Leadership Practices that Affect Student Achievement: The Role of Mission and Vision in Achieving Equity

Author: Kris Allison Taylor

Persistent link: http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:107955

This work is posted on eScholarship@BC,
Boston College University Libraries.

BOSTON COLLEGE
Lynch School of Education

Department of
Educational Leadership and Higher Education

Professional School Administrator Program (PSAP)

LEADERSHIP PRACTICES THAT AFFECT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: THE
ROLE OF MISSION AND VISION IN ACHIEVING EQUITY

Dissertation in Practice
By

KRIS ALLISON TAYLOR

with
Nicole Gittens, Tara Gohlmann, James M. Reilly and David M. Ryan

submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

March 2018

**Leadership Practices that Affect Student Achievement:
The Role of Mission and Vision in Achieving Equity**

by

Kris Allison Taylor

Dissertation Chairperson: Diana Pullin, J.D., Ph.D.
Daniel E. Gutekanst, Ed.D and Patrick McQuillian, Ph.D., Readers

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.

Scholars Hitt and Tucker (2016) state that effective leadership practice includes conveying, communicating and implementing a shared vision. This study focused on the mission-driven leadership practices at the district level and the school level that could have influenced the improved academic outcomes for urban students of color. Another focus of this study was achieving equity for marginalized student populations and whether the district designed policies or programs specifically for students of color in order to eliminate achievement gaps.

This study found aligned practices and beliefs at both the district and school level. Findings included a shared understanding of goals and daily practices to achieve the goal. There were expectations in place to observe implementation as well as reliable structures

to communicate about goals to maintain a focus on priorities. This project also aimed to learn whether these same practices were engaged if there were initiatives in place to attain equitable outcomes when working with specific marginalized populations. This study found consistency throughout the organization of a resistance to focusing on race. This resistance materialized in the form of taking a color-blind approach to instruction. This approach is in direct contrast to practices called for in the literature for meeting the needs of all students, especially students of color. Recommendations include taking courageous steps as a district by engaging transformational and social justice leadership practices to create an organization that is responsive to the needs of students of color.

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the support of my husband and son, Mark and Emmanuel Taylor. Your patience and flexibility allowed me to be away from "Team Taylor" for a significant amount of time over the course of three years. I am truly grateful for your support and inspiration and I love you both dearly.

I will forever be indebted to my colleagues in PSAP IV who made this journey one of the strongest and best learning experiences because it was filled with joy and laughter. From start to end, we weren't afraid to be ourselves.

To my dissertation team, Nicole Gittens, Tara Gohlmann, Dave Ryan and Jim Reilly: it was an absolute pleasure to work with you on this project. Thank you for your focus, intensity, transparency, serenity and dedication.

Thank you to our chair, Dr. Diana Pullin. Your leadership and support was flawless and inspiring. Many thanks to Dr. Lauri Johnson and the PSAP committee and professors who exposed us to important literature, collaborative experiences and techniques that allowed us to achieve our goals as a cohort.

No two people have been more important to me in the pursuit of my life goals than my parents James C. and Patricia M. Allison. Thank you for the sacrifices you made for our family when you were a young couple and the support you continue to provide today. Thank you for your tenacity to provide for your children and others, your example of service to God and your leadership within our family and the community. Because you chased your dreams and persevered through challenges, you encouraged your children to achieve their goals. Whether it was earning degrees, building a strong family modeled

after your own, owning a business, being a dedicated athlete or seeing the world, your

example made us who we are, and this legacy continues in your grandchildren.

I also stand on the shoulders of strong, passionate and loving Grandparents on

both sides of my family who paved the way for my life to be great and who introduced

me to a loving God and Saviour. I will always be grateful for this gift.

To my brothers, sister, sister-in-law, niece, nephews, aunts, uncles, and the entire

Allison, Ponder and Taylor families, I love you dearly and appreciate you. You had a

hand in shaping me into the person I am. Together, let's continue to embrace the legacy

passed down to us and continue to "press towards the mark of our high calling"

(Philippians 3:14).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Tables

Figures

<p align="center">**Chapter One**[1]</p>

<p align="center">**Introduction**</p>

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 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,

---

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

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-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).

---

[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: 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.

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) 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 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 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 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.

Note. Adapted from "Systematic review of key leader practices found to influence student achievement: A unified framework," by D. H. Hitt and P. D. Tucker, 2016, *Review of Educational Research*, 86, pp. 545-560.

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).

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 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

---

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

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.

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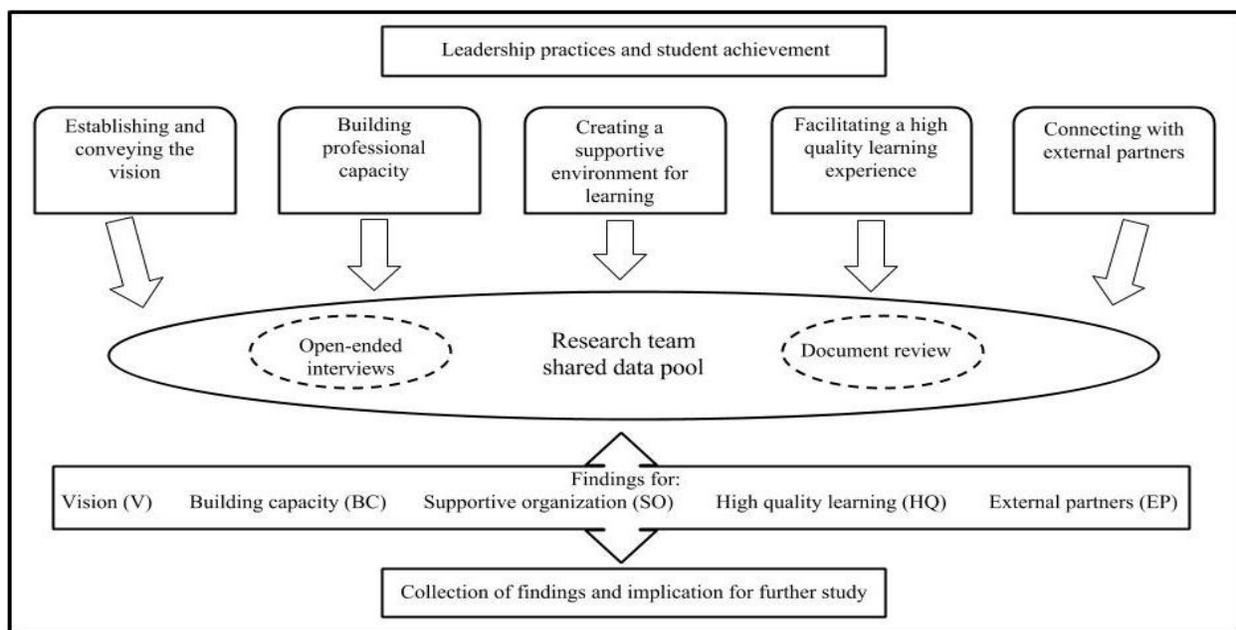
Figure 2.1. Research design map. This figure illustrates the research methods used and their connection to answering the research question.

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 3

The Role Of Mission And Vision In Achieving Equity

Statement of the Problem and Purpose

Large numbers of students of color attend high poverty schools located in urban areas (Milner, 2015) and these school children are being left behind (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The American public school system has always been viewed as a way for anyone of any race to improve their life circumstances, however achieving the American dream is fading, especially for those born into poverty (Duncan & Murnane, 2014). In addition, a student who attends a failing urban school has little opportunity to attend a high performing one (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and racial gaps in achievement continue (Noguera, 2008). Decades after the *Brown v. Board of Education* school desegregation decision of 1954, educational inequity for students of color persists; even this landmark case was unable to erase the "racialized boundaries of our schools" (Tieken, 2017, p. 399). This study aims to shed light on a way forward through the effective engagement of mission-driven leadership practices leading to improved academic outcomes for urban students.

Several pioneering studies have confirmed the impact school leaders have on student learning and achievement (Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). In addition, Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) found that school leaders can be more impactful when they couple instructional leadership practices with transformational leadership. Transformational leadership includes using vision, goals and inspiration to create an environment focused on improving student outcomes (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016). The school leader plays a key role in creating shared goals and communicating

these goals; both practices help clarify how the organization will achieve its mission and vision. This kind of clarity is necessary for creating a shared purpose that informs common behaviors and practices that help the organization maintain its focus and improve student learning outcomes. Eliminating achievement gaps for urban students of color sets these students on a path towards success, which is one way to achieve equity for this historically marginalized population. Often, these students have little choice but to attend an urban public school and often, these schools struggle to educate them. Therefore, if as a nation, we believe children are our future, it is imperative these schools improve.

"Leveling the playing field" is a common phrase used by educators to describe what drew them to urban education. Many urban district leaders, building administrators and teachers view education as a solution to persistent societal issues. These educators also understand that ensuring a quality education for those living on the margins of society, who are considered "at risk" of academic failure, often need additional supports and resources in order to achieve parity with their suburban peers. Urban education scholars and social scientists provide clarity regarding the difference between equity and equality. They have clarified that equitable resources isn't equal resources (Milner, 2015).

While most Americans have always believed in equal opportunity, this belief is not aligned to the true definition of equity, which is providing more to those in need in order to achieve equality (Milner, 2015). This conflicts with the meritocracy concept, a belief that "educational opportunity is matched to natural ability" (Mijs, 2016, p. 16). Given this American core value, providing additional supports to some, in a country that prides itself as a land of equal opportunity, can be met with challenge and resistance. This is especially true when many Americans believe poverty is the result of a lack of hard work and focus (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Unfortunately, what is not often taken into account and what often goes unnoticed are the discriminatory practices, implicit biases, white privilege and institutionalized racism which function as barriers and hurdles for people of color and those living in poverty (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Irving, 2014; Milner, 2013). These practices can stifle or limit one's opportunities. Given the belief that social economic status is the result of one's own making, it is sometimes difficult to realign resources toward equity initiatives for marginalized students and students living in poverty. However, equity-minded, urban educators still feel compelled to work to "level the playing field." This motivation can be described as social justice leadership.

Social justice leadership is defined as "making issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions central to [one's] advocacy, leadership practice and vision" (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223). It involves disrupting practices that promote marginalization. Social justice leaders lead with a "moral obligation to raise student achievement" (Theoharis, 2007, p. 232). Social justice leadership is creating a just society by improving the academic achievement of marginalized groups. Another theory of leadership associated with social justice leadership is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership's core values include equality and equity and is linked to improved student academic outcomes (Shields, 2010).

Transformational leadership is described as using vision and inspiration to create structures and cultures focused on improving student learning (Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016). Dr. Kenneth Leithwood (2012), a well-respected scholar in the field of educational leadership, defines transformational leadership as having four dimensions: setting directions; developing people; redesigning the organization; and managing the instructional program. Situated within transformational leadership is setting directions, which is similar to establishing a vision.

Elements of social justice leadership and transformational leadership are closely aligned with the first domain of Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework of establishing and conveying a mission and vision.

Many believe that in order to achieve the mission and vision, the organization must have clear goals, targets and high expectations (Hallinger, 2005; Jacobson, 2011; Trujillo, 2013). However, even with this level of clarity, social justice leaders often face formidable resistance from those within and outside of the organization (Theoharis, 2007). They also face potential backlash from stakeholders who may withdraw support and resources (Rorrer, 2006) while others believe in taking incremental steps towards progress (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Even though these challenges could be imminent, scholars have effectively demonstrated that school leadership is key to improving outcomes for students (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood et al., 2010; Louis et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003). In addition, research shows that effective districts reflect the practices of effective schools (Trujillo, 2013).

In order to uncover how urban district leaders and building level leaders achieve equity for urban students of color, this individual project aims to understand whether these leaders engage practices researchers state as having a positive influence on student achievement. These practices are consistent with the first domain of Hitt and Tucker's Unified Framework (2016), which includes: a shared vision, the broad communication of the vision, and the implementation of the vision by clarifying goals and expectations. This will serve as one of the conceptual frameworks for this study.

The importance of mission and vision is also supported by what educational leadership scholars Sun and Leithwood (2015) call "Direction Setting Leadership Practices" also known as

DSLP (p. 499). Such practices are essential to focusing an organization on initiatives designed to improve student achievement. Many studies focus on the practices school principals alone should engage to improve academic outcomes for students; however, research shows that in order for equity to be maintained and brought to scale, district level leadership plays an important role (DeVano & Price, 2012, Rorrer, 2006). In addition, the purpose of this individual project is to understand how "direction-setting school leadership practices" (Sun & Leithwood, 2015) might play a role in focusing an organization on improving academic outcomes for urban students and thereby improve equity for historically marginalized student populations. The research questions for this study are:

(1) Does an urban superintendent and his/her team use mission, vision and direction setting practices to focus the organization on initiatives to achieve equitable academic outcomes for historically marginalized student populations and does a school principal, in the same district, employ similar practices?

 (2) If there are specific initiatives designed to improve academic outcomes and equity for a particular racial group, do central office and building level leaders rely on direction setting leadership practices if they encounter resistance from stakeholders?

These research questions are guided by the first domain of Hitt and Tucker's Unified Framework: establishing, conveying and implementing a shared mission and vision. Sun and Leithwood's (2015) Direction Setting Leadership Practices (DSLP) help to further explain what effective leadership looks like within this domain. In order to better understand what practitioners do to impact student learning, this study explores whether district level and building level leaders actually engaged in the activities outlined by Hitt and Tucker. Critical Race Theory in education was used as an additional conceptual framework. The tenets of Critical Race Theory

in education state that race is normal, ordinary and part of everyday life (Omi & Winant, 1994; Lynn & Parker, 2006). However, another tenet of CRT in education is color-blindness and the refusal to acknowledge race and the permanence of race are two contrasting ideas that create a space for conflict and resistance. Given this, when aiming to provide additional resources for students of color, resistance and pushback is to be expected.

The purpose of this research study was to learn whether engaging in direction setting and mission-driven leadership practices at the district level and the school level are effective enough to overcome strong resistance from stakeholder groups; do leadership practices such as "collaboratively identifying and articulating a vision, fostering acceptance of group goals, creating high performance expectations, promoting effective communication and collaboration" (Sun & Leithwood, 2015, p. 503) help to achieve equity for urban students of color? These practices outlined by educational researchers are aligned to Hitt and Tucker's (2016) mission and vision domain. Learning whether these "direction setting leadership practices" are employed in the face of powerful opposition is the goal of this project. Other goals include examining whether the resistance from stakeholders was consistent with elements of Critical Race Theory, which include neo-liberalism, interest convergence and color-blindness.

Literature Review

Critical Race Theory. Wellman (1977) defines racism as sanctioned beliefs that defend the advantages whites have because of their dominant positions over racial minorities. Effective leadership is a way forward to improving schools, but racism is a hurdle. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a conceptual framework which aims to explain the existence of racism when there is widespread agreement that racism is dreadful and unacceptable (Harris, 2012). CRT uses judicial doctrines to centralize race within the law, especially given the neutral principles and concepts

the American justice system is founded on (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995; Harris, 2012). These theorists argue that even with guiding principles of neutrality and equality, the American justice system of rules and regulations actually reflect racial power (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Critical Race Theory provides a construct for understanding how policies negatively impact people of color and the "myriad of legal rules that continue to reproduce structures and practices of racial domination" (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xxii). Several ideas within CRT inform Critical Race Theory in education, a term created by urban education scholars Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate in the mid-1990's.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue that educational inequities found in urban schools are the result of ingrained structures in American society. They state, "the cause of their [urban students'] poverty in conjunction with the condition of their schools and schooling is institutional and structural racism" (p. 55). Yosso, Parker, Solorzano and Lynn's (2004) explanation of the first of five tenets of Critical Race Theory in education is consistent with Ladson-Billings and Tate's assessment that race is normal and ingrained in American life. The first element of Critical Race Theory in education goes on to explain that race is "central, endemic and permanent" and society is organized to maintain racial subordination (Yosso et al., 2004, p. 3). The second tenet of Critical Race Theory in education, according to Yosso et al., (2004) explains that CRT in education challenges the arguments educational institutions make to camouflage privilege and power. These institutions often rely on ideas like objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness and neutrality to maintain structural racism and inequity. The third tenet is a commitment to social justice as well as a commitment to expose "interest convergence." Interest convergence, coined by legal scholar and early author of Critical Race Theory, Derrick Bell (Pierce, 2016), is when social progress goals of minority groups happen to merge with the

interests of whites, and as a result, goals are realized. A fourth tenet is the use of the lived experiences of people of color as a method to understand racial subordination. Ladson-Billings and Tate identify this as "naming one's own reality" (1995, p. 56). The final element discusses how race and racism transcend disciplines. The idea is that race and racism are unlimited and are not bounded by any topic or subject area and therefore permeate society. Fine, Weis, Powell-Pruitt and Burns (2004) explain that "[race] is part of our daily experience. It's present in every institution, every relationship and every individual; it's the way society is organized" (p. 74).

 Color-blindness and interest convergence. The elements of Critical Race Theory in education that are of interest to this study are meritocracy, colorblindness, neutrality and interest convergence as they are outgrowths of American ideologies such as liberalism, neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. These ideas help to explain American society, both past and present. For example, the American judicial system prides itself on being color-blind and neutral. Color-blindness is a belief that race should not be a factor in decision-making and should only be considered in the most egregious of situations (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Harris, 2012). The foundations of color-blindness are rooted in *political liberalism*, a belief in freedom and equal opportunity rather than forcing circumstances on others and *economic liberalism*, a belief in choice and individual rights (Bonilla-Silva, 2013, p. 70). For example, forcing individuals to live in a certain community so schools can be racially balanced goes against political and economic liberalism because it limits a person's choice and ability to define and pursue and define happiness for him or herself. *Neo-liberalism* is a belief in a transracial society, which does not focus on race, but class (Winant, 2004). Color-blindness supports this idea by stating that race is not a factor (Khalif, Dunbar & Douglasb, 2013) as all citizens are equal before the law and these laws provide equal protection (Harris, 2012). Therefore, a focus on race is unnecessary.

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) further clarify the concept of interest convergence by adding it is when a goal of the dominant culture merges with a specific interest of the underclass, accelerating progress for the subordinate group. This concept is also linked to progress made in education. For example, white liberals who support affirmative action policies designed to increase the number of students of color admitted to universities and colleges, do so because of the legislation, but also because of a belief that having a diverse campus is good for white students (Yosso et al., 2004). In this particular case, liberals abandon their dislike of making race explicit and preferential treatment because of an ultimate gain or benefit for whites.

Themes of liberalism, such as interest convergence, color-blindness and neutrality, help to clarify the goals of Critical Race Theory in education, which is to unearth hidden practices such as oppression, subordination and structural racism. These elements must be brought to light in order to acknowledge past discrimination and the legacy of racial injustice and inequity that continue to live on. Two of the five domains in Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Universal Framework address diversity as an important factor for student achievement, but the leadership framework does not address the historical context nor the color-blind practices that maintain the status quo. Education scholars, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue that institutional racism and elements such a color-blindness, liberalism, interest convergence, resistance to preferential treatment and other factors related to CRT in education are reasons students of color attend low performing schools. In essence, it is these practices and beliefs that created the conditions which led to and continues the need for school improvement, effective leadership and equity initiatives.

Color-blindness, interest convergence and the belief that there is no dominant race are ideologies that are problematic. These ideas hinder equity movements because equity goals cannot be achieved without effective programming and implementation and sometimes race is a

factor when trying to level the playing field. As Delgado and Stefancic (2001) explain, "think how our system applauds affording everyone equality of opportunity, but resists programs that assure equality of results" (p. 23).

For this individual study, elements of Critical Race Theory in education were used to examine the response of stakeholders to questions about race to help determine whether the responses were consistent with interest convergence and color-blindness. The reactions provided insight as to how urban educational leaders achieve parity for marginalized student populations. Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework outlines research-based effective leadership practices that influence student achievement and Critical Race Theory in education aims to understand how "race and racism shape schooling structures, practices and discourses" (Yosso et al., p. 3). Urban leaders help to shape educational structures, promote best instructional practices and inform educational discourse for the urban poor and other marginalized populations. If our goal is to "level the playing field" for these students, we should aim to understand effective leadership practice along with understanding institutionalized racism if we hope to achieve equity for marginalized students.

Cultural proficiency. Recognizing race and becoming culturally proficient makes 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" (p. 13).

When educators are color-blind, it denies the past experiences and current realities that help to shape who the student is and will become. Color-blindness forces these stakeholders, and their families, from being their authentic selves, which is in direct contrast to culturally relevant pedagogy and the acceptance and affirmation of one's culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995)**.** To be

culturally responsive means to practice validation and "to acknowledge the realities of inequity that impact students in and out of school" (Hammond, 2015, p. 92). Color-blindness, or the refusal to see race, maintains inequitable power dynamics that privileges whites. It is a power structure that is "all encompassing, omnipresent, and cannot be recognized easily by its beneficiaries" (Taylor, 2009, p. 4).

Leadership theory. The Effective Schools Movement of the 1970's and 1980's came as a result of The Equal Educational Opportunity survey conducted in 1966 by J.S. Coleman. According to Egalite (2016), after Coleman and his team analyzed data from over 3,000 schools and 600,000 students, they found that background was the greatest influence on student achievement—that one's environment determined one's academic success, not schooling. A few years later, other educational researchers such as Edmonds (1982) and Lezotte (1991) conducted studies that found other variables within schools that can lead to increased student achievement. During the mid-1990's, educational scholars clarified the variables associated with student learning. School mission and vision, management of the instructional program and creating a positive culture and climate emerged as essential practices (Hallinger, 2005). Before this revelation, educational leadership focused on the direct impact school leaders had on student learning. Prior to the 1980's researchers used a "direct-effect" lens to understand the influence a school leader had on student achievement (Kruger, Witziers & Sleegers, 2007, p. 6). Today, it is widely accepted that school principals have an indirect effect on student achievement (Hallinger, 1996; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Louis et al., 2010; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Even though school leadership has been proven to have an indirect impact on student learning, a number of empirical studies using both qualitative and quantitative designs have been conducted over several years which demonstrate the key role school principals have on student achievement (Waters &

Marzano, 2003; 2006). Louis et al. (2010) state that leadership is second only to teacher practice when improving outcomes for students. School leadership is important to improve student learning, but it is also needed to implement the vision of the organization (Devono & Price, 2012).

A vision clarifies what the organization wants to become and how the members must act to make it a reality (Gurley, Peters, Collins & Fifolt, 2014). Vision is a component of effective leadership and the lack of a clear vision is the cause of decline (Bogler & Nir, 2001). Vision also influences "the heart and mind with which to carry out daily functions" (Gurley et al., 2014, p.223). A shared vision for goal setting has a positive impact on student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006, p.15). Waters et al. (2007) also found that establishing a clear focus has a .24 effect size on student achievement (p. 3). However, more recent research states that vision should be connected to student learning goals in order to transform the organization (Hallinger, 2010; Hattie, 2009; Robinson et al., 2008).

Transformational leadership. Transformational leadership's core values include equity and equality as well as setting a clear path and inspiring others to attain high goals. In addition, Jacobson's 2011 study identified three core practices that were effective in high poverty schools. These practices were setting directions, engaging in collaborative dialogues and planning professional development. Vision and transformational leadership appear essential to achieving district-wide goals aimed at creating equitable experiences for marginalized students.

Burns (1978) contributed to transformational leadership theory in his work on how leaders inspire others. Other researchers began to create instruments to study this phenomenon (Robinson, et al., 2008). Leithwood and Jantzi, in their 2006 study on transformational leadership, found that this approach has a significant impact on teacher's work environment and

teacher motivation. They used three concepts to define transformational leadership: (1) setting directions; (2) developing people; and (3) redesigning the organization (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Under the domain of setting directions, Leithwood and Jantzi further clarify specific leadership practices such as creating a school vision, identifying specific goals and targets and exhibiting high expectations. However, Robinson et al. (2008) found that transformational leadership practices that only promote a general sense of direction do not account for a strong influence on student learning, but when coupled with instructional leadership, such as setting clear academic goals, the effect size was 0.42, which was considered an "educationally significant effect" (p. 659). Sun and Leithwood (2015) have now coined the term "direction setting leadership practices" (p. 499). They state that direction setting leadership practices is central to both transformational leadership and instructional leadership.

Instructional leadership. The effective schools movement also helped to clarify the importance of instructional leadership, shifting the practice of school leaders from management and operations to improving classroom instruction (Rorrer, Skrla & Scheurich, 2008). Similarly, the role of district leadership evolved from policy implementation, oversight and supervision to instructional leadership as well (Murphy, 1988). Rorrer et al. (2008) define district level instructional leadership as "the collective responsibility of the superintendent and central office administrators to generate will and build capacity" (p. 315). This definition of instructional leadership at the district level includes themes of transformational leadership because generating will has to do with rallying support for goals and initiatives. Rorrer et al. go on to explain that generating will involves a combination of enthusiasm, a commitment to a decision, consistency, personal engagement, establishing a vision, and creating goals (2008). In addition, an effective superintendent is one who educates the school community to what services they should provide

and what student outcomes should be achieved (Rorrer et al., 2008). This definition of effective instructional leadership at the district level also aligns with transformational leadership because equity could be a district goal in order to improve outcomes for marginalized populations.

To summarize, district level instructional leadership includes goal setting and visioning and is a collective endeavor with other central office leaders to personally engage in the work of improving instruction (Waters et al, 2006). Instructional leadership at the district level also focuses on building enthusiasm, demonstrating a commitment to a specific purpose, communicating this broadly and building the capacity of others to implement goals. Instructional leadership at the district level and at the building level is similar not only to transformational leadership, but to direction setting leadership practices as a whole because it involves a continual focus on improving classroom instruction, motivating others and clarifying the goals of the organization for the entire school community (Sun & Leithwood, 2015).

Collaborative leadership. Researchers discuss the importance of collaborative leadership. Hallinger (2010) found that strong collaborative leadership has an indirect effect size of .31 on student achievement through building teacher capacity (p. 132). Robinson et al. (2008) found that building a consensus as a staff also has a positive impact on student learning (p. 662). Creating a shared purpose is similar to identifying a school's mission. Different from a vision statement which identifies a "preferred future" (Gurley et al., 2014, p. 222) a mission statement clarifies the reason the organization exists and not only provides key direction, but builds unity and is an expression of values and should also be an expression of purpose. A mission statement also focuses members to reach clearly articulated goals (Gurley et al., 2014).

Collectively establishing a shared mission and vision. A shared vision is found across several leadership models (Leithwood, 2012, p. 400). A core function of schools is improving

51

teaching and learning and in order to achieve this, there must be internal coherence, the ability to connect and re-align resources to implement a shared vision for rigorous, high quality instruction (Forman, 2017). One way to achieve this is building a shared mission and vision. Hitt and Tucker (2016), in the first domain of their Unified Framework, state that creating a shared vision is an effective leadership practice and according to direction setting leadership practices, this must be done collaboratively. Evidence of collaboration must exist at both the district level and the school level (Cuban, 1984).

District-level. Effective leadership involves engaging a set of practices that influence the practice of others. Districts are considered essential to school reform (Hannaway & Kimball, 1997) and district superintendents influence the work of individual school leaders. The role of a superintendent and his team is to create an effective learning environment for building leaders and teachers. In order to do this, everyone must have a clear sense of direction (Devano & Price, 2012).

The practice of collaboratively building a shared purpose is an effective practice among district leadership. Waters & Marzano (2006) identified five district level leadership responsibilities that are statistically significant $p < .05$ (p. 11). One practice is collaborative goal setting involving building level leaders throughout the goal setting process. Once goals are collaboratively identified, communication and dissemination are key to building common understanding.

Waters et al. (2006) considers the communication of expectations to central office staff and principals as an important role a superintendent takes on as part of the goal-setting process. Given the status and position of a superintendent, he or she must be able to effectively articulate a mission and vision (Devano et al., 2012). The communication and the articulation of a vision is

important as it serves as a catalyst for change. It shapes the practices of others and is a source of inspiration (Sun & Leithwood, 2015).

Studies show that effective districts mimic the work of effective schools (Trujillo, 2013). The effective collaboration between district leaders and building level leaders in improving academic outcomes for students is a phenomenon that should be studied and this kind of collaboration aligns well with direction setting leadership practices.

Conveying, communicating and articulating a shared vision. A district and school mission and vision can be expressed in a variety of ways, orally and through documents. In addition, the organizational vision must encompass everyone and should be compelling enough to attract followers. A leader must ensure members are familiar with the vision and to do this, it should be a common reference point (Bogler et al., 2001). Creating a mission and vision for display is not good enough. It must be communicated to all stakeholders, a central focus, and a regular resource to judge actions and make decisions. If there is no clear mission or vision, the organization is in danger of low performance and ultimately supports members who lack self-regulation and a "do your best" mentality (Sun & Leithwood, 2015, p. 503). In addition, a well-communicated vision provides guidance and clarifies objectives that support "tight congruence between what teachers and principals believe are the norms, values and goals" which is essential for creating an effective learning organization (Rosenholz, 1985, p. 360).

However, establishing, conveying and implementing a common vision is not without its challenges. Educational leadership researcher Trujillo (2013) explains the dynamics she uncovered in an urban setting engaged in district reform. This qualitative case study highlighted a school system whose vision was "proficiency for all"; however, an initiative involving the creation of mixed ability classrooms instead of honors and remedial classes, resulted in teachers

opposing the policy, principals who did not believe it was worth the fight and a superintendent who wanted favorable relationships with teachers, the union, and the school committee board (Trujillo, 2013). A deputy superintendent was the main champion willing to maintain high expectations, coherence and implementation. This study found that district initiatives aimed at achieving equity were in conflict with dominant norms, which resulted in a significant watering down of equity initiatives designed to improve educational outcomes for urban students.

Direction setting leadership practices. Developing shared goals leads to a common purpose and shared understanding. Sun & Leithwood (2015) found that direction setting leadership is effective in creating a positive working environment and fostering a mutual understanding throughout the organization. In order to achieve this, districts and schools must be on the same page. Trujillo (2013) posits that effective districts are those that have a clear mission and vision, strong instructional leadership, high expectations and frequent progress-monitoring. These districts were found to be effective in 64-80% of studies on common correlates between schools and districts (Trujillo, 2013, p. 438). Setting clear expectations is a leadership practice supported by much of the empirical research (Cotton, 1995; Leithwood, 2007; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006; Sammons, et al., 2010; Teske & Schneider, 1999). Goals should be clearly stated, clearly understood and aim for high academic targets (Hattie, 2009; Rammer, 2007). The goal setting process should also be collaborative (Hallinger, 2010) and should result in a shared vision (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Defining the school mission is one dimension of direction setting leadership practices (DSLP) and specific practices include framing goals and communicating goals and these steps are important because they allow the organization to develop a shared understanding (Sun et al, 2015).

Research on direction setting leadership practices (DSLP) is not a mature as other leadership practices. Therefore Sun et al. (2015) linked this concept to other research in the field. Locke and Latham's (2002) psychological study on goal setting and motivation found that setting goals positively impacts performance by directing attention to an effort, energizing it, nurturing persistence and influencing action.

Methods

Study design. A qualitative case study, as defined by Merriam (2009), was the research design utilized to collect and analyze the data to answer the research questions for this individual project. A case study allows for the examination of a phenomenon within a real-life context where the variables are strongly linked to context (Yin, 2009). This was necessary in order to learn whether an urban superintendent and his/her team employed direction setting practices to focus the organization, and whether these same practices were used by an urban school principal in the same district. A bounded case study also allowed for an open-ended stance that permitted ideas to emerge and change within a structured context. This design also allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts examined and studied (Creswell, 2012).

The methods for this group research study are described in Chapter Two. This individual study relied on school level and district level document reviews and open-ended interviews of district level and school level personnel. At the district level, the superintendent and an assistant superintendent of Evergreen Public Schools were interviewed. At the Standmore School, the principal, assistant principal, the instructional coach and three teachers were interviewed.

Data collection included the use of interview protocols that focused on the five domains outlined in Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Universal Framework. This individual study focused on the first domain: the establishment and conveying of a mission and vision.

Data analysis. This project included five cycles of coding. First, using the research questions for this study as a guide, a coding manual was created (Saldana, 2013). This yielded four broad categories of codes: (1) collaboratively built mission and vision; (2) broad and regular communication of a mission/vision; (3) implementation of the mission/vision by identifying goals and priorities; and (4) equity. Documents and interview transcripts were coded using these four categories. After coding each interview using the above four codes, a contact summary was written to identify main concepts, themes, ideas and questions (Miles & Huberman, 2013). The contact summaries broadened the codes to five, but narrowed the titles. The new titles were: (1) collaboration in building a mission and/or vision; (2) clarity of goals aligned to mission/vision; (3) communication; (4) equity; and (5) specific leadership practices. For the next cycle, quotes were extracted directly from the transcript and written on post-it notes. The post-it notes were placed on large pieces of chart paper with five codes and the post-it notes were organized accordingly. This was done to see how much data was collected to answer each element of the research questions. Finally, each post-it note was placed on an index card and each index card was labeled with a code. Approximately two post-it notes were taped to an index card, yielding six stacks of index cards ranging from 10-20 index cards per stack. From this coding, the findings below were derived.

Findings

Collaboratively establishing a vision. For this study, vision is defined as how the organization achieves its mission. Hitt and Tucker (2016) state the importance of collaboratively building a mission and vision in order for an organization to create a shared purpose. This shared purpose among stakeholders leads to shared leadership practices and behaviors that improve student learning (Sanzo, Sherman & Clayton, 2011). Stakeholders are defined as principals,

56

teachers, students, parents and members of the local community. When stakeholders collaboratively build a mission statement, it helps to build consensus about how to achieve the mission. This consensus influences common practices and common, collective practices positively influence student achievement (Robinson et al, 2008).

This study is focused on learning whether mission-driven leadership practices, as explained by Hitt & Tucker in the Universal Framework (2016), existed within the Evergreen Public Schools and Standmore. Hitt and Tucker state that establishing and conveying a mission and vision are effective leadership practices. Under this domain, effective leadership includes strong communication and clear organizational goals. In addition, mission-driven and direction setting leadership practices are similar to elements of transformational leadership and social justice leadership. These leadership theories highlight practices such as motivating others to achieve high goals. These goals may involve equity initiatives to level the playing field for urban students of color. Below are the mission statements for Evergreen Public Schools and Standmore Elementary:

Evergreen Public Schools Mission Statement:

Our mission is to provide all students the opportunity to advance their scholarship with a rigorous core curriculum and high quality instruction. This enables students to discover the expanse of their academic talents, share the quality of their character, and develop the confidence to become conscientious, reflective citizens who are empowered to better our community and our world.

Standmore School Mission Statement:

Students work daily with our instructional staff to become proficient readers and writers who can think critically and apply problem-solving and inquiry-based techniques in math, science, and the social sciences. Teachers use a set of defined, research-based, best practices to ensure that all students receive high-quality instruction, in every classroom, every day.

During the open-ended interviews, each interviewee was showed a copy of the district mission statement. Data collected consistently showed the written mission statements at both the district and school level were not created collaboratively; none of the stakeholder populations were engaged in crafting the district nor the school mission statement. In addition, those interviewed did not know anyone who had helped to shape the district or school mission statements.

For example, the superintendent shared that the district mission statement was developed in collaboration with other district leaders. Collaboration was defined as providing feedback. During an interview, a central office leader confirmed being asked to provide feedback, but also stated, "the vision is the superintendent's." As far a mission and vision as a whole, the superintendent revealed a strong belief in goals instead of mission and vision statements. The superintendent believed that mission and vision statements leave the community confused. He preferred goals, rather than a mission or vision statement, because "they keep in mind what you want to do."

Shared understanding of the vision. For this study, there is little evidence of collaboratively creating a mission or vision statement at the district level. In addition, none of the interviewees could verbally recite the district mission statement. However, there was shared understanding and similar practices regarding implementation. Kirp and Driver (1995) call this "organizational alignment." This is when the "goals of the school chief translate into practice on the ground" (p. 599). Even though the members of the Evergreen Public Schools and Standmore School could not recite the district or school mission or vision, they collectively understood its intent as evidenced by how they conducted and spoke about their work in similar ways. Evidence consistently showed a common understanding of the meaning of the district and school mission statement.

Mission alignment at the school level. Aron, the principal, Lee, the assistant principal, and Jordan, the instructional coach, made up the administrative team at Standmore. Chris, Morgan and Blake were teachers. All three teachers interviewed for this study did not know the school mission/vision of the school. In fact, when the principal was interviewed she brought a copy of the school mission and vision statements with her and at the start of the interview she said, "I heard the teachers did not know the mission and vision of our school, so I brought this with me." She proceeded to read the mission statement and vision statement word for word from a piece of paper. However, what was clear at both the central office and school level was that even without the collective building of a mission or vision statement, there was shared understanding of goals and purpose for their work.

There were eight open-ended interviews conducted at Standmore School for this study. Participants included classroom teachers and building administrators. When asked to share what they believed was the mission and vision of the school, teachers interviewed at Standmore responded using statements such as working hard, being flexible, promoting good citizenship and consistently working together as a staff to plan lessons and consistently review student data (Morgan, Chris and Blake). Aron, the principal added:

> We work together as a team. It's a collegial atmosphere. We look at what is working and what isn't. Teachers must get on the same page. We don't have a lot of time...we are preparing [students] for their next step. We make sure every student gets what he/she needs.

From the central office to the building level, mission statements were not collaboratively crafted by stakeholders. Building consensus around a mission/vision was not a leadership practice engaged at the district level nor the school level. However, the responses of the staff

about the implied mission was consistent and aligned across the district. Throughout the organization, there was a desire to prepare students for the future, helping students to develop into good citizens and the belief that adults consistently working together to meet the various needs of students.

Mission and vision statements were not collaboratively created, but there was evidence that the themes of these documents were being lived out and practiced. The chart below demonstrates statements from staff at Standmore that were aligned:

Table 3.1

Statements from Standmore School staff that demonstrate alignment

	Problem solving statements	Statements about flexibility or making modifications	Statements about high expectations	Statements about teamwork and collaboration
Aron, principal	"We work together to look at what's working and what isn't"	"We modify practices to meet the needs of students" "Everything is on the table"	"We are holding everyone to high standards rather than making excuses"	"Collaboration and Team"
Morgan, teacher		"Flexibility is a big part of our vision, what doesn't work we change"	"High goals and high expectations, expectations are really high"	"It's a team effort We work well together Our goals include collaboration"
Blake, teacher		"Sometimes we are switching off and on; switching during guided reading	"We don't make excuses for the kids and we don't allow them to make excuses	"From the administration on down, everyone's on board" The

		and stuff"	for themselves"	[third] grade teacher and I do everything together. We do a lot of collaborating. We do lot's of PLC's"
Lee	"We are problem solvers. During PLC's [teachers] figure out how to fix it. We don't sweep anything under the rug"	"Kids are always moving in this school, always. Kids are always getting a double dose of somethings. Constant re-teaching" "Aron is not afraid of change. If it's not working, we change it"	"We hold the kids to a high standard"	"We never cancel PLC's"

Hitt and Tucker (2016) posit that having clear goals and expectations is what leads to improved outcomes. However, collaboratively establishing a mission, vision and goals helps to build consensus and is also an effective practice. Evidence at Standmore elementary seems to show that even without collaboration for building consensus, the clarity of goals fostered a common understanding throughout the organization. The aligned statements above may underline and support the importance of the communication of goals, which is another effective leadership practice outlined by Hiit and Tucker.

Alignment between the district level and the school level. The district mission statement was collected for document review using the district web-site. During each interview, participants were provided a copy of the district mission statement downloaded directly from the

district site. The first set of interviews took place at the central office. The superintendent's leadership team included three principal supervisors or deputies who are expected to be in schools, working with principals every day. The superintendent stated that a successful school was one with a strong leader and a committed staff. The superintendent believed these qualities existed at Standmore Elementary. The Superintendent described the Standmore student population as 100% impoverished, but stated that the staff at Standmore did not allow poverty to stand in the way of student achievement. The superintendent also believed educators must find every way to address [learning] gaps and engage in continuous improvement.

Central office leadership, building level leadership and teachers responded similarly when asked to share what the district mission statement conveyed. Many made statements such as: "college and career readiness"; "providing opportunities for all students"; "creating good citizens" and "helping students become successful throughout their K-12 education and beyond." The superintendent similarly stated, "we don't say, this is our [mission] vision. We state how we provide opportunities for all kids." The superintendent went on to say, "The work is hard. We are in this together." The deputy superintendent's response to the same questions was, "The vision is...we do it all together. This is hard work and no one is going to do it alone." The deputy also stated, "we want to empower all students and citizens are empowered." Chris, a teacher at Standmore, similarly responded to the question about the essence of the district mission. She felt the spirit of the district mission is "we all work together...Our job is to make [students] good citizens and community members." In addition, collaboration and citizenship were mentioned by the superintendent, deputy superintendent and Standmore school staff (Aron, Lee, Chris, Morgan and Blake).

Publicly available documents also supported a focus on collaborative cultures, collegiality and global citizenship. The 100 Day Plan crafted during the superintendent's first year identifies four superintendent goals where the above themes were evident and consistent with responses. The superintendent's goals were:

- Provide a supportive, safe and orderly learning environment that emphasizes relationships marked by respectful interactions, acceptance, inclusiveness and our responsibility to one another.

- Work collaboratively to create and sustain excellent instruction that improves students' skills in literacy, critical thinking, collaboration and communication to prepare them for global citizenship.

- Engage responsively with families and higher education, business and community partners to develop and enhance opportunities for all students

- Enhance professional collaborative structures that promote strong, ethical leadership and scholarship.

This kind of consistency between district level staff and school based staff, without any cross collaboration in crafting district level documents, demonstrates an alignment of ideas throughout the organization. Given this alignment among staff who serve students at different levels, it brings to mind how the implied mission is communicated or conveyed. Communication of a mission and vision is an effective leadership practice identified by Hitt and Tucker (2016) and will be addressed by this individual study.

Broad and consistent communication at the district level and school level. Again, for this study, vision is defined as how the organization achieves its mission. Hitt and Tucker (2016) state that the vision must be broadly communicated so that members of the organization

understand how to adjust their daily behaviors. As a result, the research states that consistent practices throughout the organization leads to improved academic outcomes for students (Sun et al., 2015). There is evidence in Evergreen Schools and at Standmore of effective leadership practices when communicating or conveying the vision of the organization.

Interview data revealed that at the start of each year, the superintendent of Evergreen brought together all district and school-based employees. This included all building principals, teachers, guidance counselors, custodial staff, cafeteria workers etc., to share the goals for the year. It was intended to be a fun event with everyone arriving by school bus from their school site or the central office. School staff ride to the location together, wearing matching t-shirts with signs, chants and cheers. The superintendent saw this event as a way to rally and motivate all employees, to thank them for their service and to communicate the focus for the year. There was a guest speaker to motivate the staff and support the goals. At the time of this project, the speaker at this district wide event was Peter DeWitt, author of *Collaborative leadership: Six influences that matter most* (2016). This was the district wide focus for the upcoming school year.

The superintendent, the deputy superintendent and the assistant principal at Standmore all referenced this event during their interviews. This welcome back rally was a format that allowed for the broad communication of the vision since it reached all members of the organization at once. This practice is consistent with Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Model of Leadership, as the framework states that an effective leadership practice is widely conveying the mission, vision or goals of the organization. In addition, Sun and Leithwood (2015) share the importance of setting directions.

At the building level, there was also strong evidence to support the broad and consistent communication of the vision. During open-ended interviews, all three teachers interviewed

(Chris, Morgan and Blake) and the assistant principal (Lee) mentioned the morning meeting at Standmore, a daily meeting, held outside, for all students and staff before classes begin each day. During this whole school event, a chant was repeated. This chant was…."People, people can't you see? Education is the key. People, people don't you know, college is the place we'll go." There were also morning meetings held in each classroom, which were reported to focus on good citizenship.

At the district level and the school level, consistent efforts were made to share the vision or focus of the organization. The superintendent mobilized all district employees at the start of each year, and at the school level, teachers and students gathered to express shared expectations for students on a daily basis. In addition, teachers stated that they met in professional learning communities (PLC's) every week. This format is another way the school communicates its expectations or vision for how teachers should engage in their daily work. This was consistent with the research that states principals often use PLC's to promote a shared vision (Sanzo et al., 2011). At Standmore, PLC's were held in high regard. During her interview, the assistant principal reported, "We always have PLC's. If there isn't a PLC, the power must be out."

The superintendent's 100 Day Plan, created during year one of his leadership, demonstrated how regularly he communicated with the surrounding community. One year, from June to October, Superintendent Kit held at least 15 to 30 community meetings per month. He met with an array of community leaders and stakeholders, sometimes more than once, which was a great opportunity to broadly communicate the district's mission and vision. In fact, on the day the interview was conducted with Kit for this study, he was scheduled to meet with more than one community organization later that evening. The deputy superintendent discussed how Kit also personally greeted all stakeholders during public events. These direction setting leadership

practices at the district level and building level are consistent with Hitt and Tucker's (2016) framework and effective practices outlined by educational researchers (Sun & Leithwood, 2015).

Data and high expectations inform shared goals. A document search and review not only uncovered a district mission statement, but also superintendent goals. However, the superintendent revealed a preference for goals rather than written mission or vision statements. The superintendent believes that goals "drive the work." Although this was not a stated goal on the document downloaded from the website, a goal-oriented practice engaged by the superintendent and his staff included data-driven decision-making. The superintendent shared how the district leadership team conducted an assessment of all schools, over thirty, during the prior year and as a result, the superintendent and district leadership team decided to focus on early literacy as a district wide initiative. They also abandoned a math program and instituted a new math curriculum because data showed that students in the older grades were not learning the concepts. The superintendent also released five school principals by the end of that year.

At the building level, at the time of the interview, school goals were still being designed for the school accountability plan; however the teachers, the instructional coach, the assistant principal and the principal discussed a focus on literacy. Many responses from the staff during open-ended interviews shared a focus on literacy, "especially in the early grades" (Morgan, Lee, Aron and Jordan). Interview data revealed a number of similar statements at the district and building level. A publicly available document also showed a focus on literacy. This report from a district partner states that the Evergreen team was "committed to the goal of improving literacy outcomes for all students."

In conclusion, there appeared to be consistent evidence of how an urban superintendent and an urban school leader employed mission-driven leadership and direction setting practices to

focus the organization in order to attain improved academic achievement for urban students. Although mission/vision statements were not collaboratively crafted by an array of stakeholders in order to build consensus for a shared purpose, there was evidence of clear goals throughout the organization for achieving the mission. Both leaders, the superintendent and the principal, communicated and conveyed the mission and vision broadly. For the superintendent, he did this through district wide events. For the principal, she communicated through structures. These included daily whole school morning meetings and PLCs, and she utilized these as vehicles for sharing expectations.

Color-blindness throughout the organization. For the second research question, Critical Race Theory in education (CRT) was used as a lens to understand potential resistance from stakeholders. Color-blindness is an element of critical race theory in education (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Pierce, 2016).

District leadership, school leadership and school staff did not observe a benefit to creating special programming for a particular racial group to support improved academic outcomes. Interview data did not reveal the use of direction setting leadership practices to support district or school programming, district or school policies nor practices to support the academic achievement of a particular racial group outside of what they were already doing for all students. The interview data also revealed a resistance to using culturally relevant pedagogical practices. The study revealed behaviors and reactions of those interviewed consistent with a strong belief in color-blindness throughout the organization.

The second research question seeks to understand whether mission/driven leadership practices were engaged when aiming to support an equity initiative for a particular racial group, which could be how an organization achieves its mission and vision. All eight district and school

level staff responded "No" to the need for race specific programs; all interviewees did not believe there was a need to focus on a particular racial group (Kit, Charlie, Aron, Lee, Morgan, Blake, Chris and Liz). Responses included words such as, "we are so diverse, so we don't need to focus on race" (Kit) to "focusing on a particular group would be divisive and would take us back to the 1960's" (Blake).

When asked if the school or district had conversations about race, most responded "No" (Kit, Aron, Lee, Morgan and Blake). However, there was support for helping students based on their economic status and language ability. These responses were consistent with elements of CRT, which includes color-blindness and intersectionality. For example, intersectionality is a focus on both race and gender or disability and class at the same time. These intersections reveal more detailed information than when these characteristics are viewed alone. A majority of respondents (Kit, Charlie, Aron, Jordan, Lee, Chris and Blake) preferred to focus on the economic status of students and language ability. This is an example of marginalizing or ignoring the centrality of race and culture, which CRT in education aims to fight against (Ladson-Billings, 2003).

When asked whether there was a district program that focused on supporting a particular group of students by race, the superintendent mentioned a summer program brought to the district's attention by an outside organization. They wanted to support black and Latino males who were underperforming in school. The district provided the names of students and other technical supports for this summer program. Initially, there was a worry about attendance and students struggling with content. However, the superintendent reported, during the interview for this project, that there was perfect attendance and not one young man dropped out. In addition,

the superintendent shared that at the closing ceremonies, a young man revealed that for the first time, he saw himself going to college and succeeding.

When the superintendent was asked whether there could be a district initiative or policy to support a particular racial group, the response was "No." The rationale was consistent with color-blindness. The superintendent shared that their district had a large English Language Learner population and many other racial groups and that there was not a need to focus solely on one racial group. When the same question was posed to the school principal, Aron, the response was very similar. The principal mentioned a need to support all children.

Liberalism or the belief in individual freedoms gave rise to color-blind thinking, as liberals believe race is only a factor in egregious situations (Crenshaw et al., 1995). However, racial injustice permeates American society. Incarceration rates for drug use is one example. According to Alexander, "the majority of illegal drug users and dealers nationwide are white, [however] three-fourths of all people imprisoned for drug offenses have been black or Latino" (2010, p. 98). Milner's work highlights the disproportionate number of black and Latinos who live in poverty. In 2013, he wrote that blacks were 12% of the US population and Latinos were 15% of the US population, but combined, they comprised over 50% of low-income families in the United States. Being color-blind is viewed as good, right and even ethical (Alexander, 2010, p. 100). However, the facts expressed above, among a host of others, renders color-blindness a myth (Howard, 2016).

Color-blindness prevents the leaders of Evergreen Public Schools from embracing and recognizing readily available qualitative and quantitative data. For example, the summer program designed for black and Latino males who struggled in school was by all accounts a success, as reported by the superintendent. During the academic year, these students did not

attend school on a regular basis and had low grade point averages, which is what qualified them for the summer program. All successfully completed the program and at the closing ceremony, many discussed how for the first time in their lives, they saw themselves going to college. Unfortunately, the superintendent did not observe the advantages of replicating this program in order to reach these same students who are currently underperforming in schools under his purview. Color-blindness and a lack of cultural proficiency prevented the school leader from adequately moving towards providing support to a subgroup of students within the district.

Resistance to conversations about race was present at the school level. During the interview, Aron relayed a story about a teacher saying to a student that their hair was "nappy." The principal recognized the inappropriateness of this statement and made the teacher apologize to the child's parent. However, the principal missed the opportunity to build the cultural awareness and cultural proficiency of her staff. While the principal expressed a desire to support all students, this stance prevented her from seeing the individual needs of students of color who are often subjugated to name calling in and out of school. Students of color do not enjoy the same social position as whites, and are therefore subject to different experiences, including discriminatory practices and inequity (Brown, 1992). Bridging students realities with what they strive to be in the future is an example of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000). Based on the responses to interview questions, this was not something Evergreen Public Schools and Standmore could envision themselves doing.

During the open-ended interviews, a question was asked whether the district and the high performing school had conversations about race. The response to this question varied, but there were some responses in the affirmative (Charlie and Chris). When following up on this, the conversations about race mostly centered on negative experiences such as what to do when

someone says something inappropriate. The conversations about race were also conducted in relation to reviewing district policies and bulletins for appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

To summarize the findings for this study, the interview data shows that even without collective creation of a mission statement, there was alignment at the district level and at the school level for an implied mission. There were clear goals embraced throughout the organization. However, direction setting leadership practices were not engaged around issues of race or promoting programs to support the educational advancement of students belonging to a particular racial group.

Discussion

Most urban schools are attended by historically marginalized student populations who live in poverty (Milner, 2015). These schools are often underperforming and struggle to improve outcomes for students (Darling-Hammond, 2006). However, there are urban public schools able to rise above the challenge, achieving academic success with their students. The goal of this study was to understand whether mission-driven and direction setting school leadership practices outlined by Hitt and Tucker (2016) were present in a high performing urban school, serving the same student population as schools within the same district. In addition, given that most students of color attend urban public schools, this study aimed to learn whether there were equity initiatives to support the academic achievement of certain racial sub-groups. The subsequent learnings from this investigation can be summarized into four categories. These categories are: monitoring implementation; visibility and engagement; alignment; and color-blindness.

Monitoring implementation. Mission, vision and goals are common strategies for helping an organization function effectively. These practices help build a common understanding (Gurley, 2014). Scholars believe that goal-oriented leaders help focus the organization to

improve academic outcomes for students (Hallinger, 2005). This study found goal-focused

leadership at the district and school level. Evidence collected demonstrated that the mission and

vision of the district and the school were not collaboratively generated by an array of

stakeholders. In addition, evidence showed that these documents were not known by those

interviewed and could not be recited. However, this study uncovered common beliefs and

common expectations regarding an understanding of the work and goals to be achieved. There

was alignment throughout the organization and this is consistent with Hitt and Tucker's

framework (2016).

At both the district level and the school level, goals were clear. At the time of this project,

there was a clear focus on improving the literacy skills of students in the early grades. More than

just a clear goal, the practices of central office and at the building level supported

implementation. Superintendent Kit shared that he did not believe in spending time writing a

mission statement, but preferred establishing goals as a primary driver. There was no evidence

whether goals were commonly crafted, but there is evidence of focused implementation and tight

cohesion (Rozenholz, 1985). In addition, to support implementation, leaders were visible and in

the field observing practice.

It was superintendent Kit's expectation that his deputy superintendent and other principal

supervisors were working in schools every day, for most of the day. He did not expect his

principal supervisors to be in the central office; they were "to be in schools where the work

happens" (Kit). Monitoring student performance in relation to goals is likely to improve

academic rigor (Leithwood et al. 2010).

Aron, the school principal, was also visible throughout the building over the course of

every school day, closely monitoring teacher practice. Aron stated that instructional leadership

was her most important work. Instructional leadership is defined as planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and has an effect size of .42 (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 661-662). At the Standmore School, structures were in place to support implementation. Flexible scheduling for students was also an expectation and a structure to allow students the instruction they needed to achieve academic goals.

At both the district and the school level, there was a focus on getting the work done. They believed in clear goals along with application and this practice appears to support student achievement. If staff were unable to implement practices to meet stated goals, the superintendent was clear about exiting school leaders who could not improve their practice as he fired or relieved five principals in one year. Similarly, Aron, the school principal shared the same approach that if teachers were unable to implement practices, they could not remain in their current role. Therefore, it appears that implementation and monitoring are essential practices to be engaged by school leaders to impact student learning as this is a way to improve student learning.

Visibility and engagement. In addition to monitoring implementation, there was evidence of consistent collaboration. There were many comments made by central office staff and building level staff that included constant collaboration with each other. The superintendent clearly valued community partnerships as evidenced by his schedule the first three months of school; meeting with 10-25 community organizations each month. Similar to the superintendent, the school principal consistently engaged her community of teachers.

Working in concert with others was highly valued and goes beyond just showing up, but allowing the community and the staff to have a voice. The superintendent and principal were not only present, but interacted with their constituents and listening to them. For example, at the

central office level, district leaders described how Aron allowed her teachers to express their ideas during meetings and professional development (Charlie). Kit and Aron were not afraid of engaging their respective communities and listening to their ideas. This could be the reason that building a mission and vision did not seem to be as important because these leaders were constantly listening and engaging their communities.

Alignment. Both leaders demonstrated direction setting leadership practices as outlined by Sun and Leithwood (2015). These leaders focused the work of the district and the schools by their presence and collaborative approach. As the research states, tight alignment between the district and school supports coherence (Rosenholz, 1985.) In addition, the effective practices at the district level should mirror those at the school level (Trujillo, 2013). There was clear alignment among teachers as evidenced by several statements during interviews conducted for this study.

Color-blindness. The reliance on meritocracy, neutrality and liberalism are consistent with Critical Race Theory in education, and these themes can be seen throughout the Evergreen Public Schools, starting with the opening line of the district mission statement: "Our mission is to provide all students the opportunity to advance their scholarship." One may infer that this phrase communicates that it is up to the student to take advantage of the opportunities the district provides and this inference is consistent with "pulling oneself up by the bootstraps" thinking, the essence of meritocracy (Mijs, 2015). Critical race theorists argue that meritocracy and color-blindness are ideologies that maintain inequity and subordination (Yosso et al., 2004). The refusal to see students for who they are racially and culturally leads to a refusal to understand the position these students hold in American society because of their race. In essence, color-blindness is the refusal to acknowledge any difference and this stance means that the status quo

will remain (Khalifa et al., 2015). The status quo is that there is a dominant race and a subordinate race and critical race theorists argue there are structures in place to maintain this dynamic (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Admittedly, these structures are difficult to see (Taylor, 2009). However, the choice to be color-blind or rely on statements like "we support all children" was a firm belief at the top levels of the organization and if this remains, supporting all children with what they need is unlikely because urban students of color need educators who can help them bridge their current and future realities (Gay, 2000).

Results of this study align with the widely accepted concept among educational scholars that leadership matters for student learning (Louis et al., 2010). Leadership is also essential for ushering reform efforts to address inequity (Rorrer et al., 2008). As the achievement gap is growing wider, addressing inequity is needed in many urban schools that have been a failing to educate marginalized populations (Noguera, 2008).

There was alignment between district leadership at Evergreen Public Schools and school leadership at Standmore on many levels, including color-blindness. Both the superintendent and the school principal did not support the establishment of programs specifically for students of color. When asked if they ever saw themselves doing this, the response from both leaders was "No" (Kit, Aron). Rorrer et al. (2008) state that at the district level, instructional leadership involves educating the school community as to what programs should be provided to service students effectively along with what outcomes should be achieved and these outcomes may be achieved through reform efforts that address inequity. The superintendent did not believe the district needed to identify programs for specific racial groups because the district is "so diverse." However, he observed the success of a summer program coordinated by a community partner for black and Latino males but could not embrace this as something the district could also

implement. Due to a fixed stance against any programs based on race, there were missed opportunities potentially motivated by a desire not to see race or have courageous conversations about race. This stance is akin to color-blindness; a refusal to acknowledge difference (Howard, 2016; Khalifa et al, 2015).

Color-blindness also existed at the Standmore School. Aron believed in supporting all children. Supporting "all children" comes across as a broad social justice strategy, but Taylor (2009) argues that this is a "color-blind strategy" (p. 124). Color-blindness, at its core, is a refusal to see or acknowledge race or culture and this refusal does not allow for addressing inequity or inequitable practices. For example, as mentioned above, during the interview Aron shared a story about a student being told that their hair was "nappy." The assistant principal at Standmore shared a story about a study she learned that involved the low enrollment of Hispanic students in AP courses.

Color-blindness renders the students of color at Evergreen Public Schools and the Standmore School invisible. In addition, their needs as urban students of color likewise become invisible. This lack of recognition does not allow for culturally responsive teaching, which is a pedagogical practice to affirm and enhance student learning (Gay, 2000). Nor does it allow for inequity to be identified and rooted out. Researchers state that in order for inequity to be addressed and maintained, both district and school leaders must work in concert with each other (Rorrer et al., 2006). The Evergreen Public Schools and the Standmore School are missing the opportunity to achieve their ultimate mission and vision of preparing students for a global society if they continue to remain color-blind.

Transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is a potential way forward. Transformational leadership involves setting a clear path to attain high goals. Addressing

inequity as a district is a high goal, and the ability to address inequity means that one must take the courageous step to no longer be color-blind. By remaining color-blind, one is unable to see inequity within the organization. A transformational leader must be willing to observe structures and practices that may be disadvantaging certain populations of students. The real life examples of name-calling and a successful summer program for black and Latino males did not create a sense of urgency on the part of the superintendent nor the principal, but the opportunity remains.

Transformational leaders are interested in creating an organization that makes our society more just. Color-blindness assumes that all are equal when this is not the case. Whites and people of color occupy different positions in our society (Brown, 1992) and therefore have different experiences. Allowing for the reality of one's lived experience is consistent with Critical Race Theory in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and consistent with culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2000). If the leaders of Evergreen Public Schools and the Standmore School want to improve upon their success with students of color who live in poverty, they may consider engaging in a reform effort to bring about social justice. Authors Ward et al. (2015) report that social justice leadership is an underutilized practice. Ward et.al (2015) further discuss three practices school leaders could engage to promote equity: (1) critical reflection; (2) cultivating a common vision of equity; and (3) exhibiting democratic leadership by practicing "transforming dialogues" that value the voice of students by developing action plans in response to student issues (p. 340).

What this study surprisingly uncovered was that the resistance to possible equity initiatives was within the organization and at the top levels of the district and the school. Neither the superintendent nor school principal felt the need to focus on issues of race. Research supports

the impact district and school leaders have on direction-setting (Robinson et al, 2008, p. 661) and impacting student outcomes, so there is hope and this study aims to offer a way forward.

Race is part of daily life in U.S. society; it is not rare, but normal (Taylor, 2009, p.4). Culturally responsive practices offer ways to utilize the knowledge and experiences of students in order to improve academic outcomes in the classroom. Critical Race Theory in education is a lens that can be used to dismantle inequitable structures at the district level that can lead to school failure (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006). This work is not easy, but necessary if the goal is to truly support all children.

Study Limitations

This study is a snapshot of one district and one school, at one point in time. Therefore, ideas cannot be generalized. In addition, this study included a small sample size; a total of 8 interviews were conducted and analyzed. Interviewees included those with a range of experiences; some educators had less than five years of teaching experience while others had over thirty. Participants' responses to questions were based on their personal and professional knowledge. This study was not designed to understand how participants interpreted certain interview questions, especially those focused on race.

Implications for future study

Given the evidence of strong coherence between the district level and the school level and the academic results at the Standmore School, there might be an implication for future study on how districts and schools work together to improve student learning. The district plays a role in aligning resources to student needs (Rorrer et al., 2008) and this alignment builds internal coherence. The alignment of resources ultimately reflects the organization's purpose and commitment. This commitment generates opportunities to build capacity in order to produce

desired outcomes at the school level. The support from the district in collaboration with schools ultimately leads to success and sustainability (Firestone, 1989).

Another implication for research might include identifying practice-specific steps for how an organization becomes culturally proficient and equity minded. Color-blindness not only renders people of color invisible, it also renders white privilege invisible (Taylor, p. 8). In addition, while the failure to see race or culture is considered to be inclusive and socially just (Taylor, p. 124), additional research is needed on how school leaders can detangle myth from reality in a way that is fruitful and courageous. For high performing schools like Standmore, who have figured out how to educate students living in poverty, unpacking and dealing with race and culture would only enhance their work. It would also challenge the staff, students, families and the community to remain engaged in truly preparing and empowering students to reach their greatest potential, which is the goal of every educator.

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. This study (2018) looked specifically at how leadership established practices that are aligned to a purpose consistent with the articulation of the mission and vision. Ryan (2018) 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.

---

[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 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 curricula 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 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 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" (p. 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.

References

Allen, S. (2008). Eradicating the achievement gap: History, education, and reformation. *Black History Bulletin*, 71(1), 13-17.

Anderson, J. (2007). The historical context for understanding the test score gap. *The National Journal of Urban Education and Practice*. 1(1), 1-22.

Antrop-Gonzalez, R. (2006). "School as sanctuary" concept in multicultural urban education: implications for small high school reform. *Curriculum Inquiry,* 36 (3), 273 – 301.

Ärlestig H. & Törnsen M. (2014). Classroom observations and supervision – essential dimensions of pedagogical leadership. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *28*(7), 856–868.

Aveling, N. (2007). Anti-racism in schools: A question of leadership? *Discourse:Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 28, 69–85.

Avidov-Ungar, O., Friedman, I. & Olshtain, E. (2014). Empowerment amongst teachers holding leadership positions. *Teachers and Teaching*, *20*(6), 704–720.

Bartolome, L. (1994). Beyond the methods fetish: Toward a humanizing pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 64, 173 - 194.

Bedard, G. & Mombourquette, C., (2015). Conceptualizing alberta district leadership practices: a cross-case analysis. *Leadership and Policy in Schools,* 14, 233-255.

Benham, M. K. (1997). Silences and serenades: The journeys of three ethnic minority women school leaders. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 28, 280–307.

Bird, J. J., Wang, C., Watson, J. & Murray, L. (2012). Teacher and principal perceptions of authentic leadership: Implications for trust, engagement, and intention to return. *Journal of School Leadership*, *22*(May 2012), 425–461.

Blanchett, W. J., Mumford, V. & Beachum, F. (2005). Urban school failure and disproportionality in a post-brown era. *Remedial & Special Education*, 26(2), 70-81.

Blazar, D., Litke, E. & Barmore, J. (2016). What does it mean to be ranked a "high" or "low" value-added teacher? Observing differences in instructional quality across districts. *American Educational Research Journal*, *53*(2), 324-359.

Boberg, J. E. & Bourgeois, S. J. (2016). The effects of integrated transformational leadership on achievement. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *54*(3), 357-374.

Books, S. (2007). What are we talking about when we talk about "Closing the achievement gap"? *International Journal of Learning,* 14(2), 11-17.

Borko, H., Wolf, S. A., Simone, G. & Uchiyama, K. P. (2003). Schools in transition: reform efforts and school capacity in Washington state. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 25 (2), 171-201.

Boston College, (2017). Regulated University Data Chart. (2017). Retrieved from http://www.bc.edu/offices/help/security/data-chart.html#2

Bourke, K. B. & Brown, C. G. (2014). Hiring perspectives of secondary school principals. *National Forum of Educational Administration & Supervision Journal*, *31*(3), 60–71.

Braun, H. I., Wang, A., Jenkins, F. & Weinbaum, E. (2006). The black-white achievement gap: Do state policies matter? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 14(8), 1-107.

Brown, C. & Militello, M. (2016). Principal's perceptions of effective professional development in schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *54*(6).

Brown III, G. (2016). Leadership's influence: A case study of an elementary principal's indirect impact on student achievement. *Education*, *137*(1), 101–115.

Brown, K. & Wynn, S. (2009). Finding, supporting, and keeping: The role of the principal in teacher retention issues. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *8*(1), 37-63.

Brown, P. (2003). The opportunity trap: Education and employment in a global economy. *European Educational Research Journal*, *2*(1), 141–179. http://doi.org/10.2304/eerj.2003.2.1.4

Bryk, A., Gomez, L., Grunow, A. & LeMahieu, P. (2016). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press.

Bryk, A.S. and Schneider, B. (2002), *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York, NY: Russell Sage.

Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Easton, J. Q. & Luppescu, S. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cannon, J., Tenuto, P. & Kitchel, A. (2013). Idaho secondary principals' perceptions of CTE teachers' professional development needs. *Career and Technical Education Research*, *38*(3), 257–272.

Cawelti, G. (1984). Behavior patterns of effective principals. *Educational Leadership*, 41(5), 3.

Cheng, H. H. & Yang, H. L. (2011). Student team projects in information systems development: Measuring collective creative efficacy. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, *27*(6).

Chughtai, A. A. & Buckley, F. (2009). Linking trust in the principal to school outcomes. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *23*(7), 574–589.

Clotfelter, C., Ladd, H. F., Vigdor, J. & Wheeler, J. (2006). High-poverty schools and the distribution of teachers and principals. *North Carolina Law Review*, 85, 1345–1379

Cohen-Vogel, L. (2011). Staffing to the test: Are today's school personnel practices evidence based? *Educational Evaluation & Policy Analysis, 33*(4), 483-505.

Cooke, N. J., Kiekel, P. A. & Helm, E. E. (2001). Comparing and validating measures of team knowledge. In *Proceedings of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Annual Meeting 45*(4), 361-365. Sage CA: Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

Cooper, C. W. (2009). Performing cultural work in demographically changing schools: Implications for expanding transformative leadership frameworks. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 45, 694–724.

Cosner, S. (2009). Building organizational capacity through trust. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *45*(2), 248–291.

Cosner, S. & Jones, M. F. (2016). Leading school-wide improvement in low-performing schools facing conditions of accountability. *Journal Of Educational Administration, 54*(1), 41-57.

Cranston, J. (2011). Relational trust: The glue that binds a professional learning community. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, *57*(1), 59–72.

Creswell, J. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. India: Pearson Education, Inc.

Crum, K. S. & Sherman, W. H. (2008). Facilitating high achievement: High school principals' reflections on their successful leadership practices. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *46*, 562–580.

Daly, A. J. (2009). Rigid response in an age of accountability: The potential of leadership and trust. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *45*(2), 168–216.

DeArmond, M., Gross, B. & Goldhaber, D. (2010). Is it better to be good or lucky? Decentralized teacher selection in 10 elementary schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *46*(3), 322–362.

DeRosa, P., "Facing the fear: White leaders, diverse communities, and racism", ChangeWorks Consulting, 2002.

Desimone, L. M. & Le Floch, K. C. (2004). Are we asking the right questions? Using cognitive interviews to improve surveys in education research. *Educational evaluation and policy analysis*, *26*(1), 1-22.

Donaldson, M. L. (2013). Principals' approaches to cultivating teacher effectiveness: Constraints and opportunities in hiring, assigning, evaluating, and developing teachers. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 49*(5), 838-882.

Drago-Severson, E. (2007). Helping teachers learn: Principals as professional development leaders. *The Teachers College Record*, *109*(1), 70–125. Retrieved from http://www.tcrecord.org/content.asp?contentid=12737

Drago-Severson, E. (2012). New Opportunities for Principal Leadership: Shaping School Climates for Enhanced Teacher Development. *Teachers College Record*, *114*, 1–44.

Dutta, V. & Sahey, S. (2016). School leadership and its impact on student achievement; the mediating role of school climate and teacher job satisfaction. *International Journal of Educational Management, 30*(6), 941. doi:10.1108/IJEM-12-2014-0170

Edmonds, R. (1982). Programs of school improvement: An overview. *Educational Leadership*, 40(3), 4–12.

Eilers, A. M. & Camacho, A. (2007). School culture change in the making leadership factors that matter. *Urban Education*, *42*(6), 616-637.

Engel, M. & Finch, M. A. (2015). Staffing the classroom: How urban principals find teachers and make hiring decisions. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *14*(1), 12–41.

Epstein, J., (1987). Toward a theory of family – school connections: Teacher practices and parent involvement. In K. Hurrelman, F. Kaumann & F. Losel (Eds.), *Social Intervention: Potential and constraints* (pp.121-136). New York: DeGruyter.

Evans, L. (2014). Leadership for professional development and learning: enhancing our understanding of how teachers develop. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *44*(2), 179–198.

Francera, S. F. & Bliss, J. R. (2011). Instructional leadership influence on collective teacher efficacy to improve school achievement. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *10*(3), 349–370.

Freeman, E., Wertheim, E. H. & Trinder, M. (2014). Teacher perspectives on factors facilitating implementation of whole school approaches for resolving conflict. *British Educational Research Journal*, *40*(5), 847-868.

Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership & sustainability: System thinkers in action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Gaffney, M. & Faragher, R. (2010). Sustaining improvement in numeracy: Developing pedagogical content knowledge and leadership capabilities in tandem. *Mathematics Teacher Education & Development, 12*(2), 72-83.

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, practice and research.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Gay, G. & Howard, T. C. (2000). Multicultural teacher education for the 21st century. *The Teacher Educator*, *36*(1), 1-16.

Ghamrawi, N. (2011). Trust me: your school can be better--A message from teachers to principals. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *39*(3), 333–348.

Goddard, R. D., Goddard, Y. L., Kim, E. & Miller, R. (2015). A theoretical and empirical analysis of the roles of instructional leadership, teacher collaboration, and collective efficacy beliefs in support of student learning. *American Journal of Education*, *121*(4), 501–530.

Goddard, Y. L., Neumerski, C. M., Goddard, R. D., Salloum, S. J. & Berebitsky, D. (2010). A multilevel exploratory study of the relationship between teachers' perceptions of principals' instructional support and group norms for instruction in elementary schools. *Elementary School Journal, 111*(2), 336-357.

Goldring, E., Huff, J., Spillane & J. P., Barnes, C. (2009). Measuring the learning-centered leadership expertise of school principals. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 8, 197-228.

Good, T. L. (2008). In the midst of comprehensive school reform: Principals' perspectives. *Teachers College Record*, *110*(11), 2341-2360.

Grayson, J. L. & Alvarez, H. K. (2008). School climate factors relating to teacher burnout: A mediator model. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *24*(5), 1349–1363. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2007.06.005

Griffin, S. W. & Green, R. L. (2013). Transforming high poverty, underperforming schools: Practices, processes, and procedures. *National Forum of Applied Educational Research Journal*, *26* (1 & 2), 77-93.

Groves, R. M., Fowler Jr, F. J., Couper, M. P., Lepkowski, J. M., Singer, E. & Tourangeau, R. (2011). *Survey methodology*, (561). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Hallinger, P. (2010). Leadership for learning: Lessons from 40 years of empirical research. *Journal of Educational Administration, 49*(2), 125. doi:10.1108/09578231111116699

Hallinger, P., Bickman, L. & Davis, K. (1996). School context, principal leadership, and student reading achievement. *The Elementary School Journal,* 96 (5), 527 – 549.

Hallinger, P. & Heck, R. (1996). Reassessing the principal's role in school effectiveness. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *32*(1), 5–44.

Hallinger, P. & Heck, R. (2010). Collaborative leadership: Effects on school improvement. *The Elementary School Journal, 111*(2), 1.

Hammes, P. S., Bigras, M. & Crepaldi, M. A. (2014). Validity and bias of academic achievement measures in the first year of elementary school. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, *39*(1), 3–18. http://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2014.933473

Hammond, Z., (2015). Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin.

Harris, D. N. & Herrington, C. D. (2006). Accountability, standards, and the growing achievement gap: Lessons from the past half-century. *American Journal of Education*, *112*(2), 209–238. http://doi.org/10.1086/498995

Handford, V. & Leithwood, K. (2013). Why teachers trust school leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *51*(2), 194–212.

Hitt, D. H. & Tucker, P. D. (2016). Systematic review of key leader practices found to influence student achievement: A unified framework. *Review of Educational Research, 86*(2), 531-569.

Hoffmann, E. A. (2007). Open-ended interviews, power, and emotional labor. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *36*(3), 318-346.

Honig, M. I., Lorton, J. S. & Copland, M. A. (2009). Urban District Central Office Transformation for Teaching and Learning Improvement: Beyond a Zero-Sum Game. *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, *108*(1), 21-40.

Hynes, J. W., Sullivan, S. L. & Yeager, H. L. (2011). What characteristics are important to principals when hiring new teachers? *National Forum of Educational Administration & Supervision Journal*, *28*(3), 49–67.

Ingle, K., Rutledge, S. & Bishop, J. (2011). Context matters: Principals' sensemaking of teacher hiring and on-the-job performance. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *49*(5), 579–610.

Ipka, V. (2003). At-risk children in re-segregated schools: An analysis of the achievement gap. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, *30*(4), 294–304.

Jacobson, S. (2011). Leadership effects on student achievement and sustained school success. *Intl Jnl of Educational Mgt, 25*(1), 33-44. doi:10.1108/09513541111100107

Jacobson, S. L., Brooks, S., Giles, C., Johnson, L. & Ylimaki, R. (2007). Successful leadership in three high-poverty urban elementary schools. *Leadership and Policy in Schools,* 6, 291 – 317.

Jager, L. & Denessen, E. (2015). Within-teacher variation of causal attributions of low achieving students. *Social Psychology of Education*, *18*(3), 517-530.

Jennings, J. & Sohn, H. (2014). Measure for measure: How proficiency-based accountability systems affect inequality in academic achievement. *Sociology of Education*, *87*(2), 125–141. http://doi.org/10.1177/0038040714525787

Johnson, P. E. & Chrispeels, J. H. (2010). Linking the central office and its schools for reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *46*(5), 738-775.

Kelehear, Z. (2010). Pass the Crayons: Leadership, art production, and communities of practice introduction. *International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership*, *5*(10), 1–13.

Kersten, T. (2008). Teacher hiring practices: Illinois principals' perspectives. *The Educational Forum*, *72*(4), 355–368.

Khalifa, M. (2012). A re-new-ed paradigm in successful urban school leadership principal as community leader. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 48,* 424-467.

Klar, H. W. (2012). Fostering distributed instructional leadership: a sociocultural perspective of leadership development in urban high schools. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 11, 356 - 390.

Koballa Jr., T, Bradbury, L. & Deaton, C.M. (2008). Realize your mentoring success. *Science Teacher*, *75*(5), 43-47.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). *Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy.* American Educational Research Journal, *32*, (3), 465-491.

Lai, E. (2015). Principal leadership practices in exploiting situated possibilities to build teacher capacity for change. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, *15*(2), 165–175.

Laprade, K. (2011). Removing Instructional Barriers: One Track at a Time. Education, 131(4), 740-752.

Lambert, L.G. (2007). Lasting leadership: Toward sustainable school improvement. *Journal of Educational Change*, *8*(4), 311-322.

Leis, M. & Rimm-Kaufman, S. E. (2015). Principal actions related to increases in teacher-principal trust. *Journal of School Public Relations*, *36*(3), 260–291.

Leithwood, K. & Levin, B. (2004). Approaches to the evaluation of leadership programs and leadership effects. London: Department for Education and Skills.

Leithwood, K. & Jantzi, D. (2006). Transformational school leadership for large-scale reform: Effects on students, teachers, and their classroom practices. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 17*(2), 201. doi:10.1080/09243450600565829

Leithwood, K. & Wahlstrom, K. L. (2008). Linking leadership to student learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *44*(4), 455–457.

Leithwood, K., Patten, S. & Jantzi, D., (2010). Testing a conception of how school leadership influences student learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly,* 46(5) 671-706.

Leithwood, K. A. (2012). *The Ontario leadership framework 2012 research foundations: With a discussion of the research foundations*. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: The Institute for Educational Leadership. Retrieved from http://iel.immix.ca/storage/6/1360068388/Final_Research_Report_EN_REV_Feb_4_2013.pdf

Leithwood, K. & Sun, J. (2012). The nature and effects of transformational school leadership: A meta-analytic review of unpublished research. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *48*(3), 387-423.

LeMahieu, P. G., Nordstrum, L. E. & Gale, D. (2017). Positive deviance : Learning from positive anomalies. *Quality Assurance in Education*, *25*(1), 109–124. http://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-12-2016-0083

Leonard, L. (2008). Preserving the Learning Environment: Leadership of Time, 12 (16). *IEJLL: International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning*, *12*.

Levine, D. U. & Lezotte, L. W. (1990). Unusually effective schools: A review and analysis of research and practice.

Lewis, C. W., James, M., Hancock, S. & Hill-Jackson, V. (2008). Framing African American students' success and failure in urban settings. *Urban Education,* 43(2), 127-153.

Lezotte, L. (1991). *Correlates of effective schools: The first and second generation*. Okemos, MI: Effective Schools Products.

Li, L., Hallinger, P. & Ko, J. (2016). Principal leadership and school capacity effects on teacher learning in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *30*(1), 76–100.

Lindsey, R. B., Robins, K. N. & Terrell, R. D. (2003). *Cultural proficiency: A manual for school leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., Anderson, S. E., Michlin, M. & Mascall, B. (2010). Learning from leadership: Investigating the links to improved student learning. *Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement/University of Minnesota and Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto*, *42*, 50.

Lozinak, K. (2016). Mentor Matching Does Matter. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, *83*(1), 12-24.

Lumpkin, A. (2008). Three keys to success for principals (and their teachers). *Kappa Delta Pi Record, 45*(1), 22-25.

Lunenburg, F. C. (2010). (2010). Creating a professional learning community. *National Forum of Educational Administration & Supervision Journal*, *27*(4), 1–7.

Lyons, R. & Barnett, D. (2011). School audits and school improvement: Exploring the variance point concept in Kentucky's elementary, middle, and high Schools. *International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership, 6*(1-6), 1-12.

Ma, X., Shen, J. & Krenn, H. Y. (2014). The relationship between parental involvement and adequate yearly progress among urban, suburban, and rural schools. School Effectiveness & School Improvement, 25(4), 629-650. doi:10.1080/09243453.2013.862281

Marks, H. H. M. & Printy, S. S. M. (2003). Principal leadership and school performance: An integration of transformational and instructional leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *39*(3), 370–397. http://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X03253412

MacGregor, S. K. & Vavasseur, C. B. (2015). Online communities of practice. *Journal of School Leadership*, *25*(4), 758–789.

Mason, R. W. & Schroeder, M. P. (2010). Principal hiring practices: Toward a reduction of uncertainty. *The Clearing House*, *83*(5), 186–193.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) (n.d.). *Profiles Home: Profiles Help - About the Data.* Retrieved February 22, 2017 from: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/help/data.aspx?section=students

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) (n.d.). *School and District Profiles: Accountability Report.* Retrieved February 18, 2017 from: Mass.gov: Executive Office of Education. (n.d.). *Commissioner's Districts* [Data File]. Retrieved from http://www.mass.gov/edu/searchresults.html?output=xml_no_dtd&client=mg_edu&proxystylesheet=massgov&getfields=*&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&tlen=215&sitefolder=edu&filter=0&requiredfields=&startsite=EOEDUx&q=commissioner%27s+districts&site=EOEDUx&x=0&y=0

Maas, T. & Lake, R. (2015). Effective charter and traditional school characteristics: Aligning findings for informed policy making. *Journal of School Choice*, *9*(2), 165–178. http://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2015.1028311

May, H. & Supovitz, J. A. (2011). The scope of principal efforts to improve instruction. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 47*(2), 332-352.

McCann, T.M., Johannessen, L. R. & Leibenberg, E., (2010). Mentoring matters. *English Journal*, *99*(6), 86-88.

Mehta, J. (2013). From Bureaucracy to Profession: Remaking the Educational Sector for the Twenty-First Century. *Harvard Educational Review*, 83(3), 463-488.

Merriam, S. B. & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Mertz, N. T. (2010). Teacher selection and school leader effects. *Journal of School Leadership*, *20*(2), 184–207.

Mestry, R., Moonsammy-Koopasammy, I. & Schmidt, M. (2014). The instructional leadership role of primary school principals. *Education as Change*, *17*(1, SI), S49--S64.

Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings. (2011). America's diverse future: Initial glimpses at the U.S. child population from the 2010 census. Washington, DC: William H. Frey.

Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA; Sage.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M. & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Milner, R. H. (2008). Critical race theory and interest convergence as analytic tools in teacher education policies and practices. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(4), 332-346.

Milner, R. H. (2012). Beyond a test score: Explaining opportunity gaps in educational practice. *Journal of Black Studies*, 43(6), 693-718.

Milner IV, H. R. (2015). *Rac (e) ing to Class: Confronting Poverty and Race in Schools and Classrooms*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Milner, H.R., Murray, I.E., Farinde, A.A. & Delale-O'Connor (2015). Outside of schoolmatters: What we need to know in Urban Environments, *Equity & Excellence in Education, 48:4,* 529-548.

Morse, J. M. (2003). Principles of mixed methods and multi-method research design. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*, 189-208, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Moye, M. J., Henkin, A. B. & Egley, R. J. (2005). Teacher-principal relationships. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *43*(3), 260–277.

Murphy, J., Elliott, S. N., Goldring, E. & Porter, A. C. (2006). *Learning-centered leadership: A conceptual foundation*. *The Wallace Foundation*. New York, New York.

Murphy, J. & Torre, D. (2014). Creating productive cultures in schools: for students, teachers and parents. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin.

Ovando, M. N. & Ramirez, A. (2007). Principals' instructional leadership within a teacher performance appraisal system: Enhancing students' academic success. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, *20*(1–2), 85–110.

Page, C. S. & Kemp, A. T. (2015). Education, the South, and the new hegemonic bloc. *Curriculum & Teaching Dialogue*, 17(1/2), 45-62.

Papa, F. & Baxter, I. (2008). Hiring teachers in New York's public schools: Can the principal make a difference? *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *7*(1), 87–117.

Parker, M. A. (2010). Mentoring Practices to Keep Teachers in School. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, *8*(2).

Pascale, R. T., Sternin, J. & Sternin, M. (2010). *The power of positive deviance: How unlikely innovators solve the world's toughest problems*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Press.

Phillips, D. K. & Carr, K. (2007). Illustrations of the analytic memo as reflexivity for preservice teachers. Educational Action Research, 15(4), 561-575. doi:10.1080/09650790701664005

Portin, B. S., Russell, F. A., Samuelson, C., Knapp, M. S. (2013). Leading learning-focused teacher leadership in urban high schools. *Journal of School Leadership,* 23, 220 - 252.

Price, H. E. (2011). Principal-teacher interactions: How affective relationships shape principal and teacher attitudes. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *48*(1), 39–85.

Printy, S. M. (2007). Leadership for teacher learning: A community of practice perspective. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *44*(2), 187–226.

Purkey, S. & Smith, M. (1983). Effective Schools: A Review. *The Elementary School Journal*, *83*(4), 426–452.

Puzio, K., Newcomer, S. N. & Goff, P. (2015). Supporting literacy differentiation: The principal's role in a community of practice. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, *54*(2), 135–162.

Ramsey, C. M., Spira, A. P., Parisi, J. M. & Rebok, G. W. (2016). School climate: perceptual differences between students, parents, and school staff. *School Effectiveness & School Improvement, 27*(4), 629-641.

Rayfield, J. & Wilson, E. (2009). Exploring principals' perceptions of supervised agricultural experience. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, *50*(1), 70–80.

Reed, L. & Swaminathan, R. (2014). An urban school leader's approach to school improvement; toward contextually responsive leadership. *Urban Education, 51*(9), 1096. doi:10.1177/0042085914553675

Rhodes, J. E., Camic, P. M., Milburn, M. & Lowe, S. R. (2009). Improving middle school climate through teacher-centered change. *Journal of Community Psychology, 37*(6), 711-724.

Rice, S. M. (2014). Working to maximise the effectiveness of a staffing mix: what holds more and less effective teachers in a school, and what drives them away? *Educational Review*, *66*(3), 311-329.

Ringler, M. C., O'Neal, D., Rawls, J. & Cumiskey, S. (2013). The Role of School Leaders in Teacher Leadership Development. *Rural Educator*, *35*(1), n1.

Robinson, V., Lloyd, C. & Rowe, K. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *44*(5), 635–674.

Rorrer, A. K., Skrla, L. & Scheurich, J. J. (2008). Districts as institutional actors in educational reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *44*(3), 307-357.

Ruitenberg, C. W. (2011). The trouble with dispositions: A critical examination of personal beliefs, professional commitments and actual conduct in teacher education. *Ethics and Education*, *6*(1), 41-52.

Ryan, D. M. (2018). *Leadership practices that affect student achievement: Actions of the school principal when building professional capacity in a high performing urban elementary school* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Sammons, P., Gu, Q., Day, C. & Ko, J. (2011). Exploring the impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes: Results from a study of academically improved and effective schools in England. *International journal of educational management*, *25*(1), 83-101.

Sanzo, K., Sherman, W. H. & Clayton, J. (2011). Leadership practices of successful middle school principals. *Journal of Educational Administration, 49*(1), 31. doi:10,1108/09578231111102045

Schumacher, G., Grigsby, B. & Vesey, W. (2015). Determining effective teaching behaviors through the hiring process. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *29*(1), 139–155.

Sebring, P., Allensworth, E., Bryk, A., Easton, J. & Luppescu, S. (2006). *The essential supports for school improvement*. Chicago, Illinois: Consortium on Chicago School Research.

Shin, H.B. & Ortman, J.M. (2011). Language Projections 2010 to 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/acs/Shin_Ortman_FFC2011_paper.pdf

Siemens, G. (2014). Connectivism: A learning theory for the digital age. Retrieved from http://er.dut.ac.za/handle/123456789/69.

Silverman, R. M. (2014). Urban, Suburban, and Rural Contexts of School Districts and Neighborhood Revitalization Strategies: Rediscovering Equity in Education Policy and Urban Planning. *Leadership & Policy in Schools*, 13(1), 3-27. doi:10.1080/15700763.2013.876051

Singh, K. & Billingsley, B. S. (1998). Professional support and its effects on teachers' commitment. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *91*(4), 229–239. http://doi.org/10.1080/00220679809597548

Singleton, G. E. (2014). *Courageous conversations about race: A field guide for achieving equity in schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R. & Diamond, J. B. (2001). Investigating school leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Educational Researcher*, *30*(3), 23-28.

Spillane, J. P., Healey, K. & Parise, L. (2009). School leaders' opportunities to learn: A descriptive analysis from a distributed perspective. *Educational Review*, *61*(4), 407-432.

Stone, C. A. & Lane, S. (2003). Consequences of a state accountability program: Examining relationships between school performance gains and teacher, student, and school variables. *Applied Measurement In Education, 16*(1), 1-26.

Stosich, E. L. (2016). Joint inquiry: teachers' collective learning about the Common Core in high-poverty urban schools. *American Educational Research Journal, 53*(6), 1698-1731.

Sun, J. & Leithwood, K. (2015). Direction-setting school leadership practices: A meta-analytical review of evidence about their influence. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *26*(4), 499-523.

Supovitz, J., Sirinides, P. & May, H. (2010). How principals and peers influence teaching and learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *46*(1), 31–56.

Terosky, A. L. (2016). Enacting instructional leadership: perspectives and actions of public K-12 principals. *School Leadership & Management*, *36*(3), 311–332.

Trujillo, T. (2013). The reincarnation of the effective schools research: rethinking the literature on district effectiveness. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *51*(4), 426–452. http://doi.org/10.1108/09578231311325640

Tschannen-Moran, M. (2009). Fostering teacher professionalism in schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *45*(2), 217–247.

United States Census Bureau (U.S. Census). (2015). Poverty status of people by family relationship, race and Hispanic origin: 1959-2015. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-people.html

Vangrieken, K., Meredith, C., Packer, T. & Kyndt, E. (2017). Teacher communities as a context for professional development: A systematic review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *61*, 47–59.

Veel, L. & Bredhauer, M. (2009). Living local, thinking global: Creating and sustaining pedagogies. *International Journal Of Learning*, 16(9), 597-610.

Wahlstrom, K. L. & Louis, K. S. (2008). How Teachers Experience Principal Leadership: The Roles of Professional Community, Trust, Efficacy, and Shared Responsibility. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *44*(4), 458-495.

Waters, T., Marzano, R. J. & McNulty, B. (2003). Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement. A working paper retrieved from http://www.mcrel.org/PDF/ LeadershipOrganizationDevelopment/ 5031RR_BalancedLeadership.pdf.

Watson, T.N. & Bogotch, I. (2015). Reframing parent involvement: What should urban school leaders do differently? *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 14,* 257-278.

Wayne, A. J., Kwang Suk, Y., Pei, Z., Cronen, S. & Garet, M. S. (2008). Experimenting with teacher professional development: Motives and methods. *Educational Researcher*, *37*(8), 469-479.

Weijun, W., Vaillancourt, T., Brittain, H. L., Krygsman, A., Smith, D., Haltigan, J. D. & Hymel, S. (2014). School climate, peer victimization, and academic achievement: Results from a multi-informant study. *School Psychology Quarterly*, *29*(3), 360-377.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Westhues, A., Ochocka, J., Jacobson, N., Simich, L., Maiter, S., Janzen, R. & Fleras, A. (2008). Developing theory from complexity: Reflections on a collaborative mixed method participatory action research study. *Qualitative Health Research*, *18*(5), 701-717.

Whitworth, B. A. & Chiu, J. L. (2015). Professional development and teacher change: The missing leadership link. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, *26*(2), 121–137.

Wiggan, G. (2008). From Opposition to engagement: Lessons from high achieving African American students. *Urban Review,* 40(5), 317-349. doi:10.1007/s11256-007-0067-5

Wiggan, G. (2014). Student achievement for whom? High-performing and still 'Playing the game,' the meaning of school achievement among high achieving African American students. *Urban Review,* 46(3), 476-492. doi:10.1007/s11256-014-0300-y

Wiggan, G. & Watson, M. (2016). Teaching the whole child: The importance of cultural responsiveness, community engagement, and character development in high achieving African American students. *Urban Review*, 48(5), 766-798. doi:10.1007/s11256-016-0377-6

Williams, J. M., Greenleaf, A. T., Albert, T. & Barnes, E. F. (2014). Promoting educational resilience among African American students at risk of school failure: The role of school counselors. *Journal of School Counseling,* 12(9), 1-34.

Wood, D. (2007). Teachers' learning communities: Catalyst for change or a new infrastructure for the status quo? *Teachers College Record*, *109*(3), 699–739.

Yin, R. K. (2008), *Case study: research, design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Youngs, P. & King, M. B. (2002). Principal leadership for professional development to build school capacity. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *38*(5), 643-670.

Zeinabadi, H. R. (2014). Principal-teacher high-quality exchange indicators and student achievement: Testing a model. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *52*(3), 404–420.

Boston College Lynch School of Education

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.

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

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 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)

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)

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?
   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?

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)?

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 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?

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?

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)

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)