and (3) provide feedback on personnel and programs (Terosky, 2016; Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Cosner & Jones, 2016).

Implementing this dimension of the domain spreads the responsibility for student learning to the entire school. In comparing the literature for all seven dimensions, it becomes evident that there are overlaps and redundancies in how the principal behaves when building the capacity of teachers. There are signs of significant interdependence among dimensions in that one may not be a successful practice without another. *Building trust* comes to mind and seems to be a dependent variable among the other six dimensions. This should not come as a surprise since the process of shaping another person's behavior, in this case through building professional capacity, is highly complex and dependent upon so many variables working together in concurrent fashion.

Research Design and Methodology

As stated earlier in this chapter, this is one part of a comprehensive team study seeking to contribute to the knowledge base of improving student achievement from the perspective of the effective school leader. The scope of this individual study was limited to issues concerning building professional capacity, one of the five domains of effective leadership as outlined by Hitt and Tucker (2016). The findings here are organized according to each of this domain's seven dimensions. As such, this individual qualitative

case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) examined the actions taken by the principal to build professional capacity in a high performing, urban elementary school in order to advance student achievement.

Study. A description of the research design and methodology is thoroughly explained in Chapter 2. For the purposes of this individual study, the study site is considered to be the school district in which the study took place.

Document gathering. There were two stages to the document gathering process for this study: public documents gathering and internal documents gathering.

Public documents gathering. In the first stage, school district, state department of education, and school websites were accessed to download public documents that pertained to the overall study. The documents were reviewed as they were gathered and the first coding cycle, as outlined in Chapter 2, was applied by separating those documents categorized as *building professional capacity* from the other four domains. Electronic copies of these documents were placed into a Google folder. In reviewing the research question and considering the seven dimensions of building professional capacity as investigated in the literature review, it was concluded that the public documents did not provide this study with useful data.

Internal documents gathering. In the second stage of document gathering and review, specific internal documents were requested from individuals at both study locations. The specific internal documents requested included emailed staff news, copies of emails to individual faculty and staff members, professional development agendas and minutes, and minutes from Professional Learning Community sessions. The requests for

these internal documents went unfulfilled and after two attempts to secure the documents, the time to conclude the study had arrived.

While the data from the public and internal documents would have been helpful in validating claims made in the interview stage, there was ample triangulation among the interviewed respondents.

Open-ended interviews. Individual, open-ended interviews (Hoffmann, 2007) were conducted between a small research team and three members of the school district administration and five of 11 administration, faculty and staff members at the school. Transcripts from the remaining 6 respondents at the school were made available to me by the other members of the research team who conducted their interviews. Respondents from the school district administration included the superintendent, deputy superintendent, and director of curriculum and professional learning while respondents at the school were variably selected based upon their position, grade level, and time of service. They included the principal and assistant principal who were interviewed on two separate occasions, as well as the instructional coach, student adjustment counselor, special education teacher, English Language Learner teacher, and grade level classroom teachers. Each of the respondents was interviewed for approximately 30 - 90 minutes.

Two different interview protocols were used at the school level and one at the district level to gather data. The protocols are organized in Appendix B according to the respondent and their role. Questions were developed in light of the literature on the seven dimensions of building professional capacity and the intent of the questions were validated through cognitive interviews (Desimone & Le Floch, 2004).

Data analysis. Data were analyzed using three coding cycles. It was concluded from the first coding cycle of the documents, explained in the data collection section above, that those data would not serve a purpose in answering the research question for this individual study and therefore would not be subject to a second cycle. Attention was turned fully to the open-ended interview process and the data collected there.

All interview transcripts were uploaded into a team account on Dedoose so that all members of the research team had access to the same data. Using the relevant literature and prior to conducting the interview process, a coding manual was developed to serve as a guideline for the first cycle. A descriptive coding process (Saldaña, 2013) was then used with the interview data to organize them under one of the eight categories identified in the coding manual. These categories are listed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Eight Categories for First Cycle Interview Coding

Categories
1. Building professional capacity 2. Selecting the right fit 3. Providing individualized consideration 4. Providing whole group learning 5. Building trust 6. Creating communities of practice 7. Engendering responsibility for learning 8. Supporting, buffering, and recognizing individuals

The second cycle of coding highlighted the physical actions of the principal organized under each dimension. This round permitted me to clearly identify the actions taken by the principal and align those actions with the dimension or dimensions

impacted. In the third cycle, specific actions and dimensions impacted were organized

under four summary categories that emerged from the data: professional practice,

messaging, modeling, and coaching. Table 3.2 provides a general description of each of

the four categories.

Table 3.2

Four Summary Categories of Principal's Actions

Categories	General Description
Professional Practice	The principal took an individual action that was more aligned to her professional practice than any of the other three categories
Messaging	The principal is involved in communication in any form from the principal directly or indirectly to faculty and staff.
Modeling	The principal showed participation, presence, and actions that demonstrated to faculty and staff appropriate behaviors for professional learning and leadership
Coaching	The principal individually and personally imparted direction, wisdom, advice or inspiration to a faculty or staff member for the purpose of professional learning

The research team met throughout the study to organize the research process as

well as develop a consistent report of the group study findings discussed in Chapter 4.

Several discussions about the emerging patterns and themes took place and allowed for

the team to validate their understanding of the study (Cooke, Kiekel, & Helm, 2001) and

remain consistent with its purpose. Each member contributed toward the findings and evidence of participation is validated in the team's ongoing process memo.

Findings

In response to the research question "what actions do school principals take when building professional capacity?", there were several specific and tangible actions that the principal in this study (Aron) took to build professional capacity in the school. In order to answer the research question, it first had to be determined if any or all of the seven dimensions of building professional capacity (Hitt & Tucker, 2016) existed in the study site. The findings indicate that all seven dimensions existed to different degrees. In the following sections, the actions of the principal to build professional capacity are described and organized by each of those dimensions.

Selecting faculty and staff for the right fit. The faculty and staff appeared to be hardworking, collegial, caring, and open to feedback, and according to several respondents, were either "on the same page" or were willing to be on it. The data show that teachers whose personal qualities, beliefs and dispositions aligned with those of the school culture were considered for employment while there is insufficient evidence indicating whether or not these same teachers possessed the professional expertise in their position. Data are further lacking in supporting whether or not those who did not meet the personal character measures but had the professional expertise were hired. For example, Casey summarized the hiring vision with "I think Aron's done a good job of finding individuals who have the same team mentality." When asked a follow-up question to describe the tact Aron used if a teacher candidate presented a viewpoint that was different from hers, she replied, "Aron's done a great job of finding staff that don't have that

attitude." Sage, Morgan, Jesse and Blake agreed with this understanding of the hiring process.

Aron relied on two specific methods to hire for the right fit at the school. The methods for selecting and hiring those who were aligned with the vision are described below, follwed by what the principal did to inspire staff on expectations and vision.

Selecting and hiring staff. One way the principal selected faculty and staff for the right fit was by actively seeking teachers who wanted to work hard and who believed all students can learn. According to several respondents at the school and district levels (Morgan, Kit, Casey, Blake & Cody), the principal hired teachers who shared this vision and embodied the core values of the school. Casey described it as hiring team members that seem to be on the same "wavelength of ideology." There were two specific processes the principal followed to determine who would be the best fit: selecting teachers from within her professional network, and interviewing prospective teachers recently graduated from a professional preparation program.

Hiring known teachers from within a professional network. One action the principal took was selecting and hiring staff from her professional network of teachers who shared the same vision for education. These teachers were people with whom she had worked in the past in another school as well as other teachers with whom she had built professional relationships. One classroom teacher (Blake) explained that he had taught in the same school as Aron at one time and when a position became available at the school, he reached out and re-connected. He shared his belief that many others chose to work at this school because "we all value education, we have confidence in these kids. As a whole I think we have a group here that's dedicated and they're confident in what

we're doing right now." Some respondents (Casey, Sage, Jesse & Chris) confirmed Blake's assessment.

Selecting new teachers recently graduated from a professional program. The other action the principal took to hire staff was to interview a large number of teachers fresh from their undergraduate or graduate programs and selected those who meshed with the vision at the school. One teacher (Jesse), a member of the Instructional Leadership Team, explained that "we had a lot of younger staff come in from college, really enthusiastic about change. Staying longer hours and really willing to put in the work and the time that it takes." When the principal interviewed these prospective teachers, she was straightforward with her vision by verbalizing specific warnings about the intensity of the work and the high expectations for the staff. Aron's desire was to weed out those who were not committed to doing the hard work that the school demanded, and she shared the following example from previous rounds of interviews with young applicants:

> In hiring all of our new staff I tell them all right up front this is a lot of
> work, it's not something that is easy. It's hard work, it's not like you can
> do the job between 7:30 and 2:05 and think you are not going to have to
> think about it anymore. I mean this is hard. [I tell them] "You know, this is
> not an easy job. We're not an easy school. We have a lot of issues. The
> kids have a lot of needs, parents have a lot of needs, and I want you to
> know what you are getting into before you decide to come with us,
> because, it's not easy." So, I feel like we made a lot of really good hires,
> and you know, it's working well.

Inspiring faculty and staff on expectations and vision. The other way the principal selected faculty and staff for the right fit was by inspiring current teachers and other staff members to reach expectations for performance. This was done in whole group settings as well as individual ones, and Aron employed two methods for inspiring people: communicating and team leadership.

Communicating. The principal indicated that she "relentlessly communicated" the vision for the school and expectations for teacher performance through personal interaction, formal meetings, professional development sessions, staff meetings, and internal communications such as daily staff news and email messages. To those teachers who did not appear to want to live up to the expectations, the principal was direct with frank assessments about their performance. As Aron said, "[Our vision for high expectations] was really the overarching message to everybody, and some people got on board with that, and some did not, and the ones who did not, are really not here anymore." These messages affected the way teachers thought about their roles and drove some teachers to leave the school. Jesse supported this assessment, explaining "we had some teachers bid out and went to other buildings." Aron further explained "I think they got the message that the message was not going to change, and the expectations were what they were, and they could either get on the bus, or get on another bus."

Team leadership. The second action the principal took to coach faculty and staff on expectations and vision was facilitation of team leadership. All teachers were expected to facilitate, chair, or otherwise lead a committee or team in the school at some point. For those teachers who believed in the vision but were struggling with their performance, the principal assigned them to a specific team or committee that had strong colleagues as

members. Aron relied on the other teachers and groups of teachers to assist in the teacher's growth and help determine if the teacher fit or did not fit their model of expectations and vision for the school. She explained that "while we do have a great staff, there are people that need a lot more support than others, and so it's a fine line of, you know, you do not want to send somebody over the edge, but you want to support them and move them to the next level."

Providing individualized consideration. The principal considered the individual strengths and challenges of the faculty and staff before deciding on how best to use them in the overall operations of the school. Aron explained: "'I think it's important to meet people where they are as much as we can. Some people are really strong, and I always want to find the strength in whoever it is because I know that then they can be a leader in that area for their peers." To accomplish this, she worked individually with teachers on several projects to include goal setting, reviewing student work, analyzing student data, attending to classrooms, and providing feedback on instruction. As Aron stated, "when you talk with them and watch them and get to know what they are good at, then you can guide them into the right area. I feel like it's counterproductive to try to jam a square peg into a round hole."

The principal reported that she considered each of the teacher's strengths and challenges based on her interaction with them and invited them to be involved with activities in the school such as membership on the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), facilitating small group or whole group professional learning activities, leading a committee, spearheading a special project, or using their expertise to support or tutor another teacher in curriculum, instruction, or assessment issues. When on those teams

and committees, the principal would shift their responsibilities to suit their needs. Some respondents (Jesse, Blake & Jordan) described being on different committees based upon their strengths and challenges, and one newer teacher (Chris) stated, "We all have roles. So for example in the math PLC, I'm the recorder and everyone will have a different role, then the roles will switch, so like I said, we share. We share roles." The principal further explained:

I think it's important to identify people's strengths and I think it's important to sort of distribute leadership to teachers because teachers can build buy-in with their colleagues and bring people along in a quicker way because they are also developing relationships with them and they work with them in teams and they are side by side with them.

As summarized above, the faculty and staff believed that their school was better than most because of the way they were being deployed by the principal, the way they were collaborating with other teachers and staff in the building, and the way they were solving problems together. One district leader (Dylan) saw this as a result of the principal "growing teacher leaders because there's no way that the principal or the assistant principal can—we can't be everywhere and monitor everything."

Providing opportunities to learn for whole faculty to include leader(s). The principal provided opportunities to learn for the whole faculty and included herself as someone who needed to continue to learn about her craft. Three specific actions that the principal had taken to implement this dimension of building professional capacity are described below and include: inviting professional development programs and trainers to the school for whole school training, participating in whole group professional learning

sessions alongside teachers, and using data to explain to staff why the PD is necessary, including district-wide mandated professional learning.

   Inviting professional development programs and trainers to the school for whole school training. The principal embraced whole group learning opportunities in district-wide areas such as math and science curriculum as well as school-wide learning opportunities in science instruction and literacy. She made frequent use of the school district's content liaisons who tailored specific learning activities for her staff at her request. One district administrator (Dylan) shared that she knew "that our science coach went in and did a full faculty meeting training on Visual Thinking Strategies at [the school]." In general, the faculty and staff were open to learning and the principal supported their desire to learn by securing this professional development. Some respondents (Charlie, Dylan, Kit & Morgan) indicated that there was a high level of commitment to improve what they do so that they could improve how students learn. Kit validated this assessment when he stated "the training [they] participate in willingly, and the training that the principal willingly participates in, really has made that school successful."

   Participating in whole group professional learning sessions alongside teachers. The principal established a bi-weekly schedule for professional development and shared in leading whole group learning with the school's instructional coach. The principal willingly participated in the training alongside her staff. According to a member of the Instructional Leadership Team (Jordan), "the principal is usually the one that thinks of the topic. So she's saying like this is something we need to do…..before the year gets too far." Several respondents (Kit, Charlie, Blake, Chris & Dylan) stated the principal was

enthusiastic about learning with the staff and saw her participation as modeling professional behavior. They further shared stories of their experiences with the principal involved in their professional learning breakout sessions. One teacher in particular (Blake) made note of the principal not only revamping the Professional Learning Communities movement at the school into a form of professional learning, but also fully participating in it each week. He stated "[Aron] works with the teachers all the time; she's at every one of [the PLC meetings]."

Using data to support the need for professional learning. The principal supported the development of the topics for professional learning and her invitations to content liaisons and other professional learning consultants by looking through student data with the Instructional Leadership Team (Lee, Jesse, Morgan, Chris & Jordan). The team designed the trainings in partnership with the principal and instructional coach based on the needs depicted in the student work. Some of the data were widespread such as district-wide student math scores which called for an overhaul of the district's math curriculum, or district-wide literacy data which prompted the district to engage with a prominent consultant. While there was district level professional learning available to all schools, the principal reported that she used her school-level scores to tailor the type of learning teachers needed to make improvements in their instruction. Aron indicated there was one grade level in particular where some teachers needed extra training in literacy based on the consistency of their students' low performance in reading, while other teachers had excelled in this area and required training in other areas. Using data permitted the principal to hone in on what exactly was needed. Aron explained "I just find that the devil is in the details and it's usually a very simple solution to a problem.

Most of it is very basic and easy to correct, but if you do not ever get down to that level to see what the problem is, it just keeps going, unresolved."

Building trust. There were four specific actions taken by the principal that respondents believed contributed toward building trust: maintaining consistent norms in PLCs, modeling trustworthy behavior, hosting difficult conversations, and encouraging risk and failure in the classroom as a means of innovating practice. There were two pieces of data indicating some uncertainty among the respondents about building trust, the presence of trust, and the context of trust, and those data are discussed below.

Maintaining consistent norms governing the PLC process. It was reported by some respondents (Kit, Casey, Blake, Jordan, & Cody) that when the principal began at the school she revamped the PLC process so that teachers and administrators would be talking more frequently about student work. Aron explained that the process was set up with non-negotiable guidelines in a framework that required participation from all faculty, and she included herself and the assistant principal (Lee) in this expectation so that they both attended the PLC grade level meetings. She reported that she took an active role in each meeting by asking teachers direct questions that required them to prepare student data reports in earnest. Four teachers (Morgan, Casey, Jesse & Chris) reported that they understood the expectations for the PLC meetings and, because they were consistent, developed a level of trust with each other to share student work that was subpar and illustrate student outcomes that fell short of achievement goals. In general, however, the teachers interviewed for this study believed the administrators were there to help them improve and that eliminated any feelings of vulnerability.

Modeling trustworthy behavior. According to some teachers (Blake, Morgan &

Casey), the principal modeled trustworthy behavior by virtue of her work ethic. She held

high expectations for her staff to do their jobs regardless of the time it took and lived up

to those same expectations. In general, these teachers saw the principal involved

alongside them in their work at all hours before, during, and after school. Morgan was

emphatic in stating "she models it—yes she models it. For the most part everybody feels

[trust]...we're supported by the principal." Blake and Casey indicated they believed there

was trust based on how she treated them as professionals, how she conducted home visits

to model the practice, how she managed difficult staff situations that were delicate, and

how she put in the time and worked as hard as everybody else.

Contrary to the data supporting the culture of building trust, Blake and Morgan

expressed sentiments indicating there existed some uncertainties about trust. In some

respect there was a lack of clarity around what trust meant, how it was earned, and when

it was most prevalent. For instance, Morgan was unsure if all staff felt trust and

concluded with "there might be issues with trust, honestly." Blake reported that he

believed all teachers trust each other but further stated that "I stay out of the teachers'

room anyway because bad things happen there." These sentiments are further explored in

the discussion section of this chapter as they are worthy of further research.

Hosting difficult conversations. There were two methods followed by the

principal when hosting difficult conversations with faculty and staff. The first method

was maintaining confidentiality, and the second method was communicating in clear and

direct terms.

Maintaining confidentiality. Several respondents (Blake, Morgan, Jordan, & Cody) reported that the principal entertained sensitive and sometimes delicate individual conversations with faculty and staff that addressed their professional and personal issues. Holding these conversations and respecting the teacher's privacy by not breaching their confidentiality boosted the levels of trust they had in her. One respondent (Blake) stated "if I had an issue with another teacher [and] I went to [Aron], I would trust the fact that I wouldn't be hearing about it anywhere else."

Communicating in clear and direct terms. Kit described how the principal promoted buy-in from teachers through direct and straightforward communication. He explained that Aron spoke frankly to teachers about their practice and her expectations for their practice. Jordan added that Aron does this specifically when participating in PLC meetings with teachers where she pointed out deficiencies in student achievement. Some teachers (Jordan, Cody & Chris) reported they were at first uncomfortable with the feedback but learned exactly what they needed to do and sought to bring more positive data to the meetings. Other teachers (Morgan, Casey, Blake & Jesse) reported that they felt comfortable speaking frankly with the principal about different issues that they believed were important. The principal encouraged open dialogue from the teachers (Charlie) and, according to Casey, teachers "have the freedom to express our concerns." As a result of this open communication, several teachers cited above believed there was a high level of trust among each other as well as with the principal.

Encouraging risk and failure to promote innovation. Aron stated that she promoted improving student achievement but did not specifically direct the teachers on the process. She stated that she believed she provided autonomy for the teachers and

communicated her expectations for student performance while focusing solely on results. One staff member (Cody) echoed this assertion when she stated "They have instructional freedom, they certainly do. There is some stuff that is not negotiable…]but] you cannot always follow a certain program to a tee."

Supporting, buffering, and recognizing individuals. There were five actions taken by the principal that can be described as supporting, buffering, and recognizing individuals: providing autonomy, assisting with parent communication, inspiring through personal dialogue, protecting instructional team time, and providing recognition. Each of these five actions can be organized under one of two general categories, and they are *communicated* and *facilitated*. Below, the actions taken according to each of those two general categories are described.

Communicated. According to Casey, the principal promoted autonomy in the classroom by telling teachers that they were free to explore their own pedagogy and classroom management as they saw fit unless the district office required something to be done a certain way, at which point Aron would explain what it was and then typically model it for teachers. Jordan and Sage stated that, similar to her actions to building trust, Aron communicated to teachers the expectations for student learning and then provided resources, materials, and associated professional development to help them meet those expectations.

Through conversations, staff meeting speeches, staff emails, and newsletters to faculty and staff, the principal sent inspiring messages of support for their work. She also worked independently with teachers on their professional goals and provided inspiration and motivation when they were struggling to achieve them. Jesse explained that when she

set her students' learning goals and then first assessed them, she believed that she would never achieve the goals based on how low the students' baseline scores were. Aron told her "No it's gonna happen, we'll help you and work together as a team to do it." Many of the teachers interviewed (Casey, Jesse, Blake, Sage & Chris) agreed that when the principal shared her belief in them and their ability, they were more motivated to work harder to achieve the goals they set out to reach. They believed the principal made a meaningful impact on their ability to succeed through her verbalized support as a coach, tutor, or other aid. Aron shared that her motivation and inspirational tactics are part of her leadership strategy: "I am trying to motivate the teachers; they need to do the same thing for the kids."

Facilitated. Many of the respondents (Jesse, Kit, Charlie, Dylan, Morgan & Sage) believed that the principal worked alongside teachers to ensure their success and that of students by pushing teachers to go beyond the classroom walls and establish consistent communication with the parents at home. Aron assisted teachers with making connections with the parents and ensured that the teacher remained in contact with parents. One respondent (Morgan) explained that the principal watched for signs of students not completing homework and then facilitated the contact with the home, asking the teacher "did you talk to the parent? Should we bring the parent in?" Almost all of the respondents stated that the principal attended the daily PLC meetings and was well informed of who was maintaining contact with parents and who was not.

Aron explained that she built a daily schedule that protected PLC and classroom instruction time that did not permit interruptions. She stated that she is "sort of fanatical about instructional time" so she minimized the number of announcements over the

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intercom system and limited email traffic during student learning time. PLC time was also established to provide additional support to teachers who were struggling with instructional issues. Aron explained that in order to accomplish this, she "created[d] schedules down to the minute and...making sure that transitions are happening. They know that instructional time is sacred."

Recognition of staff from the principal was conducted in staff meetings, PLCs, and instructional leadership team meetings, but there were no data supporting public celebrations or recognition of staff outside of the school. Aron described recognizing teachers and entire classrooms that exceeded expectations and class goals with "cupcakes or pastry...to celebrate successes that we're seeing." Two teachers (Blake & Chris) described participating in school wide contests including activities centered on the school climate.

Creating communities of practice. The school staff displayed strong signs of participating within what was earlier defined in this study as a community of practice. The data were clear that there existed a culture of collaboration, operations of mandatory PLC meetings for the purpose of learning from student work, and using data to inform all decisions. The data showed that these conditions were the result of the principal being the primary driver of establishing the three conditions through participation in the formation and operation of the activities as well as the modeling of specific behaviors associated with the activities. Both actions are described below.

Driving the conditions. According to several respondents (Morgan, Casey, Sage, Jamie, Jesse, Blake & Cody), the principal required collaboration among teachers by messaging her expectations for them to be leaders in the operation of the school. These

teachers believed that they were required to work together in order to successfully achieve the school's vision and therefore relied on each other for support, learning, and planning. Just about all of these respondents believed that the school was high performing because of the collaboration and within that work was constant sharing of what was working and not working in classrooms. To best facilitate this condition of collaboration, the principal revamped a PLC model when she began in her role and set expectations and guidelines that required teachers to be fully invested in them. Jesse described the intensity of the expectations as being "through the roof. It really is reflecting on ourselves, and reflecting on our own practice."

Participating in activities. Teachers (Morgan, Casey, Jesse & Jordan) stated that the principal participated in the daily PLCs as a way of assisting them with understanding the purpose of the PLC, modeled the appropriate behavior as required to meet the expectations, and served as a sounding board when problems arose with the goal of helping the team reach the solution. According to these teachers, when Aron participated she asked each grade level team about their student data which would require an informed response after having worked together on analyzing and understanding it. Aron explained "we look at student work, we look at data, we look at classroom practices...we talk about what is working and what isn't. So, it's all very concrete." Accrording to Aron, teacher teams were not as prepared to respond to her expectations at first, but over time they prepared more intently to meet the rigorous demands of the expectations. The results soon transformed into improved lesson plans and solutions to common problems, both of which were then posted and shared with all teachers in the school.

Having driven and participated in the activities, the principal had set expectations for teachers to reflect and provide more feedback to each other for improvement. Teachers (Jesse, Cody & Sage) believed that their colleagues could help them when they saw themselves not meeting expectations for student growth, shared student work with each other, and discussed how student work could be improved more freely and openly after experiencing initial PLC work. Jesse shared that she didn't feel as vulnerable as she did when she started this type of work, and described her own feelings of vulnerability and how the vision for the school helped her overcome it:

> We do not all know what we are doing, and we do need help. So, I think that high quality is really looking at the instruction and saying, 'Is it meeting everybody's needs? Is it moving the children forward?' And if it's not, why not? Because it needs to be moving kids, and if we are not moving kids, then why are we not moving them?

Engendering responsibility for learning. The principal engendered responsibility for student learning using three different methods through messaging or working with faculty and staff individually. In some instances, two or three actions were employed at the same time such as emailing revised goals directly to an individual teacher, leaving a short note on a teacher's desk or in the mailbox after observing in a classroom, or meeting individually with a teacher and verbalizing expectations for student learning. One teacher (Chris) summed it up by stating "I think that a lot of the expectation stuff is verbal, and it's sort of relentless communication that [we] hear all of the time." Described below are the four methods the principal used to engender responsibility for learning.

Communicated expectations for performance. According to some teachers (Sage, Blake& Chris), the principal consistently communicated her expectations for student performance to teachers in emails, newsletters, internal communications, and conversations at staff meetings and PLCs. Sage shared that Aron sent a staff news document each week that outlined what teachers needed to know for the week including academic goals and reminders about core values. Blake explained that at the beginning of the year, Aron handed out binders containing expectations for literacy supported by verbal and written guidelines for implementing the program. Respondents (Sage, Jamie, Blake, Dylan & Chris) agreed that the principal's expectations for student learning were high, and were not lowered based on student demographics or living conditions. They believed the principal's messages contained demands that the teachers focus on student learning when the students are present in the school since they cannot change the living conditions or state of poverty in which students lived. One of the respondents (Blake) stated there was the commitment to not "make excuses for the kids, and we don't allow them to make excuses for themselves." Chris specifically stated that she refused to lower expectations for student performance because the "goal of the work we do every day is to make sure that kids are receiving high quality instruction."

Development of school building learning goals. The principal explained that she developed a building goal that was shared by all staff in the school, not just teachers. This building goal held each person in the school accountable to doing their part in helping students reach it. Jamie supported this assertion when she stated "we have just a general goal for the building that Aron kinds of creates for us and with us." Embedded in that goal was the expectation that teachers and staff work together to achieve it. And,

according to Jordan, Aron then worked with each teacher individually to set their classroom student learning goals.

Maintaining the belief that all students can learn. The principal made it very clear that she believed that all teachers and staff believed "that all students can learn. We strive to meet the needs of all our students through differentiated instruction that addresses individual instructional levels and learning styles." The belief is reported by teachers (Sage, Jamie, Jesse, Chris & Cody) to have spread through the interactions they have had with Aron regarding the non-negotiable approach to their jobs. Most of these interactions took place in the PLC meetings where Aron questioned deficiencies in students' learning and asked the teachers how it was going to be rectified. As one respondent (Cody) explained, "You have to take ownership of it. You are the teacher and you have to deliver it, however it gets there."

Limitations and Implications for Further Research

This individual study focused on the actions of one principal in one high performing, urban elementary school. The intent of the study was to determine if seven conditions of one aspect of a leadership framework were present in the school and explore the actions the principal took to set those conditions. In a single case study such as this, the data are isolated to this single site and therefore represent only a miniscule sample of the findings available from the larger phenomenon. In that this study was limited by its size and scope, further research would best be conducted by expanding it to several other sites and principals. Additionally, researchers seeking to replicate this study should consider other types of schools, age levels, and demographics in order to build a robust pool of data for comparison.

A second limitation involved the lack of time availability for the study on behalf of the researcher and respondents. There existed a very short window of time to conduct field research and that time was often dictated by the availability of the respondents. The study took place during the academic year and since the respondents work in schools, windows of availability during the school day were limited.

This lack of time also contributed toward a lack of data supporting an observation about the sustainability of the leadership practices in the school and subsequently the success of the school (Lambert, 2007). This particular aspect of the limitation leads to an implication for the study of the capacity building of the assistant principal and her development as a school leader. A study of this type would be important for practitioners who wish to sustain the leadership practices in the school should the principal leave. Further, by building the capacity of the assistant principal to lead in a similar fashion, district leadership would have the option of expanding those practices to other buildings by placing the assistant principal there.

A third limitation in this study was the difficultly in acquiring district and school level documents from school personnel. Research began with the gathering of publicly available documents secured from school, district, and government websites, however when internal documents were requested for validation of respondent statements and general triangulation of data, the requests were not heeded. This required the researcher to validate information with data from several respondents.

The causal relationship between leadership practices and student achievement was not the intent of this study and therefore one recommendation for further research includes exploring connections between the effective leadership practices studied with

the academic outcomes of students at the site. Practitioners and researchers alike would benefit greatly from seeing evidence of specific leadership practices tied to specific academic outcomes, and this individual study has laid a foundation for that to happen.

A final limitation in this individual study is the lack of data supporting the relationship between the school principal and the school's instructional coach as it pertains to building capacity of staff. Several faculty members (Blake, Jesse, Morgan, Cody & Chris) cited the instructional coach as an important leader in the school and a person who helped them build their instructional repertoire in the name of improving student learning. While one of the actions of the school principal may be to utilize the instructional coach as a strategic approach to building capacity, the interview protocol that was used did not seek to uncover how the principal acted in this way. Any future research similar to that described in this study should include a deeper dive into the working relationship of the principal and instructional coach with the goal of uncovering how the coach's functions are deployed by the principal.

Discussion

The research question for this study was, what actions does a school principal take when building professional capacity? The answer to that question was described in detail in the previous section and organized according to the seven dimensions of building professional capacity in Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework for effective leader practices. This section will connect those findings to prior scholarship and organize them under the four summary categories of principal's actions listed in Table 3.2. The categories are professional practice, messaging, modeling, and coaching, and they will be

presented in the order in which they appear in that table. The section will conclude with recommendations.

Professional practice. The summary category of professional practice is best described as actions the principal took that were not necessarily communicated via messaging, modeling, or coaching, but appeared effective and contributed to building professional capacity. These actions were cross-cutting, appeared frequently in all seven dimensions, and for the most part established the basis for one of the three other summary categories to occur. These actions are described below and include personnel decisions, planning and participating in professional learning, building a supportive climate and culture, and establishing student learning as the most important function of the school.

Personnel decisions. Interviewing, selecting, and assigning faculty and then setting expectations for performance were all functions reportedly being performed by the principal. Data supported the process for hiring as "selective" and "purposeful" which Leithwood and Levin (2004) show as an effective means for improving schools. However, the findings also indicated a heavy emphasis on hiring for personal qualities (Hynes, Sullivan, & Yeager, 2011) and not necessarily for evidence of effective teaching strategies. The principal developed the skill to screen candidates through her experience with the process (Schumacher, Grigsby, & Vesey, 2015) and utilized her network of professional relationships to find and hire teachers she and her team believed to fit their vision (Engel & Finch, 2015). A key finding was the principal's clarity in her verbal expectations to candidates about commitment and dedication to the job during the hiring process and distinct regard for hiring those teachers who aligned to the cultural values of

the school (Kersten, 2008). There is insufficient evidence to support if highly effective teachers were hired despite having opposing viewpoints.

Planning and participating in professional learning. Collaboration in learning is a key component of the principal's vision for this school and she clearly acted upon that vision given the amount of professional development she offered to her staff (Brown & Militello, 2016). Along with identifying learning needs of staff (Cannon, Tenuto, & Kitchel, 2013; Li, Hallinger, & Ko, 2016), the principal actively participated in the learning with them (Evans, 2014; Drago-Severson, 2007; Gaffney & Farrager, 2010). She relied upon student achievement data to guide her in selecting topics and subsequently explained those data to the staff as a means of justifying the need for professional learning in a specific area (Spillane, Healey, & Parise, 2009; Ringler, O'Neal, Rawls, & Cumiskey, 2013; Ovando & Ramirez, 2006).

Building a supportive climate and culture. One prominent theme that emerged from this study was the principal's efforts in supporting staff through autonomy to explore, innovate, and take risks in the classroom (Cosner, 2009; Cranston, 2011; Daly, 2009; Leis & Rimm-Kaufman, 2015; Chughtai & Buckley, 2015). She sought to strike a balance between the expectations she held for professional responsibility and the non-negotiable activities that teachers are required to perform. This emerged through her modeling behaviors that she wanted teachers to adopt (Ghamrawi, 2011) and seeking to build trustworthiness through consistent behaviors and fostering a professional community of practitioners (Wahlstrom & Lewis, 2008; Handford & Leithwood, 2013). There exists a small concern with the issue of trust in the building, however, and that was exemplified in two veteran teachers' (Blake & Morgan) statements about the dimension

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of building trust. The issues were not directly related to the relational trust that the principal was trying to generate with them (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), rather it appeared more general in nature and worthy of additional research, something noted in the Recommendations section of this chapter. Lastly, the principal paid close attention to the skill level of each teacher and sought to pair those who struggled with those who succeeded (Parker, 2010; Veel & Bredhauer, 2009). By doing this she built a supportive mentoring system that required collaboration and professional growth (Lozinak, 2016).

Establishing student learning as the most important function of the school. The faculty and staff in this study offered ample data supporting the claim that the principal established student learning as the highest priority in the school. The most common piece of evidence is the revamping of the professional learning community (PLC) and the attention to granular detail of each student's learning goals (MacGregor & Vavasseur, 2015; Arlestig & Tornsen, 2014). The principal further supported the vision for student learning by setting high expectations for learning regardless of the student's outside life situation, holding each teacher accountable for the success of each student in the classroom, and aligning professional learning opportunities to specific student learning goals (Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, & Ylimaki, 2007; Terosky, 2016; Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Cosner & Jones, 2016). Lastly, the principal built a collaborative and supportive climate for teachers to hear how they can improve their craft. In response to this, teachers in this study commonly stated how important it was to be prepared to talk through student learning data, even when the data were not showing progress (Goddard, Goddard, Kim, & Miller, 2015).

The professional practice summary is of actions that were borne out of the principal's overall leadership. These actions were predominantly described in the literature as best practice and were clearly evident in the study. It was clear from the findings that professional practice described in the literature is also prevalent in the field. However, the literature was not as robust concerning the tangible, specific actions by the principal to advance her practice of building professional capacity. The next three sections organize those tangible, specific actions reported from the field and are summarized under the broad categories of messaging, modeling, and coaching.

Messaging. The category of messaging contains actions that conveyed meaning through some form of direct or indirect communication. There were two primary methods of messaging including purposeful spoken dialogue either in a single, dual, or multiple person format, or written communication in the form of handwritten notes, emails, newsletters, formal letters, or evaluations. This category also contains actions such as gesturing, inferring, observing, and listening. It appeared in the data most when conditions for engendering responsibility for learning, building trust, and supporting, buffering, and recognizing individuals were being set. Verbalizing feedback, asking acute questions about practice, speaking frankly, communicating expectations, emailing revised goals directly, and leaving a short note on the teacher's desk, were all specific instances of messaging from the principal. These actions built relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), improved teacher confidence (Brown & Wynn, 2009), and motivated people (Rayfield & Wilson, 2009).

Modeling. The pattern of modeling that emerged from this study consisted of the principal showing or demonstrating the high expectations for professional behaviors she

wanted her faculty and staff to achieve (Evans, 2014; Drago-Severson, 2012; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). These actions appeared predominantly when the principal was setting conditions for opportunities to learn for the whole faculty including the leader, building trust, and creating communities of practice. Specific actions consisted of the principal participating in professional learning activities alongside faculty and staff, demonstrating to faculty how to teach a lesson or implement a new classroom activity (Stosich, 2016), reviewing student work with a teacher, talking through a data set that informed a decision, demonstrating a work ethic that she professed by being present in classrooms and at school events, being innovative and taking professional risks in her approach to projects at the school, and showing staff how to manage difficult situations with parents such as communicating with them, conducting home visits, and de-escalating angry visitors (Lumpkin, 2008; Rhodes, Camic, Milburn, & Lowe, 2009; Rice, 2014).

Coaching. The category of coaching is described as those actions the principal took to impart wisdom, advice, guidance, or direct instruction to a single faculty or staff member, including goal setting (Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, & Ylimaki, 2007). In coaching others, the principal used all forms of messaging described above. She provided feedback to staff members who were selected to facilitate leadership team meetings, supported the teachers' desire to learn by inviting content liaisons to provide professional learning (Cannon, Tenuto, & Kitchel, 2013; Li, Hallinger, & Ko, 2016), inspired faculty and staff through personal dialogue (Avidov-Ungar Friedman, & Olshtain, 2014), sent motivating written messages (Rayfield & Wilson, 2009), and worked alongside teachers in particularly difficult situations (Zeinabadi, 2014). Coaching was especially active in the three dimensions of providing individual consideration, providing opportunities to

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learn for whole faculty to include the leader, and supporting, buffering, and recognizing individuals.

Recommendations

There are three primary recommendations that have emerged as a result of these findings and they are briefly explained below.

The first recommendation is for the principal to recruit and hire teachers who have the professional, demonstrated evidence of improving student achievement even though they may not share the same ideology and values within the school culture. There was evidence in the findings that the current teaching staff were dedicated (Blake & Morgan) and committed (Aron & Cody) to the students, and for the most part teachers (Casey, Sage, Jesse & Chris) believed that everyone bought into the same vision for students.These are personal characteristics that are argued to be important in the hiring process (Leithwood & Levin, 2004), but ensuring there is professional expertise to advance the mission is just as essential (Inge, Rutledge, & Bishop, 2011). This is fully explored in the literature review section at the beginning of this chapter, however much of the evidence from this study portrays a faculty that aligns to a number of similar personal qualities and dispositions. There is little evidence that indicated that the current faculty demonstrated the professional skills that are needed to improve student learning when they were hired, hence the apparent heavy emphasis on the development of their professional capacity under the current principal. Hiring teachers who already have the expertise in their background even though they may present opposing viewpoints and perspectives of the principal would go a long way in committing to improving learning

for all students, and it would actually accelerate the capacity building process under the current mentor program in the school.

The second recommendation is to address the issue of building trust that was raised by Blake and Morgan in the study. When asked about their thoughts regarding how the principal built trusting relationships, some faculty and staff members hesitated at responding and required further explanation. A few asked what was meant by trust, and others responded with their perspective on trust between adults and students. This may have been an issue with clarity in the protocol and is discussed in the limitations section of this chapter. However, those respondents who shared their concern regarding trust are veteran teachers of more than five years at the school. Teachers with fewer years at the school and hired by the principal were quick to confirm a high value of trust and provided tangible examples of why they believed it existed. In working to build trust with faculty and staff, it would be useful for the principal and other leaders to seek to understand the needs from veteran teachers first and approach building those relationships in a more interpersonal fashion through individualized consideration (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

A third and final recommendation is for the principal to work with the superintendent's leadership team to share her model for professional school leadership. According to the state's accountability measures, Standmore is a recent high performing school in a low performing school district and is one of the highest performing elementary schools with a significantly at-risk population of students. What is the next step in these children's futures? While they are now better prepared to take on the challenges of of their next school, what exactly are those challenges? This recommendation is more a call for systemic change as it is a transition plan for one

school and speaks to equity for all students, the initial thrust for this study. Given the rate of success at Standmore and the proven methods for leading faculty and staff through a turnaround period, the superintendent and her staff should consider building a professional learning program modeled after the actions that have led to improvement at Standmore that actively engages the other school leaders at all levels. This program would be the school district's foray district wide into building the professional capacity of all faculty and staff and advance more equitable learning opportunities for all students.

Conclusion

This individual study sought to explore the actions of the school principal when building professional capacity in a high performing, urban elementary school within a low performing school district. The study limited its scope to one domain within a Unified Framework of effective leadership practices (Hitt & Tucker, 2016) and looked for specific and tangible actions that set conditions for the seven dimensions composing that domain. The study concluded that not only were all seven dimensions of building professional capacity active at the school, but the principal employed four primary actions to enact those dimensions. The study also concluded that building professional capacity is essential to increasing equitable learning opportunities for all students, and in order to close the achievement gap, systems must expand their efforts to build capacity of all leaders, faculty and staff. System and school leaders will find this study useful in their work implementing models of distributed leadership (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001) and school turnaround plans through building the professional capacity of all practitioners.

Chapter 4[4]

Group Findings, Discussion, Study Limitations and Implications for Practice

This study explored leadership practices at a high performing, urban elementary school within a low performing, urban district. The research was guided by a leadership framework (Hitt & Tucker, 2016) comprised of synthesized effective leadership practices that have shown to improve student achievement. This study was focused on answering the research question: What leadership practices are present in a high performing, urban elementary school?

In order to answer the research question, the research team embarked on a qualitative case study in which each of the five individual studies was grounded in one of the five domains within Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework. Taylor (2018) looked specifically at how leadership established practices that are aligned to a purpose consistent with the articulation of the mission and vision. This study looked at the principal's actions for developing professional capacity among faculty and staff while Gohlmann (2018) looked at how the leadership creates a supportive organization for learning. Gittens (2018) focused on how leadership is developing a high-quality learning program while Reilly (2018) researched how the school builds productive relationships with families and external partners. The findings from the individual studies illustrated that there were several elements of each domain's leadership practices found within the school. These findings are highlighted in the following section. The remaining sections of this chapter include discussion regarding the findings, overall limitations of the group's study, and implications for practice, policy, and research.

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[4] This chapter was jointly written by Nicole Gittens, Tara Gohlmann, James Reilly, David Ryan and Kris Taylor

Group Findings

　　Taylor (2018), Gohlmann (2018), Gittens (2018), Ryan (2018), and Reilly (2018) each conducted an individual study resulting in findings that contributed to answering the collective study's research question. Analysis of those findings was conducted by triangulating similar pieces of data emerging from the multimethods approach (Morse, 2003) outlined in Chapter 2. This led to a logically synthesized collection of findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Westhues, Ochocka, Jacobson, Simich, Maiter, Janzen & Fleras, 2008). Our research resulted in five major findings:

1) there exists a strong culture of accountability at the Standmore School where faculty and staff hold each other responsible for improving student achievement;

2) collaboration is standard practice and is embedded in the culture of the school, including but not limited to instructional planning, analysis of student learning, professional growth, and achievement of classroom and school goals;

3) the administration, faculty, and staff maintain high expectations for their own performance and that of each other which leads to higher expectations for student learning;

4) there is a shared belief among those who work at the Standmore School that all students can learn and they are responsible for driving that learning while students are in attendance; and

5) color blindness as it relates to race and its impact on students and learning is an accepted practice, so work remains to improve the school's and

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district's level of cultural proficiency and position along the cultural

competency continuum.

These synthesized findings led the group to support their conclusion that all of the

domains of the effective leadership practices outlined in Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified

Framework were presently active in the school at the time of the study, albeit to different

levels of frequency and quality. In concluding such and effectively identifying those

practices in each of the five individual studies as well as in summary in this chapter, the

group believes it has confidently answered the study's research question. A more

thorough analysis of the group's synthesized findings leading to this conclusion is

discussed in the next section.

The synthesis of the findings discussed below is a result of multiple iterative

stages of analysis (Westhues et al., 2008). Elements of data patterns emerging from the

individual studies have been woven together to tell the story of the Standmore School

relative to its effective leadership practices. These data are consistent with those found in

the literature highlighting effective leadership practices that influence improved student

achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Hitt & Tucker, 2016;

Jacobson, 2011; Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Sun &

Leithwood, 2015; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010; Sammons, Gu, Day

& Ko, 2011; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). While this study was not designed to

elicit or represent any causal relationship between the two, it does present encouraging

signs warranting further consideration for research, practice, and policy. These

implications are discussed at the conclusion of this chapter.

Discussion

  Culture of accountability and responsibility. The deputy superintendent of

Evergreen Public Schools was impressed by the culture of the Standmore School. She felt

that much of the recent progress at Standmore was because of the climate and culture that

was established by Aron, the current principal (Dutta & Sahey, 2016). The principal of

Standmore stated that her school community "spends a lot of time focused on school

culture." That culture was one of accountability and responsibility. The deputy

superintendent further stated that the principal is effective in balancing support for

teachers and, at the same time, pressing those teachers for results. The principal of

Standmore believed it was her responsibility to hold teachers accountable for student

outcomes (Ryan, 2018).

  Aron not only believed that it was her responsibility to hold teachers accountable,

but she created the structures necessary for teachers to help students make academic

gains. First, she increased instructional time by making certain that disruptions to

instruction are minimized. Second, she expected that teachers use classroom time for

instruction that was focused and well planned (Ryan, 2018). Aron also created structures

to help with holding teachers accountable for student outcomes, namely Professional

Learning Communities (PLCs) and Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs) (Taylor,

2018). Additionally, she allowed for her instructional coach to take a prominent role in

instructional leadership and support for her teachers. The PLCs at Standmore took

precedence over everything else and were almost never canceled according to

Standmore's vice principal (Gittens, 2018; Taylor, 2018). PLCs were described by

teachers as the place where they supported one another in ensuring that students met

academic targets, where they communicated with the principal about what was working and what was not in the curricular and instructional programs. Teachers also saw PLCs as a *de facto* opportunity for teachers to hold each other accountable for student progress and that they were all on pace with curricula (Gittens, 2018).

The principal used both the PLCs and ILTs to review data to determine whether or not what teachers were doing was working for students. Aron expected that each PLC and ILT meeting was used to review student data and as a space for teachers to be able to "speak intelligently" to that data (Ryan, 2018). And because Aron immediately abandoned any practice or curriculum that was not proving to move students forward according to the goals that were set, teachers were flexible with scheduling as students' and teachers' schedules changed regularly to address student needs (Gittens, 2018). Aron maintained that it is "too late to find out in June if there is a ... problem with student learning" and thus felt that if teachers discovered an academic problem with a student or group of students, it was their and her responsibility to make sure that adjustments were made to address those problems (Gittens, 2018; Taylor, 2018). As a result, the teaching staff regularly assessed students to understand their progress and where students stood in relation to learning goals.

Additionally, Aron worked one-on-one with teachers who struggled to support students in making academic goals. Aron provided support both personally to teachers and through structured time for those teachers to work with the instructional coach who supported the teachers in a non-evaluative capacity (Ryan, 2018). It was her expectation all teachers move students who were on grade level one full year and those who were academically below grade level *more* than a full year (Gittens, 2018).

Finally, beyond academic expectations, Standmore adopted a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) system to establish and enforce common behavioral expectations as well as a common way to support student behaviors (Gittens, 2018). Through the PBIS system, teachers were expected to address behavioral challenges within the classroom so that students were not unnecessarily removed from the academic environment. The PBIS system also held adults accountable to being fair and consistent in disciplinary practices for students who needed such support (Gittens, 2018).

Collaboration. Collaboration was not only present at both the district and school level, but also was described by the interviewees as a required part of their professional practice (Taylor, 2018). During the 2017-2018 school year, the district focused on collaborative leadership in their professional development (Taylor, 2018). They did this in various ways including setting aside professional development time at the beginning of the year to build a collaborative mindset amongst the district staff and purchasing texts on collaborative leadership for the staff. Additionally, the superintendent noted his belief that the mission and vision of the district is achieved with collaborative work (Taylor, 2018). These actions all support the leadership practice of establishing and conveying a vision. District leadership also noted the school's collaborative mindset in acknowledging the strong relationship between staff, the focus on successful and productive PLCs, and the continuous and positive feedback cycle.

Just as collaboration was important at the district level, school level leadership and staff talked about collaboration to such an extent that it appeared to be at least an expectation and at best a cultural norm at the Standmore School. We found when investigating the leadership practice of building professional capacity that teachers

collaboratively set goals with school leadership, the principal and instructional coach modeled collaboration when leading professional development and PLCs, the instructional coach worked with teachers to analyze data to support the students in their classrooms, and school leaders expected teachers to actively communicate with parents (Gittens, 2018; Reilly, 2018; Ryan, 2018). The actions demonstrated that the leadership practice of building professional capacity was present in the school. Because the culture supports building professional capacity, no one person or team would have been the lone reason that student achievement has improved. At Standmore there was a belief that as the capacity and skill set of all the teachers in the classrooms improved, so would student achievement.

An important part of the leadership practice of creating a supportive organization for learning is that decision-making is collaborative and leadership is shared. We found that Standmore school leaders used various tools to support their collaborative efforts, such as PLCs and lesson plans on a school-wide shared Google drive. Every school level staff person noted collaboration or working well together as important to his or her work at the Standmore School (Taylor, 2018). Many even noted that collaboration was one of the most important reasons for the success of the school. Another common theme noted was that because not all students received academic support at home, teachers sought ways for the students themselves to buy into their own learning objectives.

When considering collaborative efforts between Standmore and its community partners and parents, a number of practices were noted that supported the leadership practice of connecting with external partners. The community that surrounds a school is critical to the school achieving its student achievement goals and the actions at

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Standmore demonstrated how the leaders leveraged this leadership practice. This

leadership practice was supported by teachers working together and sharing information

about students with one another. There was also evidence of collaboration with parents

on student learning plans, although data supporting this practice was almost exclusively

limited to improving student achievement (Gittens, 2018; Reilly, 2018). Some of the

notable active collaborations included those with local educational institutions (nearby

college student tutors and Big Brother Big Sisters), with local business partners (library

restoration), and with the city and surrounding community on the playground

development project (Reilly, 2018). It is also important to note, however, that the lack of

data confirming collaboration from the viewpoint of external stakeholders was a

limitation of the study since no parents and only one community representative were able

to be interviewed.

In summary, we found that Standmore School leaders and teachers operated in a

highly collaborative environment (Taylor, 2018). This study's findings show that all

school leaders and five of the eight teachers interviewed said that collaboration was a key

to the success of the Standmore School.

High expectations. There is a preponderance of evidence supporting the claim

that Standmore set high expectations for staff and students. This condition, a practical

application of the instructional focus found in the school's accountability plan, was found

to be rooted in the principal's non-negotiable practice of setting ambitious yet reachable

goals, a sincere and focused approach to holding students accountable for learning

behavior while in school, and embedding a system of peer practice at the school that

fostered high expectations (Ryan, 2018). Throughout the study it was clear that the

principal balanced high expectations for her staff with the value teachers provided with

their instructional expertise, a condition originally found in high performing schools by

Waters, Marzano & McNulty (2003). As part of these high expectations, the principal

was clear with her staff that all students have the ability to learn and that blaming the

students for lack of progress was not an acceptable practice at Standmore (Reilly, 2018).

This foundation set the tone of high expectations for both staff and students at

Standmore.

    Setting ambitious goals. The principal spent a large amount of her time assisting

classroom teachers with developing and ultimately attaining their students' learning

goals. These goals were derivative of the school goals that were developed by the

principal based upon available student learning data. Each year a new school goal was

developed and teachers were required to use their classroom student learning data to align

their methods with desired results (Ryan, 2018).

    At times it became overwhelming for teachers when they realized how ambitious

the learning goals were, but when infused with motivation and inspiration from the

principal and other members of the Instructional Leadership Team, the teachers and

students succeeded (Gittens, 2018; Ryan, 2018). For instance, setting a goal for students

who were on grade level that calls for less than 100% progress was viewed as failure

(Gittens, 2018). Teachers and staff were not only encouraged and assisted by

administration to reach the student achievement goals for their classrooms, but also relied

on each other for motivation. They shared the instructional coach's resource room where

the Instructional Leadership Team met as well as the grade level PLCs met. The walls in

this room depicted the story of each student's progress and with it, the teacher's progress

in helping students reach their goals. Lastly, teachers were supported and motivated by the allocation of resources that were carefully targeted to the goals of improving student achievement. While the school was not overly saturated with technology or other supplemental instructional materials, the principal had secured what was deemed appropriate for helping students reach their learning goals. Further, she organized staff in such a way (Ryan, 2018) as to maintain a low average class size of 16.5 students and introduced a double block of literacy instruction.

Focused approach to student learning. The study sought to explore effective leadership practices in a high performing, urban elementary school within a low performing school district. Much of the context preceding the study centered on the socioeconomic and racial identity of the students who attended this neighborhood school and their success in achieving at levels higher than similar schools in the district, a concept first reported by Milner, Murray, Farinde & Delale-O'Connor (2015). What was discovered was a set of beliefs that promoted the value of holding students to high expectations for learning regardless of their background, skin color or zip code. The message was clear from respondents that when students were in school, they were in school to learn (Gittens, 2018). And when the day began with the morning meeting at which all students and staff were present, students were being motivated to focus on learning for the day and goals for the future (Reilly, 2018; Taylor, 2018).

All staff including the superintendent, principal, and assistant principal, noted these high expectations for learning without excuses for students with difficult home situations (Gittens, 2018). Echoing what Milner (2015) first identified in studies of urban schooling, they expressed their belief that the focus on learning was a critical part of the

school's success and instead of using poverty or other deficit-laden approaches to helping students feel comfortable, they pushed students out of their comfort zones into learning zones.

Embedded system of peer practice. The administration, faculty and staff members in this study demonstrated a passion for working with students and families. While it was not always explicitly stated, the data were clear in the stories relayed in the interviews and the context in which respondents spoke about their students that they found passion and enjoyment in their work.

There existed a healthy competition among teachers to reach their student learning goals, something that had been spoken about by several of the respondents (Ryan, 2018). However, there was an underlying peer pressure to always be at your best when coming together in PLCs, lesson planning, scoring, and facilitation of school-wide committees (Ryan, 2018). Teachers appeared to want always to be prepared and to not let their team members down, holding each other accountable for completing that which had been mutually agreed upon. These were peer embedded norms of collaboration within the school and without them the team would not be successful in meeting their goals. Since the teachers knew the principal was holding them accountable to reaching their goals, there appeared to be tremendous motivation to work together and hold each other accountable.

Other embedded peer practice measures included maintaining contact with parents, especially for students considered to be at risk, and being willing to speak up when struggling with something that was holding back progress (Reilly, 2018; Ryan, 2018).

Shared beliefs. Most Standmore School personnel could not delineate a specific vision and mission statement for the school, yet many embodied a shared mission and vision in remarkably similar ways and were commonly driven by a belief system on how to best support student achievement (Taylor, 2018). These beliefs included notions that all students have the ability to learn, teacher actions drive learning, and parents are important partners in supporting student achievement (Reilly, 2018; Taylor, 2018). The school leader promoted the development of these shared beliefs through direct communication and modeled practice (Reilly, 2018; Ryan, 2018; Taylor, 2018).

All students can learn. Standmore teachers consistently expressed the belief that all students could learn and the importance of setting high expectations. Many shared how the principal "relentlessly communicates" this belief both explicitly and through her practice (Ryan, 2018; Taylor, 2018). Examples included the continual use of data to track the academic growth of all students in PLCs and the development of inclusive, rigorous, and growth centered student learning goals tied to the teacher evaluation system (Gittens, 2018). By promoting the common belief that all students can learn, the principal worked to ensure that fewer students were left behind and that teachers accepted their own responsibility in promoting academic growth.

Teacher actions drive learning. Informed by the premise that all students can learn, the teaching philosophy at the Standmore School was driven by personal responsibility and accountability. School staff members shared that the principal has zero tolerance for the practice of blaming kids and families for the lack of students' academic achievement (Reilly, 2018). This sends the message that while students are in school, they are there to learn, and it does not benefit teachers to complain about matters outside

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of their locus of control. Accordingly, the principal set high expectations for her staff to continue to build their instructional practice and to make constant adjustments when student growth becomes stagnant. This belief is even shared by the principal when interviewing prospective teachers as she provides specific warnings about how hard it is to work at the school and that there are no excuses for students to not learn (Ryan, 2018).

A focus on pedagogy was also demonstrated then the principal declared that being an instructional leader was the most important aspect of her job (Gittens, 2018). This was not only manifested by her willingness to work 1:1 with teachers struggling with specific concepts (such as literacy and math) but in how she modeled learning through her own professional learning and participation with staff during professional development events (Gittens, 2018). By promoting the shared belief that teacher actions drive student learning, the principal ensured that the most powerful lever in promoting student achievement remained activated and could dynamically evolve as student needs changed. While the teacher's role in student learning is central, the importance of communicating and partnering with parents was another shared belief held by staff members (Reilly, 2018).

Parent communication and involvement important to support learning. The school leader actively promoted the belief that all parents should be involved and can positively influence student achievement outcomes. Several staff members shared that there was a clear expectation from the principal that parents were to be seen as invested partners in their children's education (Reilly, 2018). Some of these expectations surrounding parent communication were evident in staff newsletters and school structures such as PLC meetings (Reilly, 2018). Staff members shared that although communication

was most often triggered when students were having difficulty such as truancy, poor homework completion, or displaying challenging behaviors, it transcended notes or phone calls home. Some staff members shared that they also conducted home visits and took pride in the ability to garner parent participation in school-wide events (Reilly, 2018). By promoting the belief that all parents can be important and invested partners, the school leader disrupted a culture of blame and increased the likelihood of utilizing an important asset in promoting student achievement. However, the inability to confirm this practice with external stakeholders was a limitation of this finding.

   Cultural proficiency and color-blindness. Although there was clear evidence of effective leadership practices and structures in place that supported academic achievement of urban students (Ryan, 2018), data also showed a lack of culturally proficient practices within the Evergreen Public Schools (Reilly, 2018; Taylor, 2018). In addition, there was evidence of color blindness throughout the organization, from the central office to the school level (Reilly, 2018; Taylor, 2018). Hitt and Tucker (2016) speak to the importance of considering context to improve the organization and they also address the importance of diversity from an asset-based perspective.

   Ethnic and racial diversity was considered in obvious ways by the district, such as offering multiple languages on the district website and including multi-cultural and language reading books in the classrooms (Gittens, 2018). Additionally, the 2009 Family Involvement Plan talked about the importance of engaging all families. However, there was little evidence that school or district leadership thought about ethnic and racial diversity in an asset-based way (Reilly, 2018; Taylor, 2018). The general sense from the administration and teachers was that the school was able to reach their kids despite their

economic circumstances and conversations about race and culture were unnecessary (Reilly, 2018; Taylor, 2018). In addition, parental involvement was governed by a school-based agenda focused mostly on improving student achievement and there was limited evidence of shared decision-making outside of individual student success plans (Reilly, 2018).

Both the superintendent and the school principal valued a focus on providing opportunities for students living in poverty, but they had not addressed the role race and culture have in developing a student's capacity and the organization's ability to serve its constituents (Reilly, 2018; Taylor, 2018). This study found that interviewed district leaders, school leaders, and teachers did not appear to understand the importance of addressing race and cultural background as a means to improve student achievement (Gittens, 2018; Reilly, 2018; Taylor, 2018). Becoming culturally proficient requires that both the teacher and the student share and build knowledge together. Culturally relevant pedagogy involves using the "reality, history and perspectives of students" (Bartolome, 1994, p. 173). Within the district, there was a belief that because the student population is so racially diverse, there isn't a need to focus on race (Taylor, 2018). Instead of leveraging culture and race as a tool and a lens to better understand the urban students of color and to serve and enhance their skills as educators, district and school leaders and teachers appeared to rely on a typical stance consistent with being color-blind (Taylor, 2018).

As posited in Critical Race Theory, color-blind approaches deny educators and their students access to the benefits associated with the use of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) or multicultural pedagogy (Gay & Howard, 2000)

which allow for the inclusion of culture, background and identity in the classroom to improve achievement. To be culturally responsive means to practice validation, "to acknowledge the realities of inequity that impact students in and out of school" (Hammond, 2015, p. 92).

Recognizing race and becoming culturally proficient make one a better educator. As educational scholars Gay and Howard (2000) state, "developing skills...in multicultural pedagogy is consistent with the logical sequence of how pedagogical mastery is accomplished" (pg. 13). Standmore has done great work in helping students of color and students living in poverty improve academically. There was evidence of strong and consistent instructional practices coupled with high expectations (Gittens, 2018; Ryan, 2018) and this culture of high expectations was consistent with culturally proficient practices (Gay, 2000). However, Evergreen Public Schools and the Standmore School could do much more to achieve academic success for all students by embarking on a journey to have conversations about race and culture and creating programs and policies to benefit certain racial and cultural groups.

Urban students everywhere need leaders willing to confront inequity. This is one definition of transformational leadership. Transformational leaders, as defined by Leithwood and Jantzi (2006), build vision, develop their staff by offering intellectually stimulating learning experiences and create a collaborative school culture. The empirical literature also suggests that leadership is essential to instituting school-wide reform (Sanzo, Sherman & Clayton, 2011). If Evergreen Public Schools and the Standmore School want to prepare students for the future with the ability to participate in a global society, district leaders and school leaders could leverage transformative leadership

practices and embrace reform efforts to fight against color-blindness. This allows for the development of a culturally responsive organization that validates the real life experiences of students of color. These practices will reinforce the strong alliances with students and families and lead to improved academic outcomes.

Study Limitations

The design and execution of this study resulted in a number of limitations primarily due to research timing and scope. The first limitation related to the district and school selection methodology. The school was selected using a purposeful selection methodology and was a Massachusetts designated Level 2 urban school in an urban district. The findings from this research apply to this school alone and may not be transferable to other districts or schools in the district, or more widely.

The second limitation related to our methods at the school level. We used document reviews and interviews at both the school and district level. The document review relied heavily on documents available publically. We had limited access to non-public documents and data. In selecting interview respondents, we employed purposeful methodology relying on support from the district. We were limited in our capacity to interview and interviewed only one community partner, eight school level personnel and three district level personnel. This small number of interviewees limits the perspectives garnered for the study. Furthermore, parents and students were not interviewed as part of this study. Perspectives from these groups would provide additional data.

Third, we did not collect data on how long each interviewee worked in the school and district or whether the interviewee had experience in other schools or under other school leaders. The context of an interviewee's experience would provide perspective on

how the interviewee understood the leadership practices present at Standmore. Additional information about teachers who worked at Standmore before and after the present principal began her tenure in that role would provide further context regarding the before and after comparisons about the school and the leadership practices present.

Fourth, our study was conducted at a single point in time. When selecting a school for this study, we considered the success of the school using Massachusetts accountability data available for the 2015-2016 school year and we performed our data review and analysis in the 2017-2018 school year. While we believe many of the practices found support the success of the school, our study was limited by time and scope and was therefore unable to find a correlation between the success of the school and the leadership practices.

Implications for Practice

This research study aimed to determine what leadership practices were present in a high performing, urban elementary school. The project was designed using the five individual studies of Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework for effective leadership practices and each is represented in the school. Readers of this paper should rely on empirical research for an understanding of the relationship between the leadership practices found in the school and student outcomes. This was not the purpose of this study and therefore should not be entertained when referring to it; those findings are very different from those being reported in this study. However, because so many urban schools in Massachusetts have significant populations of traditionally marginalized students, identifying practices of successful urban schools and recommending a way to replicate those practices is one strategy for closing the statewide achievement gap and a

primary purpose for this study. As a result, below are some recommendations to organizations that wish to use this study in that fashion.

The first recommendation for any organization or individual seeking to use this study in its practice is to first develop a vision for learning and then broadly communicate that vision throughout the organization. Taylor (2018) defines vision as "how the organization achieves its mission" (p. 6). Since people will be chiefly responsible for delivering on that vision, organizations must clearly and relentlessly communicate the vision to them. Communicating comes in various forms and includes the effective hiring and management of the right personnel (Ryan, 2018), constant written and verbal information about the desired outcomes for students, the modeling and reinforcement of high expectations for staff and students alike, and the knowledge of effective instructional strategies and curriculum (Gittens, 2018). The vision is much more powerful when it has been developed in a collaborative fashion with internal and external stakeholders including parents and community members (Reilly, 2018), and therefore requires great effort on the part of the school leadership to consistently exemplify the tenets of the vision and engage everyone in the conversation who has a claim in the school. Only when this foundational cornerstone is laid can the organization begin to achieve higher degrees of success.

In this light, the Standmore School should more firmly expand its communication of the vision to more external stakeholders, especially its parents. There exists a gap in the data between the parent community and the school as evidenced by the fact that efforts to have educators identify potential study participants from the parent community were unsuccessful. While this is a limitation to this study, it possibly also signifies a

weaker connection between the school and parent community than what has been reported through the interview process with administration, teachers and staff (Reilly, 2018).

The second recommendation for any organization seeking to use this study in its practice is to embark upon a journey along the continuum of cultural competence (DeRosa, 2002) to understand its levels of implicit bias and institutional racism. As Taylor (2018) notes, students' rates of poverty in urban school districts seem to be given more attention than race, and when you talk about poverty in schools, you must talk about race (Milner, 2015). Taylor's research on Standmore shows that the organization promotes color-blindness (p. 9) by denying the importance of addressing race through specialized programs. Instead, there is ample evidence from the open-ended interviews that administrators, including those at the district office, teachers and staff are seeing and treating all students the same based on the high level of poverty and not considering the effects of race. This approach to working with students of color is not uncommon and is actually the third stage along the six-stage continuum of cultural competence (DeRosa, 2002). But the fact that this is not uncommon should not be confused with it being an accepted practice. It is the organization's ethical responsibility to address its bias by owning and changing it.

The Standmore School is trying to close the achievement gap in an earnest and productive manner by employing many of the practices that are included in the literature supporting effective methods for doing so. However, it is doing it by ignoring race, which only perpetuates how separate and unequal opportunities are for our children (Singleton, 2014). According to Taylor (2009), many other schools operate in the same fashion and

therefore this recommendation is essential to all organizations who seek to improve equity in learning opportunities for all students while remaining ethically tied to their vision.

A third recommendation for organizations wishing to use this study in its practice is to create a system for sustainability through a focused professional development model for school leadership based on the practices highlighted at Standmore. This recommendation is specifically for system leaders who wish to implement successful practices at other schools, build a pipeline of high performing leaders in all schools (Ryan, 2018), and ensure leadership practices are sustained in the wake of a leader leaving a school (Fullan, 2005). This particular recommendation is at the heart of this study and is based on the premise of ensuring highly effective leadership practices in all schools so that all students have the same robust opportunities for learning.

It is evident in the data from this study that Evergreen School District is a low performing district by virtue of the accountability results at many of its schools. The Standmore School, however, is not one of those schools and leads the district in student academic performance. Given that much of the student population and resources such as curriculum, staffing, and programming are similar throughout the district (Pascale, Sternin & Sternin, 2010), how did Standmore outperform the rest? While there are several explanations that are better left to the section for implications for research below, this study highlights the leadership practices at Standmore as one of those possible reasons. Therefore, maintaining those practices in the school if the current principal should leave, is tremendously important to the continued success of that individual school, as is the expansion of those practices to other schools so that other students can

have the same potential for success as Standmore students. This can only be

accomplished through an organized program of leadership development in which the

practices at Standmore are elementary to it and those in the program are held accountable

to implementing those practices (Gittens, 2018). Evergreen should begin with preparing

the current assistant principal at Standmore and expand training to other schools and

prospective principals as well (Ryan, 2018).

Implication for Policy Makers

The data depicted a moderate level of disconnect between the school district

office and Standmore in terms of curriculum, resources, and leadership development.

While this disconnect did not appear to debilitate Standmore in a significant manner,

largely due to the strength of the school leadership and its efforts to engage the school

district office, it is unknown if this gap exists between the district office and each of the

other schools in the district. This combination of disconnected relations would have a

profound effect on the provision of equitable learning opportunities for all students,

especially if each school in the school district was relying on its own internal leadership

to manage operations and resources. It is recommended that the connections between the

school district office and the schools in the district be audited to understand where

strengths and challenges lie in the relationship and ultimately to develop district policy to

outline what those relationships shall look like. This is especially critical to have in place

in the event school district and school level leaders exit the district.

Implications for Research

This study sought to explore the leadership practices in a high performing, urban

elementary school without the goal of determining the effects of those practices on

student achievement. This would appear to be a logical next step in researching this area of educational leadership and would build upon the body of work already available. It is important to remember, however, that leadership practices in an urban environment can and should be drastically different from those in other types of settings (Aveling, 2007; Benham K, 1997; Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor & Wheeler, 2006; Cooper, 2009; Khalifa, 2012). Understanding the correlations between the leadership practices at high performing urban schools and student achievement, particularly in districts where most schools continue to struggle, will provide important information to policy makers, district leaders, and principals in their work to implement more effective practices for better student learning outcomes.

A second area for research that would prove useful would be the exploration of the level of impact and frequency of each of the leadership dimensions in Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework at Standmore. The research design would need to be able to quantify how each dimension played a role in improving student achievement and take into account the many variables that exist with school leadership (Saldaña, 2013). This study would be very useful in helping school leaders understand what practices work best and those that can be minimized, thus more narrowly defining what effective leadership for student achievement looks like.

Lastly, it would prove useful to replicate this study in several of the low performing schools in the district. A study of this type would shed light on the importance of the leadership practices in Hitt and Tucker relative to the student achievement at those schools. For instance, if the same leadership practices were found to be in some of the low performing schools, it would generate several questions about the

impact of the practices and the validity of the correlation between the practices and

student achievement, and perhaps bring to light some of the risks associated with the

practices. Overall, any contribution to the body of literature outlining highly effective

leadership practices resulting in high levels of student achievement would be useful.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study. The researchers will investigate how leadership practices influence student achievement in The Canterbury Street School which is a school in the Worcester Public School District.
- We would like you to participate in the study because you 1) work in the school or its district or 2) you are a parent or other community partner to the school.
- Please read this form. Ask any questions that you may have before you agree to be in the study.

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this study is to understand what your school and/or district has done to influence student achievement.

- People in this study are from your school and district or are parents or other community partners to the school.

What will happen in the study:

We hope you will participate in an interview or focus group at an agreed upon time. We expect this will take no longer than 2 hours. **The interview/focus group sessions will take place in a conference room in the school or district office.**

Risks and Discomforts of Being in the Study:

If you participate in this study the main risk is a breach of confidentiality. We will make every effort to ensure confidentiality. We will maintain your anonymity to the extent possible, **however, anonymity is not possible for focus group participants**. There are no other expected risks to participate in this study. This study may include risks that are unknown at this time.

Benefits of Being in the Study:

The benefits of being in this study are minimal. This study may help us understand what the leaders of your school have done to influence student achievement.

Payments:

You will receive a token of appreciation in the form of a **$10** Staples, Dunkin Donuts or equivalent gift card.

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Costs:
There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Confidentiality:
- The records of this study will be kept private. In any report we publish, we will make every effort to ensure your identity is kept anonymous. Research records will be kept in a locked file. Your identity will remain anonymous in any publications.
- All electronic information will be secured on password protected computers and will be shared carefully amongst researchers. Audio files will be protected and shared in the same way. All audio files will be erased once the research report is published.
- For the most part, only the researchers will have access to information. A few other key people may also have access. These might include government agencies. Also, the Institutional Review Board at Boston College and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records.

Choosing to be in the study and choosing to quit the study:
- Choosing to be in this study is voluntary. Your participation will not impact current or future relations with the University or employment with your district.
- You are free to quit at any time, for whatever reason.
- There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for quitting.
- You will be notified of any new findings from the research if they might make you decide that you want to stop being in the study.

Getting dismissed from the study:
The researcher may dismiss you from the study at any time if it is in your best interests. For example if side effects or distress have resulted from your participation.

Contacts and Questions:
- The researchers conducting this study are listed below. If you have questions or want more information, please contact any of the researchers via email. That researcher will arrange a time to discuss your concerns. **You may also contact the faculty advisor to the researchers conducting the study, Dr. Pullin via email, pullin@bc.edu or phone at (617) 552-8407.**
- If you believe you may have suffered a research related injury, contact one of the researchers via email.
- If you have any questions about your rights as a person in this research study, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu

Copy of Consent Form:

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form. I have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to be in the Leadership Practices That Affect Student Achievement: School Leadership For Equity With Excellence study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates

Study Participant (Print Name): _____Date _____

Participant or Legal Representative Signature: _____Date _____

List of Researchers

1. Nicole Gittens, Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, Brookline Public Schools; gittensn@bc.edu

2. Tara Gohlmann, Chief Operating Officer, Boston College High School; gohlmann@bc.edu

3. James Reilly, Principal of Priest St School, Leominster Public Schools; reillyjl@bc.edu

4. David Ryan, Superintendent of Schools for Allenstown, Chichester, & Epsom (NH) School Districts - SAU53; ryandp@bc.edu

5. Kris Taylor, Director of Leadership Development at Boston Public Schools; taylorkx@bc.ed

Appendix B

Interviewees and Roles

Interviewee	Role
Kit	Superintendent
Charlie	Superintendent's leadership team
Dylan	Superintendent's leadership team
Pat	Site council member
Aron	Principal
Lee	Assistant Principal
Jesse	Teacher and Instructional Leadership Team member
Morgan	Teacher and Instructional Leadership Team member
Casey	Teacher
Sage	Teacher
Jamie	Teacher
Blake	Teacher
Chris	Teacher and Instructional Leadership Team member
Cody	Adjustment Counselor
Jordan	Instructional Coach

Boston College Lynch School of Education

Appendix C

Open Ended Interview Protocol for School Level Personnel – A
Question / Domain Alignment Key

BQ = Background Question	**SO** = Supportive organization - Domain 3
OQ = Overarching Question	**HQ** = High quality instruction - Domain 4
V = Vision - Domain 1	**EP** = External partners - Domain 5
BC = Building capacity - Domain 2	**CRT** = CRT in education

Background Questions:
1. What is your position? How did you come to be in this role? (BQ)
   a. What motivates you to do with work?

Overarching Questions:
2. Why is your school successful?

3. Are families and community partners welcomed at the school? If so what is their role? (EP)

4. How are decisions made in your school and what challenges do you face when making important decisions? (V, SO, EP, BC)
   a. Can you provide a recent example?
   b. Would you describe your school as sharing leadership?
   c. Are decisions made by consensus, voting or by gathering input?

Specific Questions:
5. A mission statement calls out the reason the organization exist. A vision identifies how to achieve the mission. Are you familiar with the district mission and vision? If so, how do they impact your work? (V, SO)

6. Is there a school mission statement? If not, is there an implied school mission?

7. Is there a school vision statement separate from the mission? If so, what is it? If not, is there an implied vision for the school? (V)

8. Schools sometimes seek to include stakeholders in creating the mission and vision of

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the school, who helped shape your mission and vision? Did you or do you now someone who helped shape the district mission or vision? (V, SO, BC)

9. (Principal) How broadly is the school mission and vision communicated? How often, would you say you reference it? Do you intentionally reference it on a daily, weekly, monthly or yearly basis? (V)

10. (Teachers) How often would you say the principal discusses the school mission and vision or incorporates the school mission or vision into the work you do? (V)

11. Are there instructional goals or priorities? If so what are they and are they linked to the school mission and vision? How were these goals developed? Who had a hand in shaping them? (V, BC)

12. How often are goals and expectations communicated? (Principal) Are these goals shared outside of the school? If so, how and when? (V)

13. (Principal) How do you communicate instructional priorities? What practices do you rely on to build awareness of goals, expectations and instructional priorities? (BC)

14. (Teachers) How are goals communicated and evaluated? Can you provide specific examples? (V, SO, BC)

15. Do the goals/ instructional priorities change what people do on a daily basis? If so, can you provide an example? (V, BC)

16. (Principal) What behaviors do you observe within the school that are consistent with the goals, instructional priorities and core values? (V, BC)

17. (Principal) What do you believe is your role in implementing the mission and vision of the school and the district? (V)

18. Is trust included as a value in your school? How is it promoted by leaders and staff? (SO, BC)

19. Who other than you (principal)/who among you (teachers) takes the lead on implementing expectations? FOLLOW UP In what way? (BC)

20. How much time has been dedicated to PD? (SO, BC)
    a. Who leads PD? (SO, BC)
    b. Is PD differentiated to address all levels of readiness? (SO, BC)

21. Aside from providing professional development for implementing new practices, how do you generate a sense of responsibility among staff for student learning? (BC) 133

22. How do you know when a teacher is the right fit for your school? How do you address those who no longer fit?(BC)

23. Please describe how instructional time is protected. Can you think and list some of the ways you mitigate interruptions to instructional activities? (BC)

24. (Principal) As a school, do you engage in conversations about race? Can you share an example? What have you learned from these conversations? (CRT)

25. (Principal) One definition of equity is ensuring that every student receives the resources needed to support their academic achievement on a daily basis. Has there ever been a program to improve academic outcomes for a particular racial group? For example, some districts may have programs to support Latina females who are English Language Learners or Black males with Individual Education Plans? Other districts may focus on improving the academic achievement of Black and Latino males. Has a program like this ever existed in your district, can you explain what this program is/was and what are/were the goals? Please describe. What is/was the reason for this focus? What are/were the goals and the reasons it was created? (CRT)

26. How have you built school policies that support this population of students? Is there consensus?
    a. How have you encouraged faculty and staff to work for the wellbeing of this student population?
    b. Are there practices in place to eliminate achievement gaps for this population of students?
    c. How have you communicated your expectations for serving these students?

27. (Principal) Was there ever a time when there was pushback from a stakeholder group (teachers, principals, parents, students, school committee or community) regarding a certain program or policy? If so, can you describe what happened? What was the central issue they disagreed with? (CRT)

28. (Principal) What was your response? How did you specifically address the concerns? Can you share the practices you relied on to resolve the issue? (V)

29. (Principal) What was the conclusion? (V)

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Boston College Lynch School of Education

Appendix D

Open Ended Interview Protocol for Principal - Vision and High Quality Instruction Focus

Question / Domain Alignment Key

BQ = Background Question	**SO** = Supportive organization - Domain 3
OQ = Overarching Question	**HQ** = High quality instruction - Domain 4
V = Vision - Domain 1	**EP** = External partners - Domain 5
BC = Building capacity - Domain 2	**CRT** = CRT in education

Background Questions:
1. Can you tell us what your current role is and what brought you to this position?
   a. What motivates you to do this work?

Academic Achievement:

2. Why do you believe Standmore is successful?

3. Why do you believe Standmore is able to be effective with the same population of students while other level 3 or level 4 schools in Evergreen, serving the same student population, is not as successful?

4. Based on your experience, what leadership practices seem key to creating a level 1 school?

Building mission/vision at the district level:

5. We were able to review the district mission statement. What do you believe is the essence of Evergreen's district mission statement? (Note: Why the organization exists?
   a. Do you know how the mission was identified? Who helped shape or create it? Did you or do you know someone who helped create the district mission?

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6. A vision specifically calls out how to achieve the mission. It can also be the shared purpose or any mutual understandings that drive the practices of members of the organization. What do you believe is the vision of Evergreen? (Note: Vision clarifies what the organization will focus on. The goals or specific practices in order to achieve the mission - Ex. what will Evergreen do to improve academic achievement).

7. Districts sometimes engage stakeholders in the creation of the vision or shared understandings for how to achieve the mission. How was the district vision crafted? (Was this done collaboratively?)
   a. Do you know how the vision was identified? Who helped shape or create it? Did you or do you know someone who helped create the district vision?
   b. How often does the district refer to or reference the mission and or vision of the district?

Building mission/vision at the school level:

8. We were able to review the mission statement of Standmore. What do you believe is the essence of Standmore's mission statement?
   a. How was the vision was identified? Who helped shape or create it?

9. A vision specifically calls out how to achieve the mission. It can also be the mutual understandings that drive the practices of the members of the organization. What do you believe is Standmore's vision? (Note: Vision clarifies what the organization will focus on. The goals and specific practices in order to achieve the mission - Ex. what will Evergreen do to improve academic achievement).

10. Schools sometimes engage stakeholders in the creation of the vision or the shared understanding of how to achieve the mission. How was the vision crafted? (Was this done collaboratively?)
    a. Who helped shape or create it?
    b. How often do you refer to or reference the vision?

Communicating and implementing vision at the district level and at the school level:

11. How is the district vision (shared purpose/mutual understanding/shared practices) communicated to school leaders? When? How often?

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12. Would you say there are goals linked to the district mission and vision? How were they developed? Who had a hand in shaping the goals?

13. Does the district mission/vision inform instructional priorities at Standmore? Please explain. How are instructional priorities communicated to teachers?

14. Does the district mission/vision change what people do at Standmore on a daily basis? If so, can you provide an example? What behaviors do you observe within the school that are consistent with the district goals, instructional priorities and core values? How does the district mission/vision inform your practice?

15. How do you build support, enthusiasm or buy-in? How do you motivate others to stay true to the district and Standmore's mission/vision?

16. Core values are sometimes used to guide the work and inform decisions. Has the district identified core values? If so, do these values inform your daily work as a principal? Do the district core values inform the daily work of teachers? If so, what does that look like?

17. Has Standmore identified core values as a school that guide the work and inform decisions? If so, what does this look like? Can you provide an example?

Building Capacity:

18. Is trust included as a value in your school? How is it promoted by leaders and staff?

19. Who other than you among you takes the lead on implementing expectations? In what way?

20. How much time is dedicated to PD? Who leads PD?
    a. Is it differentiated to address all levels of readiness?

21. Aside from providing professional development for implementing new practices, how do you generate a sense of responsibility among staff for student learning?

22. How do you know when a teacher is the right fit for your school? How do you address those who are no longer a fit?

23. Please describe how instructional time is protected. Can you think of and list ways you mitigate interruptions to instructional activities?

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Equity/Race:

24. As a district, do you ever engaged in conversations about race? Can you share an example? What have you learned from these conversations?

25. As a school, have you ever engaged in conversations about race? Can you share an example? What have you learned from these conversations?

26. One definition of equity is ensuring that every student receives the resources needed to support their academic achievement on a daily basis. At Standmore, has there ever been a program to improve academic outcomes for a particular racial group? For example, some districts may have programs to improve outcomes for Black and Latino males or Latina females who are English Language Learners. Has a program like this ever existed in your district? Can you explain what this program is/was and what was/were the goals? Please describe the program. What was the focus? What were the goals/focus and the reasons it was created?

27. How have you built school policies to support this population of students? What has been the response? Have you communicated your expectations for serving these students?

28. Was there ever a time when there was pushback from a stakeholder group (teachers, parents, students, school committee or central office or the community) regarding a certain program or policy designed to improved outcomes for a racial group? What was the central issue they disagreed with?

29. What was your response? How did you see the issue? How did your address the concerns?

30. How did you resolve the issue? What was the conclusion?

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Appendix E

Open Ended Interview Protocol for School Level Personnel – B

Question / Domain Alignment Key

BQ = Background Question	**SO** = Supportive organization - Domain 3
OQ = Overarching Question	**HQ** = High quality instruction - Domain 4
V = Vision - Domain 1	**EP** = External partners - Domain 5
BC = Building capacity - Domain 2	

Background Questions:

1. What is your position? How did you come to be in this role? (BQ)
   a. What motivates you to do this work?

2. Why do you think your school successful? (BQ)

3. What are the most important things your principal does (you do) to support student learning? (BQ, SO, HQ)

Specific Questions:

4. Talk about the district's and school's mission and vision and how they relate to your student achievement goals? How do your school's values and informal belief systems support the mission? (V, SO)

5. How would you describe the beliefs and values that drive and shape the work of your school?

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Probes: How do you communicate these values? How do these relate to the mission and vision of the school/district? (SO)

6. (Principal) How do you communicate student achievement goals?
   (Teachers) How are student achievement goals communicated and evaluated?
   Probe: Can you provide specific examples? (V, SO)

7. What resources do you have that are most useful to your work with the children?
   Probes: Professional development, teaching supports? Are there other resources you want but you are not getting? (SO)

8. What are the specific challenges of your school as you think about moving it forward? What are the specific strengths and how do you work with those strengths? (SO)

9. Can you tell us how you hold all students to the same standards? (SO)

10. How are important decisions made in your school and what challenges do you face when making important decisions? (SO, EP, BC)
    a. Do you have a recent example of a decision and how you were included or not in that decision? (SO)

11. Do you feel that your opinion is valued in the school's decision making process? How have you contributed to decisions made by school or district leadership? (SO)

A high-quality learning experience is said to make the difference in student achievement, with that in mind, please consider the following questions (HQ):

12. How important is safety and orderliness to this school community?
    (Principal/Teachers)
    Why do you say that?
    a. How are expectations around safety and orderliness conveyed to the school community?
    b. What are examples of policies or practices that promote safety and orderliness?

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13. How important is it for the school environment to reflect students' backgrounds? (Principal/Teachers) (HQ)
    a. What are some ways that the school environment reflects students' backgrounds?
    b. How are students involved in creating a school environment that reflects their backgrounds?

14. How is the curricular program developed and monitored at this school? (Principal/Teachers)
    a. How involved are teachers in developing the school's curricular program?
        i. Please talk about ways that teachers are involved in developing the curricular program.
    b. How much time do you spend on monitoring the school's curricular program?
        i. What do you do to monitor the curricular program?

15. How is instruction developed and monitored at this school? (Principal/Teachers)
    a. Please talk about how instruction is developed and monitored at this school.
        i. Are their specific expectations for instruction?
        ii. How are the expectations to conveyed to classroom personnel?
    b. How much time is spent monitoring instruction at this school?
        i. Who monitors instruction?

16. How is assessment developed and monitored in this school?
    a. Please talk about how assessment is developed and monitored?
    b. How are teachers involved in the development of assessments?
    c. How are assessments used to provide a high-quality student experience?

17. What do you consider to be a high-quality learning experience for students?
    - (For teachers) How does your administration support teachers in creating these experience for students (SO)?

Appendix F

Open Ended Interview Protocol for District Level Personnel

Question / Domain Alignment Key

BQ = Background Question	**SO** = Supportive Organization - Domain 3
OQ = Overarching Question	**HQ** = High quality instruction - Domain 4
V = Vision - Domain 1	**EP** = External partners - Domain 5
BC = Building capacity - Domain 2	**CRT** = Critical Race Theory in education

Background Questions:

1. Can you tell us what your current role is and what brought you to this position?
   a. What motivates you to do this work?

Academic Achievement:

2. Why do you believe Standmore is successful?

3. Why do you believe Standmore is able to be effective with the same population of students and other level 3 or level 4 schools, in this district, serving the same student population, are not as successful?

4. Based on your experience, what leadership practices seem key to creating a level 1 school?

Building Mission/Vision:

5. We were able to review the district mission statement on your website. What do you believe is the essence of Evergreen's mission statement? (Why does the organization exist?)

6. A vision specifically calls out how to achieve the mission. It can also be the shared purpose or mutual understandings that drive the practices of members of the organization. What do you believe is the vision of Evergreen? (Note: It clarifies

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what the organization will focus on. The goals. Specific practices in order to achieve the mission - Ex. what will WPS do to improve academic achievement - mission).

7. Districts sometimes engage stakeholders in the creation of the vision or shared purpose for how to achieve the mission? How was the vision crafted? (Was this done collaboratively?)

Communicating and Implementing Vision:

8. How is the vision (shared purpose/mutual understanding/shared practices) communicated to school leaders? When? How often?

9. How is the vision communicated to other stakeholders? When? How often?

10. Would you say there are goals linked to the mission and vision? How were they developed? Who had a hand in shaping them?
    a. How does the principal at Standmore communicate and drive those goals with her staff?

11. Does the mission/vision inform instructional priorities? If so, how were these identified and how were they communicated to principals and teachers?
    a. How does the principal coordinate, lead, and/or deliver professional learning to her staff on a whole school level and individual level?

12. Does the mission/vision change what people do on a daily basis? If so, can you provide an example? What behaviors do you observe within the district/schools that are consistent with the goals, instructional priorities and core values?

13. How do you build support, enthusiasm or buy-in? How do you motivate others to stay true to the mission/vision?

14. Core values are sometimes used to guide the work and inform decisions. Has the district identified core values? If so, so these values inform the daily work of district leaders, school leaders and teachers. If so, what does that look like?

Equity/Race:

15. As a district, do you ever engage in conversations about race? Can you share an example? What have you learned from these conversations?   143

16. One definition of equity is ensuring that every student receives the resources needed to support their academic achievement on a daily basis. Has there ever been a program to improve academic outcomes for a particular racial group? For example, some districts may have programs to improve outcomes for Black and Latino males or Latina females who are English Language Learners. Has a program like this ever existed in your district? Can you explain what this program is/was and what was/were the goals? Please describe the program. What was the focus? What were the goals/focus and the reasons it was created?

17. How have you built district policies to support this population of students? What has been the response? Have you communicated your expectations for serving these students?

18. Was there ever a time when there was pushback from a stakeholder group (teachers, principals, parents, students, school committee or community) regarding a certain program or policy designed to improved outcomes for a racial group? What was the central issue they disagreed with?

19. What was your response? How did you see the issue? How did your address the concerns

20. How did you resolve the issue? What was the conclusion?

21. Which district leaders are essential for implementing the district priorities related to the district mission/vision? Can we interview these district leaders?

Informed Communication and Leadership Practices that Affect Student Achievement

Appendix G

Open Ended Interview Protocol for External Stakeholders

Question / Domain Alignment Key

BQ = Background Question	**SO** = Supportive organization - Domain 3
OQ = Overarching Question	**HQ** = High quality instruction - Domain 4
V = Vision - Domain 1	**EP** = External partners - Domain 5
BC = Building capacity - Domain 2	

Background Questions:
1. What is your connection to school X? How long have you been part of the school community?

2. What motivates you to partner with this school community?

Overarching Questions:
3. Do you agree with the state's assessment that school X is a high performing school? Why or why not?

4. Is there a district mission and vision? Is there a school mission and vision? (V)

5. Was the mission and vision created with input from you or others? (V)

6. How would you describe the beliefs and values of school X? And how are these communicated?

7. Do you feel that your child's teacher gets the resources he/she needs in the classroom? The school? (SO)

Specific Questions:
8. Are students and families connected to community resources? (EP)

9. Are families and community partners welcomed at the school? If so what is their role?(EP)

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10. Do you feel welcome, understood, and respected at the school? (EP)

11. How are decisions made in your school? Do you feel that your input is valued? (SO, EP)

12. Are family and community resources used? (EP)

13. What supports, if any, from the community, including families, do you rely on to support student achievement? If so, how does this occur? (EP)

14. Are families and community partners engaged at the school? (EP)

15. Are students and families connected to community resources? (EP)

16. Is the school or school leadership considered an active member of the community? (EP)

17. Do you feel school's goals are aligned with community needs? (EP)

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