Leadership Practices that Affect Student Achievement: Family and Community Partnerships

Author: James Michael Reilly

BOSTON COLLEGE
Lynch School of Education

Department of
Educational Leadership and Higher Education

Professional School Administrator Program (PSAP)

LEADERSHIP PRACTICES THAT AFFECT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Dissertation in practice
by

JAMES M. REILLY

with Nicole Gittens, Tara Gohlmann, David M. Ryan, and Kris Allison Taylor

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

May 2018

Leadership Practices that Affect Student Achievement:
Family and Community Partnerships

by

James M. Reilly

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

This study focused on Hitt and Tucker's (2016) leadership domain of connecting with external partners. Specifically, it examined whether leadership practices that supported family and community partnerships were present at the school. Family and community partnerships are important because they support two essential, yet frequently overlooked, contexts where student learning and development take place. In addition, this study examined whether school leadership practices promoted these partnerships in a culturally proficient manner. This analysis was informed by the culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) framework, which describes principal behaviors that promote cultural responsiveness in urban settings.

Several leadership practices that supported the criteria established by Hitt and Tucker (2016) under the domain of connecting with external partners were evident at the school, including: building productive relationships with families and the community; engaging families in collaborative processes to strengthen student learning; and anchoring the school in the community. However, leadership practices promoting family and community partnerships did not fully support a finding of being a culturally proficient school culture. This finding was primarily based on a "one size fits all" approach to working with students and families, which has been described in the literature as "cultural blindness". Recommendations to practitioners as a result of this study include expanding informal opportunities for parent input and engagement, conducting an equity audit, and pursuing cultural proficiency professional development.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the outstanding faculty of the Lynch School of Education at Boston College for their relentless support and guidance during my time in the PSAP program. It has been a gift to learn and grow from such a dynamic group of scholars. In particular I would like to thank Dr. Diana Pullin, who served as my committee chair. Thank you Dr. Pullin for your thoughtful feedback, keen insight, and supportive presence. It has been a privilege to work with you during this process and I am truly grateful to have shared in your wealth of knowledge and experience.

In addition, I would like to thank committee members Dr. Patrick McQuillan and Dr. Daniel Gutekanst. Dr. McQuillan was instrumental in helping us refine the scope, approach, and focus of our work prior to engaging in our actual study. Dr. Gutekanst not only ensured that I always felt connected when away from the program, but he helped bridge the realms of scholarship and practice in a meaningful way.

Thank you to my co-authors, Nicole Gittens, Tara Gohlmann, David Ryan, and Kris Taylor. I have developed profound respect and admiration for your many talents and you have all taught me a great deal about leadership and life. I cannot imagine being more fortunate than to have been grouped together with you as a team. Thanks as well to all of my colleagues in PSAP IV, who have prodded, inspired, and made me laugh for the past three years.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their enduring support. My parents, Thomas and Norberta Reilly, who have always encouraged and supported me in so many ways. Words cannot express what your unwavering love has meant to me. To my children, Olivia and Grace, who demonstrated patience and kindness as I pursued my

personal goals. You both mean more to me than you will ever know. And to my wife Cara, who sacrificed more than anyone to help me complete this journey. I love you and always will.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Tables

Figures

Chapter One[1]

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, Haltigan & Hymel, 2014; Ramsey, 2015), principal instructional activities (May & Supovitz,

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

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 (2016) 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 in the study. Retrieved January 19, 2018 from: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu

The accountability level in Table 2.3 represents that Massachusetts state accountability level as described in more detail above. The school performance percentage shows the percentile that the Standmore School performed overall compared to schools that serve the same grade levels across the state. In 2013, the Standmore School was performing in the bottom 5 to 10% of similar schools in the state, but by 2016 had significantly improved their performance to 20 to 25% using this measure.

Data collection. Data collection took place between September 2017 and December 2017. Prior to this phase, each member of the research team completed individual Institutional Review Board (IRB) certification and the project was approved by both the Boston College IRB and the study site's IRB authority. Data collection consisted of two specific methods beginning with document review and followed by open-ended interviews. The pool of research subjects was limited to adults and each subject completed a Boston College Adult Informed Consent Form (Appendix A). As stated previously in this chapter, all members of the research team participated in performing on-site interviews with identified participants and collecting and analyzing documents and artifacts. This collaborative approach to data collection afforded the team the necessary time and energy to complete both phases of data collection on time. Figure 2.1 is a design map depicting how data sources contributed to the findings for each research topic and helped answer the collective research question. As the design map shows, there were five domains framing each researcher's individual study while also serving as one-fifth interdependent variable in the overall study. These five domains each have a code associated with them that were used when reviewing documents. Using Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified

Framework as a conceptual framework to guide the project shaped the logic of the design and strengthened the potential for meaningful findings.

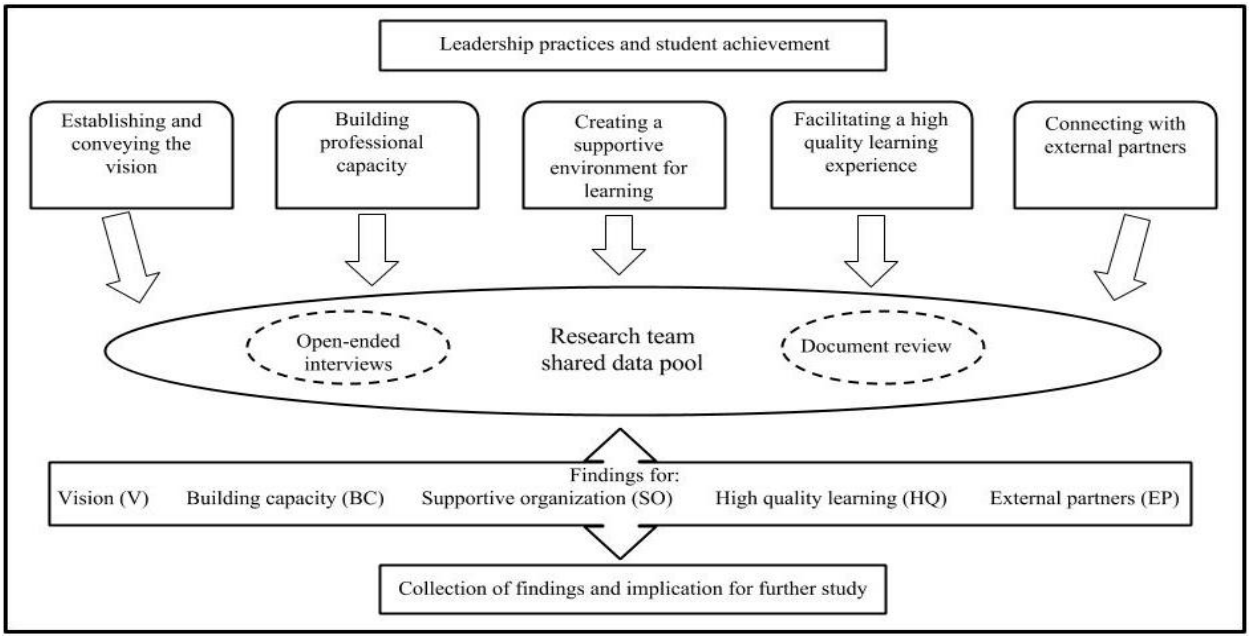

Figure 2.1. Research design map. This figure illustrates the research methods used and their connection to answering the research question.

Document review. Aside from sometimes being difficult to obtain, Creswell (2012) supported the use of documents as data because "they provide the advantage of being in the language and words of the participants, who have usually given thoughtful attention to them" (p.223). Documents reviewed included those identified in Table 2.4.

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

principal provided some documents from the school for review. These documents were also reviewed upon receipt using the same *a priori list* and stored in the Google folder.

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

As district and school level documents were collected, and after they had been placed in a storage folder, they were reviewed by each member of the research team and separated according to the specific domain under which they fell. Hitt and Tucker (2016) specifically used terms and phrases such as vision, building capacity, high-quality learning, supportive organization, and external partners to organize the domains in their framework. These terms and phrases served as codes for each of the domains. Each member of the research team applied their code (see "Findings for:" in Figure 2.1) to relevant documents and moved a copy of those documents to a folder named after their domain. All folders with the elements of the specific domains and/or dimensions were shared among the team, and Table 2.4 illustrates how those documents were coded. In some cases, documents that were collected were not used. Since the document review was the first method of data collection, information from the documents helped refine and/or create additional research questions for the open-ended interview process (Creswell, 2012) and further informed the selection of subjects to be interviewed.

Table 2.4

Alignment of Documents to Codes

Type of document	Code
Mission statement	V, SO, HQ, EP

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

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

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

Three district level administrators, one site council member, and 11 school level administrators and teachers were interviewed using five different interview protocols. Of those five protocols, four were used at the school level while one was used at the district level to

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

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

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

Table 2.5

Interview Respondents

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

Selection was based on the research team's belief in the respondents' understanding and experience they may have had with the phenomenon being studied. Following this logic, the research team believed that these respondents held the highest probability of providing useful information for answering the study's research question.

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

Prior to conducting interviews, one team member engaged in cognitive interviews (Desimone & Le Floch, 2004) to validate the intent of the questions and sought assistance from

his colleagues and peers in the field to conduct think-alouds (Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer & Tourangeau, 2011). Based upon responses and respective probes and follow up, the interview questions were refined.

Data Analysis

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

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

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

meetings. The third and fourth cycles of analysis were conducted by the individual researchers as described in Chapter 3.

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

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

Chapter Three

Family and Community Partnerships

Statement of the Problem, Purpose and Research Questions

Educational disparities based on factors such as household income and race/ethnicity have been documented in student achievement for decades (Deschenes, Cuban & Tyack, 2001). These differences are often most profound in urban schools that function with scarce district resources and serve high numbers of traditionally marginalized groups, such as those from low socioeconomic status families, English learners, and students of color (Milner, Murray, Farinde & Delale-O'Conner, 2015). Despite these challenges, some urban schools are able to thrive and effectively promote the achievement of all students. Why are these institutions successful when so many schools in similar contexts fail? This issue becomes even more perplexing when student achievement variations are observed between traditional public schools governed by a common urban district. These schools presumably receive similar district support and often serve similar demographic populations. Yet, for example, in each of the ten largest districts in Massachusetts, there is at least one school that is vastly outperforming its peers (MA DESE: School and District Profiles, n.d). Bryk, Gomes, Grunow, and LeMahieu (2016) suggest that analyzing these "positive deviants" is essential for school improvement work. We agree with this premise and engaged in a qualitative case study of one such urban school.

Empirical literature maintains that while teachers have the greatest impact on promoting student achievement, school leadership is the second most important lever in successful schools (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom, 2004). What leadership practices are evident in a "positive deviant" school that supports student achievement? By applying Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework, data were collected and analyzed to answer this question.

In their review of 56 empirical research studies, Hitt and Tucker (2016) sought to identify practices attributed to leaders who were effective in promoting student achievement. Their theoretical approach was based on the importance of integrated leadership, which combines the tenets of shared instructional leadership and transformational leadership (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2005). As such, they focused their inquiry on the analysis and synthesis of three existing frameworks: Ontario Leadership Framework (Leithwood, 2012), Learning-Centered Leadership Framework (Murphy, Elliot, Goldring & Porter, 2006) and The Essential Supports Framework (Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton & Luppescu, 2006). Their work culminated in the creation of a Unified Model of Effective Leader Practices that identified 28 dimensions (actions or practices) contained within five overarching domains: establishing and conveying the vision; facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students; building professional capacity; creating a supportive organization for learning; and connecting with external partners. Each member of our group applied one domain to guide our collective analysis of leadership practices in a positive deviant school deemed successful in promoting student achievement by achieving a Level 2 rating as defined by the Massachusetts accountability system. If the findings identify which specific school leadership practices were present, this study could provide a beneficial template for other urban school leaders to follow.

The domain of "connecting with external partners" identifies practices within the realm of family and community partnerships. This individual study sought to understand whether or not these specific leadership practices, as defined by Hitt and Tucker (2016), were present at the school studied. These findings informed the collective findings and help answer the overarching research question: What leadership practices are present in a high performing urban elementary school?

The importance of family and community partnerships is frequently overlooked in leadership practice. School leaders often attempt to address achievement inequities by focusing on the use of data and improving pedagogy (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). While these efforts are important, they do not address the fact that the school environment is just one of several contexts that impact students. Epstein (1987, 2001) asserts that in addition to schools, families and communities are essential to children's learning and development. Empirical literature suggests that the ability of actors within these *overlapping spheres of influence* to communicate with each other and coordinate their efforts has a profound impact on promoting student achievement and improving other outcomes (Catsambis & Beveridge, 2001; Eptstein, 2001; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). Furthermore, Green (2015a) contends that sustaining change in urban schools that service traditionally marginalized groups often requires leadership that spans school and community boundaries. He asserts that combining urban school reform with community development is often critical to the sustainability of improvement efforts because schools alone cannot address the multiple forms of inequality that impact student outcomes.

Recent legislation such as the Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) encourages the adoption of indicators measuring community and family engagement as a means to promote equity and best practice (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). While the capacity of district leaders to support school-community partnerships is important, the schools themselves, and their respective leadership teams, are ultimately responsible for the choice to pursue asset-based partnerships (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). Such partnerships not only make parents aware of their children's academic progress, but also recognize the importance of shared decision-making and culturally proficient practice. Yet these more "authentic" family and community partnerships are rarely implemented in schools with fidelity (Auerbach, 2010). Leaders that can position their schools as

community assets, however, and work toward shared goals of student growth and community improvement can achieve equitable outcomes observable in student achievement and overall quality (Green, 2015a). Few studies have focused on this aspect of leadership practice in schools that operate within challenging urban contexts but are still able to promote high levels of student achievement.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine what leadership practices that support family and community partnerships were present at a successful urban elementary school. Two research questions guided this study:

1. Are leadership practices that support family and community partnerships evident at a high performing urban elementary school?
2. Are culturally responsive leadership practices that support family and community partnerships evident at a high performing urban elementary school?

Review of the Literature

This review of empirical literature presents four types of school organizational structures and their impact on how schools connect with external partners. It then examines relationship frameworks used to explain and analyze family and community partnerships in schools. This analysis includes how these frameworks define the role of school leaders in promoting and sustaining these relationships. The final section presents the conceptual frameworks used to support the analysis of the overall case study and the individual research questions.

School organizational structures. Schools approach family and community partnerships in myriad ways. From literature on the topic, Valli, Stefanski, and Jacobson (2014) categorize four types of schools: family and interagency collaboration schools; full-service schools; full-service community schools; and community development schools. They align these terms along

a spectrum in accordance to the primary focus of their work (see Table 3.1, column 4), as well as how they define and organize their relationships with other stakeholders (see Table 3.1, columns 2-3). The family and interagency collaboration model, for example, represents schools that are focused on coordinating health and social services for students in the hopes of better supporting their needs and therefore improving student achievement. Full-service schools share a similar focus but actually deliver these services in the school milieu. Full-service community schools, on the other hand, provide site-based services akin to the full-service model but also engage in shared decision making and power sharing with stakeholders. The final type of school categorized, a community development model, may or may not deliver site-based coordinated support services. The main difference is the way these schools seek to work with and impact the community they serve. They operate on the belief that schools and communities are interdependent and therefore the goals and power structure utilized at these schools reflect this belief.

Table 3.1

School structure characteristics

School Structure Model	Site-Based Services	Shared Power	Vision/Main Goal
Interagency collaboration	No	No	Improve Student Achievement
Full service school	Yes	No	Improve Student Achievement
Full service community school	Yes	Partial	Improve Student Experience
Community development	Sometimes	Full	Improve Student and Community Experiences

Note. Adapted from Valli, Stefanski, and Jacobson (2014).

For the purpose of this analysis, whether or not services are provided on-site at schools (Table 3.1, column 2) is less important than the nature of the partnerships themselves (Table 3.1,

columns 3-4). This review does not examine full-service and full-service community schools since their distinct structural characteristics make them less suitable for comparison when examining leadership practices in the context of traditionally organized schools. The family and interagency collaboration and community development models are included since they often utilize traditional school structures and are aligned with specific partnership frameworks important to understanding family and community partnerships more fully.

Partnership frameworks. How schools engage with family and community partners is an essential element to analyzing these relationships. Partnership frameworks explain how family and community relationships are approached and defined. Epstein (1987, 2001) asserts that family, school, and community are all important *spheres of influence* that impact student development and can be optimized in a system through two-way communication, mutually beneficial student outcomes, and a component of shared decision-making. Epstein's partnership framework measures these conditions across six types of involvement, including: sustaining caring and supportive environments; establishing two-way exchanges about school programs and children's progress; soliciting and organizing parent involvement; supporting learning at home; promoting parental advocacy; and identifying and integrating services from the community to support student experiences (Epstein, Galindo & Sheldon, 2011). The family and interagency collaboration structural model reflects Epstein's framework in that work is focused on student outcomes and largely controlled by the school. Empirical studies using this framework suggest that these types of partnerships can improve family involvement, academic outcomes in mathematics, reading, and writing, as well as attendance and student behavior (Catsambis & Beveridge, 2001; Epstein, 2001; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). Yet it must be noted that many of these studies are dated and some come from unpublished dissertations.

Epstein (2005) did, however, also complete a three-year longitudinal study at a Title I elementary school. The study compared a school's student achievement growth in math, reading, and writing with comparison schools of a similar structure on the 4th grade Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT). Epstein found that the subject school far exceeded the comparison schools, some of which serviced more affluent populations, in growth as measured by the percentage of students achieving the state benchmark across all subject areas.

Yet many scholars, including Auerbach (2008), contend that Eptsein's partnership framework is insufficient, particularly when practiced with disenfranchised families in urban schools. Auerbach states, "Parents—especially low-income and minority parents—are more likely to be involved in education when schools invite their participation, provide multiple entry points for involvement, value their perspectives, and reach out in culturally appropriate ways" (p.700). She suggests that such relationships build social capital in communities and impact not only the experience of students and their families, but also entire neighborhoods.

The importance of building social capital in urban communities is echoed by other scholars as well. Both Ishimaru (2013) and Green (2017c) cite Putnum's (2000) concept of "bonding" and "bridging" as being important because it unites stakeholders towards a shared purpose, empowers them, and builds trust. Auerbach (2009) and Green (2017c) suggest that leaders are far more likely to engage in partnerships that empower stakeholders if they have a social justice orientation. Auerbach adds that principals taking ownership of partnerships, making a commitment to their establishment, and believing in their importance leads to their success. Auerbach does not specifically advocate for the adoption of interdependent school and community goals as described in Valli, Stefanski & Jacobson's (2014) community development model, but her framework makes a concerted effort to share power and engage stakeholders in a

culturally proficient manner that does not exist in their interagency collaboration model either. Thus, the term authentic/empowered model is included in this review to represent the types of partnerships described by Auerbach's framework that are not sufficiently characterized by either of these models (See Table 3.2).

Increasingly, scholars assert that only by employing a community development model approach (table 3.2, column 4) will lasting change be possible in urban school settings. Green (2017c) states that empirical literature supports linking urban school reform with community development in three ways: societal conditions such as poverty cannot be addressed without the support of neighborhood institutions (Miller, 2012), school improvement rarely lasts without concurrent community improvement (Warren, 2005), and the pervasive complexity of inequality in many urban communities makes it impossible for schools to complete this work by themselves (Noguera & Wells, 2011). In his case study analysis of a principal who connected urban school reform with community improvement, Green cites several leadership actions that supported this work. For instance, the principal made the school an essential part of the neighborhood by providing site-based health services and establishing relationships with community-based organizations that could provide support to students, families, and community members. The mission of supporting the community was not only made explicit in the school's vision statement but was embedded in practice. One example of how this was achieved was linking school goals and culture to community revitalization projects, such as addressing gang violence by promoting and developing youth leadership skills. Finally, instruction at the school was linked with community realities. Small learning communities were established that made learning relevant to students by partnering with local institutions such as local businesses, community-based organizations, and the local chamber of commerce. These changes not only resulted in vital

services becoming more accessible to members of the community, but important academic indicators improved over a five year period as well, including a 13% increase in the graduation rate and a 15% increase in access to Advanced Placement classes (p.19). Green largely attributes the school and community improvements in the case study to the school leader, a principal named Oscar.

Table 3.2

School partnership model characteristics

Model Name	Interagency Collaboration	Authentic/Empowered	Community Development
Partnership Framework	Epstein	Auerbach	Green
Epistemologies	Positivism	Interpretivism	Critical Theory
Asset-Based View	No	Yes	Yes
Culturally Proficient	No	Yes	Yes
Parent Empowerment	Limited	Yes	Yes
Community Empowerment	No	Yes	Yes
Social Justice Basis	No	Limited	Yes
Explicit Community Development Goals	No	No	Yes

Note. Adapted from Valli, Stefanski, and Jacobson (2014); Green (2017b).

Green (2017a) has recently suggested that performing a community-based equity audit is essential before any substantive work of this type can begin. He suggests this process should have four phases: disrupting deficit views of the community; conducting an initial community inquiry that includes shared experiences; creating a community-based leadership team; and finally gathering asset-based equity data to support future actions. Green (2017b) asserts that it is necessary for principals to operate from a critical epistemology when implementing the community development model of partnerships and that a principal's belief systems and skillsets are often connected to both the type of relationships they pursue and their ultimate effectiveness (See Table 3.2, row 3, columns 2-4).

Nearly all scholars agree that the role of the principal is an essential component of family and community partnerships. In their review of 26 articles focused on community partnerships and the role of leadership, Valli, Stefanski & Jacobson (2016) found that school leadership was the central component needed to manage challenges when community partnerships were initiated. They also found that school leaders were most effective when they were able to actively share power and sought to establish interagency and neighborhood connections beyond what is typical in most schools. The authors noted that as community partnerships became more complex and comprehensive, there was a need for leadership to adapt to new demands such as becoming less school-centric and improving facilitative skills.

Connecting with external partners. The analysis of parent and community partnerships is part of a larger case study focused on leadership practices in schools that promote student achievement. We applied all of the domains of a common framework, Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Model of Effective Leader Practices including connecting with external partners, which focuses on parent and community partnerships. Evidence of these practices, called dimensions by Hitt and Tucker, were used to answer the first research question: are leadership practices that support family and community partnerships evident at a high performing urban elementary school?

The first dimension of connecting with external partners is building productive relationships with families and community. Hitt and Tucker (2016) cite Leithwood (2012) in establishing the importance of family in a student's development and the need for school environments to be welcoming and inclusive. The authors also cite Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, and Luppescu (2006) to support utilizing established community resources and facilitating the faculty's understanding of cultural dynamics to help build trust with families. All

of these practices are well established in empirical literature but many scholars would argue they constitute a minimal baseline for acceptable practice and are largely insufficient when working with traditionally marginalized families (Auerbach, 2009).

The second dimension is engaging families and community in collaborative processes to strengthen student learning. Hitt and Tucker (2016) state that schools that involve families in decision-making are generally higher functioning and cite the work of Sebring et al. (2006) to support this position. However, Hitt and Tucker seem content with limiting actual parental authority, stating, "Finding ways for parents and the community to perceive a sense of influence in their schools surfaces as a critical component of this domain" (p.560). Many scholars such as Auerbach (2008) contend that, "in the long-term, parent engagement—seen solely as a means to raise achievement—constrains and controls its intent according to the school's agenda, thereby discounting other family needs and goals" (p. 727).

The third dimension is anchoring schools in the community. Hitt and Tucker (2016) promote the importance of connecting families with community resources as soon as schools become aware of student needs. They also suggest that school leaders should engage with other school leaders to discuss ways that home, school, and community efforts can be aligned. Similar to the previous dimensions, these practices are largely grounded in the interagency collaboration model that reflects Epstein's partnership framework (See Table 3.2, column 2). For the purpose of our common research, it is important to apply the dimensions of the Hitt and Tucker Unified Framework as intended. However, these practices identified by Hitt and Tucker alone are insufficient when balanced against the entire body of literature on impactful family and community partnerships, especially when applied in an urban setting serving traditionally marginalized students. Thus, this analysis will also engage a broader body of literature.

Culturally responsive school leadership framework. The second research question is: are culturally responsive leadership practices that support family and community partnerships evident at a high performing urban elementary school? Since the Hitt and Tucker (2016) conceptualization doesn't sufficiently address the issues present in urban schools, this question is informed by the culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) framework created by Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016). The framework establishes school principal behaviors that promote cultural responsiveness in urban settings. The authors examined 79 empirical and 159 total sources related to the topic of CRSL and found four overarching behaviors of culturally responsive school leaders: critically self-reflects on leadership behaviors; develops culturally responsive teachers; promotes culturally responsive and inclusive school environments; and engages students and parents in community contexts.

The overarching behavior of critical self-reflection on leadership behaviors, also referred to as critical consciousness, is based on the belief that leaders need to have an understanding of their own beliefs and values when it comes to working with marginalized students. This includes questioning their personal assumptions about race and culture and how these may impact the school environment. The second overarching behavior, developing culturally responsive teachers, focuses not only on hiring and retaining culturally responsive teachers but providing training and modeling these behaviors to current staff members. This includes the provision of appropriate resources such as professional development and a culturally responsive curriculum. Promoting a culturally responsive school environment, the third overarching behavior, is defined as creating a culturally affirming school environment that emphasizes inclusivity and questions exclusionary practices. The final overarching behavior is engagement with students and parents in community contexts. This overarching behavior is most germane to this analysis as it focuses

on family and community partnerships. It establishes practices that involve working with these constituents in culturally appropriate ways including advocating for community-based issues (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016). There is a clear connection between this overarching behavior and the characteristics found in the authentic/empowered and community development models (See Table 3.2, Columns 3-4) discussed earlier in this review, both of which focus on improving learning and experiences in urban schools through family and community partnerships.

Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) provide several examples of leadership actions that are supported by empirical literature and are associated with the organizing behavior of engages students and parents in community contexts. These include: developing meaningful and positive relationships within the community (Johnson, 2006); finding overlapping spaces for school and community (Ishimaru, 2013); serving as an advocate for community-based causes in both the school and neighborhood community (Gooden, 2005); resisting deficit images of students and families (Flessa, 2009); and creating a culture of care and hope (Gooden, 2005). All of these leadership practices are in line with current scholarship on effective family and community partnerships serving marginalized populations and therefore appropriate to guide the data collection and analysis for this part of the study (Auerbach, 2008; Green, 2017c).

Schools may utilize a variety of structures to support family and community partnerships. In addition, the manner in which schools approach these relationships can be analyzed by applying the various partnership frameworks supported by empirical literature. Scholars have increasingly argued that “authentic” partnerships that are culturally proficient and promote shared decision making are essential to lasting improvement in urban schools (Green, 2015a).

Methodologies

The study utilized a qualitative case study design to analyze leadership practices at a high performing, urban elementary school. Data collection and analysis served the dual purpose of providing data to the research team to answer our overarching question as well as answering this study's specific research questions. Chapter 2 presents the overarching methods of our group study. Methods and data collection unique to this individual study are presented below.

Data collection. Data collection consisted of document reviews, open-ended interviews, and general observational data collected during the site visit. Data from all of these primary sources assisted in answering both research questions as demonstrated in Table 3.3. The process began with a document review consisting primarily of the School Improvement Plan, parent and community communication documents, and weekly staff communications. All of these documents yielded important data related to the scope and leverage afforded to family and community partnerships.

The document review was followed by a series of open-ended interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) that included district staff, school administrators, teacher leaders, guidance staff, and community partners. In addition to interviews, a parent and community member focus group was originally planned to be part of the study to confirm the presence of specific dimensions of leadership practices from the perspective of these stakeholders. Ultimately this primary source of data was abandoned after attempts to identify potential participants through email and direct requests of staff members (Aron, Cody, and Lee) were unsuccessful.

When visiting the site to conduct interviews, a request was made to observe the before school and afterschool procedures in place at the school. This provided an additional opportunity

to gather observational data on leadership practices that promote family and community partnerships, such as facilitating communication and providing a welcoming environment.

How each of these data sources was used to indicate the presence of leadership practices and assist in answering research questions is noted in Table 3.3. The table includes specific exemplars coded by the following letters to indicate correlation with the three primary data sources: Document review (D), Open-ended interviews (I), and Facility observation (O).

Table 3.3

Data sources and exemplars used to answer research questions

RQ 1 Dimension	Data Sources	Exemplars
Building productive relationships with families and community	Document review (D) Open-ended interviews (I) Facility observation (O)	Evidence of parent engagement opportunities (O)
Engaging families and community in collaborative processes to strengthen student learning	Document review (D) Open-ended interviews (I)	Q: What role do families play in supporting student learning? (I)
Anchoring schools in the community	Document review (D) Open-ended interviews (I) Facility observation (O)	School Improvement Plan (D) Q: How are students and families connected to community resources? (I)

RQ 2 Dimension	Data Sources	Exemplars
Developing meaningful and positive relationships within the community	Document review (D) Open-ended interviews (I) Facility observation (O)	School Improvement Plan (D) Q: How are families and community partners engaged at the school? (I)
Finding overlapping spaces for school and community	Open-ended interviews (I) Facility observation (O)	Are school facilities and services available to community members? (I) Designated space at school for community use (O)
Resisting deficit images of students and families	Open-ended interviews (I)	Q: How are families and community partners engaged at the school? (I)

Creating a culture of care and hope	Open-ended interviews (I) Facility observation (O)	School Improvement Plan (D) Evidence of supportive school culture (O)

Note. D = Document review, I = Semi-structured interview; O=Facility observation
Adapted from Hitt and Tucker (2016); Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016).

Data analysis. Coding of qualitative data identified examples of leadership practices supporting family and community partnerships at the school. These included field notes from the site visit, document reviews, and interview transcripts. Initial coding determined whether data applied to any of the domains of Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework. Saldaña (2013) asserts that coding is both an heuristic and cyclical act that requires multiple attempts to first discover and then delineate themes and categories such as those in our framework. A second cycle of coding focused on whether the data supported specific dimensions in the domain of connecting with external partners. A third round of coding was then conducted to determine if the data supported the overarching behavior of engaging students and families in community context promoted by the CRSL frameworks. A final round of coding then took place to identify the specific leadership practices (dimensions) that supported either framework.

This iterative process was documented and supported by the use of analytic memos by all research team members. Saldaña (2013) contends that analytic memos are essential to the process of data analysis and should be conducted concurrently with coding to promote greater understanding and deeper meaning. Connections between collected data and research questions are more likely to be made when they occur continuously across a variety of contexts. By noting spontaneous thoughts and observations the likelihood of effective data analysis increased.

Findings

The following section describes the leadership practices found to support parent and community partnerships at a successful urban elementary school. They are first identified using

Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework as a template and then re-examined using the CRSL framework of Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016).

Leadership practices that support parent and community partnerships. Several leadership practices that support parent and community partnerships and are part of Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework were evident at the school. These include: building productive relationships with families and the community; engaging families and community in collaborative processes to strengthen student learning; and anchoring schools in the community. The finding of these practices is directly related to the first research question addressing whether leadership practices supported parent and community partnerships.

Building productive relationships with family and community. The first dimension of Hitt and Tucker's (2016) framework, building productive relationships with families and community, focuses on the need for school environments to be welcoming and inclusive. Interviews, document reviews, and observations suggested that several leadership practices at the school have promoted this type of environment. This was evidenced by the intentional planning of both the student day and special events at the school.

School day structure. The school day afforded ample opportunity for families to feel welcome and included in their children's school experiences. One example gleaned from interviews (Blake, Cody, and Lee) and direct observation was how school procedures have been structured to promote interaction and communication with parents at both the beginning and end of the day. In the morning, most parents walked with their children to school and brought their child to a line monitored by their child's teacher. The parents were then welcomed to stay for an opening ceremony that included the pledge of allegiance, recognition of birthdays, and a school chant before the formal school day began. At the end of the day, parents entered the school and

dismissed their children from tables staffed by a teacher. If a teacher needed to connect with a parent, or vice versa, they were seamlessly afforded this opportunity. By structuring the school day in this manner, school leadership increased the likelihood families will feel connected to the school and empowered to actively participate in their children's education. It also provides a means for parents to share concerns immediately and not let them fester. As Lee (assistant principal) noted, "If a parent has something to say, or the teacher has something to say, you can say it right there."

Event planning. This attention to detail and focus on welcoming families was also found when planning school events. One district leader (Charlie) reported that the principal (Aron) purposely structured school events, academic and social, to facilitate family participation: "The planning was done with the needs and knowledge of family schedules, family interests, what would make families feel comfortable and want to stay engaged." This included both the time of day that the events took place as well as providing meals whenever possible. They reported that taking this approach often resulted in greater participation than other schools garnered when holding similar events. One staff member (Jordan) shared the evolution of an event initially devised to support student homework that ultimately morphed into a student showcase to increase the participation of families:

> We figured if we just have parents come in and say we want to talk to you about best practices at home they're not really going to come. So we said okay, let's have it so they're coming to see their child's work…and the teachers were beyond thrilled with the turnout.

Both of these examples indicate a willingness to create flexible agendas that take into account the needs and desires of families when planning events, and ultimately creating a more welcoming and inclusive environment at the school.

Engaging families and community in collaborative processes to strengthen student learning. Hitt and Tucker's (2016) second dimension is engaging families and community in collaborative processes to strengthen student learning. This dimension focuses on the active pursuit of parent involvement to support their child's academic success. Leadership practices found to support the establishment of these collaborative processes include the promotion of parents as invested and active partners by the school leader as well as the establishment of explicit guidelines and expectations surrounding parent communication.

Parents as invested partners. One practice that several staff members noted (Aron, Blake, Cody, and Kit) was the current principal's promotion of the belief that families were to be seen as partners who were a critical link to student success. Some teachers shared that unlike previous principals, the notion that parents were not invested in their child's education was not tolerated. As the principal (Aron) commented,

> That was a real struggle because all I heard in the beginning was, 'The families don't care or the kids don't do their homework and misbehave.' Some people got on board with that, and some did not, and the ones that did not, are really not here anymore.

The belief that parents are invested partners is reinforced by explicit communication expectations at the school, which similarly increased the likelihood of effective collaboration.

Communication expectations. Several faculty members (Aron, Blake, Cody, and Lee) noted during interviews that parent communication was an expectation that transcended phone calls or conferences and often included visiting homes. As Aron commented, "We work really

hard at getting and keeping parents involved. Whether it's coming in for student success meetings, talking about attendance issues, or just parent meetings." Cody added,

> We always try to have the teacher be the first connection with the parent. Teachers stay a little longer to talk to parents about any situation. For meetings that we have we try to ask, 'Okay what is the best day for you.'

By setting clear expectations for communication, school leadership has made the establishment of collaborative parental partnerships focused on student learning more likely. Documents such as the staff newsletter and Student Success Plans (SSP) further confirmed this practice. For instance, several issues of the newsletter mentioned expectations concerning conferences or parent meetings. Lee also shared how the SSP form had been adapted to include, "method of parental contact" to ensure that communication with the family had been initiated if a teacher was concerned about student behavior or achievement.

Anchoring schools in the community. The third dimension of Hitt and Tucker's (2016) framework, anchoring schools in the community, promotes the importance of connecting families with their community and providing needed resources. Leadership practices that support this dimension include the school leader's investment in learning more about the community, their participation in joint school/community projects, and the school's well-established system of connecting families with needed resources.

Knowing the community. One way the school leader has anchored the school in the community is becoming aware of the issues families face and the conditions some must endure. Faculty and school leadership (Aron, Lee, and Cody) reported that the school principal had visited the local homeless shelter that services over 30 families with students at the school. This has allowed the school principal to become aware and advocate for resources that would benefit

these families including backpacks, clothes, and food. It also demonstrates to both the faculty and families at the school their leader's investment in the community. Cody reported,

> We are really connected, especially the principal, she's the one that goes to that. But that's important that the people know there is a school here, and we're investing in our community. We want the best for them. We want to work together for the benefit of everyone. And I think that's a good message that is coming out there.

Joint community and school projects. Another example of how the school leader anchored the school in the community was their participation in joint school/community endeavors. One way this leadership practice was evidenced was a planned playground that would benefit both the local neighborhood and school. Teachers and community providers shared (Casey, Cody, Pat, and Morgan) that the project involved working with a local community center and the city manager to acquire a parcel of land that was previously the site of a condemned home. This was accomplished by sharing resources and supervised by a joint planning board that included the principal. The end product will not only provide a playground for the neighborhood and school, but secure parking for teachers making the streets surrounding the school less congested and safer for students and their families. Faculty and school leadership (Aron, Charlie, Pat, and Kit) reported that the school has also begun to partner with a local business that has provided jobs to local families and provided financial support for school improvement projects. Both these examples demonstrate how the school leader has endorsed ways to support the needs of both the school and community.

System of connecting families with resources. Another way the school has anchored itself in the community is the practice of connecting families with needed resources. School faculty and leadership (Aron, Blake, Cody, and Lee) shared several examples of needed services

being provided to students and facilitated through the school. These included mental health services for students and families, as well as supportive programs such as Big Brother/Big Sister and tutoring through a local college. A final example is hosting an English as a second language class at the school that is considered a district program but has been made available to all community members. By connecting not only families but also community members to needed resources, the school has positioned itself as an active and invested partner in the neighborhood. As Pat offered when commenting on this aspect of the principal's practice, "She was trained to be more community oriented and to welcome people in."

Culturally proficient leadership practices. The second research question relates to whether the leadership practices supporting parent and community partnerships at the school are culturally proficient. These findings are guided by the culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) framework created by Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016). Interview data supported some culturally proficient leadership practices including: developing meaningful and positive relationships within the community; finding overlapping spaces for school and community; and creating a culture of care and hope. However many of these practices focused on accomplishing a narrow, school-driven agenda and not all were corroborated by external stakeholders. In addition, there was some evidence of deficit images of students and families and a reluctance to address the need for cultural proficiency.

Developing meaningful and positive relationships within the community. Many of the leadership practices at the school increase the likelihood of meaningful and positive relationships with parents and the community. As previously discussed, this has been established by creating a school environment that is generally welcoming to families and views parents as active participants in their children's academic success. As the school principal noted, "I think that our

most important work with parents is building relationships and building trust and having them work with us to support their child." Evidence of this practice is also demonstrated at the community level by effective relationships with community service providers and active partnering with local colleges and businesses to support student needs.

Despite the emphasis on maintaining positive relationships with parents, evidence during interviews of shared decision-making at the school was limited. While there was parent and community participation on the school improvement council, for example, their impact and influence on the school improvement plan was difficult to ascertain through document reviews and interviews. In addition, nearly all of the interview data gathered on parent engagement suggested these interactions were based primarily on promoting student achievement. Ultimately, the inability to interview parents made it difficult to confirm or refute this finding.

Finding overlapping spaces for school and community. Leadership practices at the school promote interconnectedness between the school and community. One staff member (Casey) shared that families are often made aware of community events through school communications and teachers are similarly informed of community resources that may benefit their students. This was confirmed through documents reviewed including the weekly staff newsletter. Besides the aforementioned playground project, school leadership has shown a willingness to pursue city-wide opportunities to improve the school and neighborhood. Faculty and school leadership (Casey and Lee) shared the recent example of a mural project that designated part of the school building as a canvas to be spray painted by a team of international artists. Both staff members suggested the completed project has become a source of pride and inspiration for residents of the neighborhood in addition to beautifying the school.

Creating a culture of care and hope. As the principal noted (Aron), **"**Our kids have a lot of struggles and they have a lot of hardships to be honest. So they need to know that the person that is their teacher cares about them and wants them to succeed." This culture of caring is supported by several practices at the school including a school-wide morning meeting that was observed by the research team and included a chant extolling the importance of education and the attainability of a college education. In the morning the staff and children gathered to recite together, "People, people can't you see? Education is the key! People, people don't you know? College is the place we'll go!" Several staff (Chris, Lee, and Morgan) mentioned this practice during interviews as an example of promoting high expectations and hope in their students. Others respondents (Aron, Blake, Cody, and Lee) shared efforts to support students who had experienced trauma, including the death of a parent, as how this practice was evident and promoted at the school. Blake offered,

> I think everybody knows who these kids are, we're very involved. We'll talk to their parents, we'll go to their house if we have to or set up meetings here. I think everybody just knows that these kids don't have the greatest lives, and we want to make things better for them. They believe in us. If we believe in them then they believe in us.

Resisting deficit images of students and families. While leadership practices at the school supported communicating with all families and setting high expectations for all students, there was also evidence of deficit images of students and families. This was primarily manifested by a reluctance to address the impact of culture and race on the student experience. The school principal admitted,

> There is not anything that I have done actively to recognize or distinguish certain cultures…I think we just view the kids as kids and whether they have an issue with homelessness, poverty, lack of parenting, or whatever the problem might be.

While this viewpoint was echoed by many of the staff members (Blake, Cody, and Lee) some of whom were proud to be "colorblind," others saw it as a need to be addressed. As one staff member (Jordan) commented,

> I'm realizing that's probably not a good thing that we don't address it. Our teachers are aware of the demographics but I don't think that they take that into consideration when it comes to what they do…we're going to hit a ceiling and it's probably going to involve a conversation that involves race but we're not there yet because we still can just make general gains which is still good.

Whether it was a form resistance or a function of limited resources, the reluctance or inability of the school to make parents readily available for interviews was another source of data supporting this finding. One interview subject (Pat) suggested, "Yeah, they're afraid the parents are [gonna] come in and say bad stuff, I'm sure." While it is difficult to open oneself to the possibility of criticism, impinging on the opportunity for external stakeholders, and families in particular, to share their experience needlessly silences voices that may serve as a positive impetus for change and improvement. It also leads to the perception, at a minimum, that their viewpoints are not valued and keeps these individuals marginalized.

Discussion

There were several leadership practices that supported family and community partnerships at the school studied. While these practices were found to support the criteria established by Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework under the domain of connecting

with external partners, they did not fully support a finding of being a culturally proficient school culture. The following sections will discuss: how the leadership practices align to existing partnership frameworks established by empirical literature; where the practices fit along a continuum of cultural proficiency; and recommendations for potential next steps in strengthening family and community partnerships at the school.

Epstein's partnership framework. Findings suggest that leadership practices supporting family and community partnerships at the school were most closely aligned with Epstein's partnership framework. This was particularly evident by the limited evidence of shared decision-making and an emphasis on parent involvement as a means to improve student achievement.

Limited evidence of shared decision-making. There was scant evidence of shared decision-making with parents during document reviews and interviews. For example, while parent and community participation were noted on school improvement documents, there were no goals associated with these stakeholders. Additionally, no staff members were able to provide an example of how parental input had influenced a decision or practice at the school. This suggests that although parent support was recognized and valued at Standmore, there were few mechanisms in place to actively solicit their input, let alone influence decisions that truly impact the school experience. Such an approach to parent engagement echoes Epstein's partnership framework and Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework, which promote the appearance, but not the true sharing, of decision-making power with parents. Another tenet of both frameworks evident at Standmore was an emphasis on pursuing parent involvement primarily as a means to improve student achievement.

Parent involvement focused on student achievement. Most of the leadership practices that supported parental partnerships at Standmore focused on improving student achievement.

These included the practice of placing an emphasis on communicating with parents when there were concerns around attendance, homework completion, or behavior. While this emphasis is understandable given the original low academic standing of the school, it is nonetheless narrow in scope and purpose. While Epstein's framework and Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework support the importance of involving parents, they are not as concerned with doing so in a culturally proficient manner. This can ultimately alienate parents as well as send the message that the school lacks a holistic appreciation or understanding of their child. It has been proposed by some scholars, including Auerbach (2008) and Green (2017c), that family and community partnerships based exclusively on such models will have difficulty maintaining success in urban settings. This is another potential area of growth moving forward for the school.

Cultural blindness. Lindsey, Roberts, and CambellJoans (2013) have described a continuum of culture as a means of explaining how schools may be viewed in terms of their cultural proficiency. This is often most prominent in how schools engage in family and community partnerships. The authors describe six levels of beliefs and practices along this spectrum including: cultural destructiveness; cultural incapacity; cultural blindness; cultural pre-competence; cultural competence; and cultural proficiency. The authors define cultural destructiveness as the practice of negating cultures that are different. Cultural incapacity is described as elevating the superiority of one's own culture while suppressing those that are different and cultural blindness is the practice of refusing to acknowledge that differences in cultures and experience exist. Once individuals recognize that their own lack of understanding of other cultures is limiting their ability to interact effectively, they enter the stage of cultural pre-competence. This is followed by cultural competence, which is defined by interacting with other cultural groups in ways that recognize and value differences. Ultimately, individuals seek to

obtain a level of cultural proficiency where they honor and appreciate diversity by respectfully interacting with all cultural groups.

Many of the practices at Standmore suggest the staff engage in parent and community partnerships using a lens of cultural blindness. This finding is supported not only by the explicit statements made by staff members (Aron, Blake, and Lee) of holding these beliefs, but the lack of programming to recognize and support different student experiences (Gittens, 2018; Taylor, 2018), and the absence of professional development outside of the impact of coming from low socioeconomic status families. This data suggests that this is also a potential area of growth at the school moving forward.

Recommendations

Data suggest there has been a clear change in the willingness to pursue parent and community partnerships at the Standmore School. The staff and leadership team have taken significant steps to partner with parents in promoting the academic growth of all students. This work has been complemented by several initiatives involving community organizations to improve the experience of students, families, and community members. The recommendations that follow are offered in the spirit of building on this commendable progress.

Expanding opportunities for parent engagement and input. Both empirical literature (Auerbach, 2008; Green, 2017c) and interview data suggest the school could benefit from soliciting parent feedback as a tool to improve parent partnerships at the school. When discussing the history of Standmore, Pat shared that at one point, “Parents really felt frozen out of the school and that’s when things really started to tailspin for the school in terms of its academic performance.” Despite feeling that this has improved under the current principal, Pat stated, “Parents are still fearful of going into the school. And a lot of it reflects upon their

childhood." One way to address this dynamic is to provide parents with low stakes opportunities to interact and provide feedback to school leadership. Auerbach (2008) contends that marginalized parents are more likely to become invested in a school when they feel their input is valued and they are provided with multiple and diverse opportunities to interact. As Pat suggested,

> I think that you do that by having opportunities for them to come in and meet the principal and key staff in a very low key way. There's not a problem. We're not [gonna] talk about grades, we're not [gonna] talk about academics. Just come on in so you know who the principal is. So there's not that relationship. "She's the principal! And I am the parent!"

Expanding such opportunities builds greater comfort and trust among stakeholders, provides valuable feedback for school improvement, and allows misperceptions about the school to be addressed. It may also provide a vehicle to improve parent participation in traditional school structures such as the PTO and site council. The care and investment the Standmore faculty exhibit towards students is exemplary and exposing parents to this reality whenever possible by opening the school would be a final benefit of this change in practice (Gohlmann, 2018).

Equity audit. If provided with additional opportunities to interact with school leadership, one piece of feedback some parents may provide is that they feel marginalized by current school practices. Initiating an equity audit would be an important first step in uncovering opportunities to improve the experience of students and families placed at risk. The current approach of treating all students the same has undoubtedly created pockets of injustice that would be more apparent after undergoing such a process. Given the pervasive finding of "cultural blindness" amongst staff members, this process should be guided by a third party experienced in conducting

such analysis. There may be opportunities to initiate this work by partnering with a local community organization or educational institution. Findings could serve as a launching point for implementation of professional development on cultural proficiency.

Cultural proficiency professional development. The school and district demonstrate a need to address cultural proficiency. Professional development could build upon work the district has already initiated on the impact of coming from low socioeconomic status families. The few staff members who acknowledged the need to improve cultural proficiency expressed concern with the capacity of other faculty members to engage in this process. There is a clear need for this effort to be guided by a professional organization that has experience working with resistant clients and that the work be supported and initiated at the district level. It is important for the school and district to understand that the need for cultural proficiency is not indicated by documented incidents of racial or cultural discrimination. It is rather an instrument of practice that should be adopted by all schools as a means of ensuring a quality and equitable learning experience for all students.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this individual study was the exclusion of parents as a source of primary data. This made it impossible to triangulate other sources of data from the perspective of this important group of stakeholders. In addition, only one community partner represented the experience of external stakeholders. This extremely limited sample size similarly limits the validity of all findings. It is important to note, however, that many previous studies focusing on family and community partnerships have gathered data using the school as the primary source of data. Additional limitations that were universal to the research study are addressed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4[4]

Group Findings, Discussion, Study Limitations and Implications for Practice

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

In order to answer the research question, the research team embarked on a qualitative case study in which each of the five individual studies was grounded in one of the five domains within Hitt and Tucker's (2016) Unified Framework. Taylor (2018) looked specifically at how leadership established practices that are aligned to a purpose consistent with the articulation of the mission and vision. 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 this study 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.

Auerbach, S. (2008). Visioning parent engagement in urban schools. *Journal of School Leadership, 17(6),* 699-734.

Auerbach, S. (2009). Walking the walk: Portraits in leadership for family engagement in urban schools. *School Community Journal, 19*(1), 9-31.

Auerbach, S. (2010). Beyond coffee with the principal: Toward leadership for authentic school-family partnerships. *Journal of School Leadership, 20,* 728-757.

Auerbach, S. (2011). Learning from Latino families. *Educational Leadership, 68(8),* 16-21.

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

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.

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.

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

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

Catsambis, S., & Beveridge, A. (2001). Does neighborhood matter? Family, neighborhood, and school influences on eighth-grade mathematics achievement. *Sociological Focus, 34,* 435-457.

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).

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

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

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

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

Deschenes, S., Cuban, L., & Tyack, D. (2001). Mismatch: Historical perspectives on schools and students who don't fit them. *Teachers College Record, 103*(4), 525-547.

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.

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.

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.

Epstein, J., (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools.* Boulder, CO: Westview.

Epstein, J. (2005). A case study of the partnership schools comprehensive school reform (CSR) model. *The Elementary School Journal, 106 (2),* 151-170.

Epstein, J., Galindo, C., & Sheldon, S. (2011). Levels of leadership: Effects of district and school leaders on the quality of school programs of family and community involvement. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 47 (3),* 462-495.

Epstein, J., Sanders, M.G. (2006). Prospects for change: Preparing educators for school, family, and community partnerships. *Peabody Journal of Education, 81 (22),* 81-120.

Flessa, J. (2009). Urban school principals, deficit frameworks, and implications for leadership. *Journal of School Leadership, 19,* 334-373.

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

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.

Gittens, N. (2018). *Leadership practices that affect student achievement: Principal leadership and high-quality learning experiences for students* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.

Gohlmann, T. (2018). *Leadership practices that affect student achievement: Creating a supportive organization for learning* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.

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.

Gooden, M.A. (2005). The role of an African American principal in an urban information technology high school. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 41,* 630-650.

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

Green, T. L. (2015a). Leading for urban school reform and community development. *Educational Administrative Quarterly, 51 (5),* 679-711.

Green, T. L. (2015b). Places of inequality, places of possibility: Mapping "opportunity in geography" across urban school-communities. *The Urban Review, 47(4)*, 717-741. doi:10.1007/s11256-015-0331-z

Green, T. L. (2017a). Community-based equity audits: A practical approach for educational leaders to support equitable community-school improvements. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 53(1),* 3-39.

Green, T. L. (2017b). From positivism to critical theory: School-community relations toward community equity literacy. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (QSE), 30*(4), 370-387. doi:10.1080/09518398.2016.1253892

Green T.L. (2017c) School as community, community as school: Examining principal leadership for urban school reform and community development. *Education and Urban Society,* 1-25. doi:10.1177/0013124516683997

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

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.

Horsford, S. D., & Vasquez Heilig, J. (2014). *Community-based education reform in urban contexts: Implications for leadership, policy, and accountability*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: doi:10.1177/0042085914557647

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

Ishimaru, A. (2013). From heroes to organizers: Principals and education organizing in urban school reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 49,* 3-51.

Ishimaru, A. (2014). Rewriting the rules of engagement: Elaborating a model of district-community collaboration. *Harvard Educational Review, 84*(2), 188-216.

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, L.S., (2006). "Making her community a better place to live": Culturally responsive urban school leadership in historical context. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 5,* 19-36.

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

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

Khalifa, M., Gooden, M., & Davis, J. (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature. *Review of Educational Research, 86*(4), 1272–1311.

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.

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

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

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

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.

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.

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

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

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

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

Mathis, W.J. & Trujillo, T.M. (2016). *Lessons from NCLB for the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved [date] from http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/lessons-from-NCLB

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

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.

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.

Miller, P. (2012). Mapping educational opportunity zones: A geospatial analysis of neighborhood block groups. *Urban Review, 44,* 189-218.

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.

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.

Noguera, P., & Wells, L. (2011). The politics of school reform: A broader and bolder approach for Newark. *Berkeley Review of Education, 2,* 5-25.

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

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.

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

Putnam R.D. (2000) Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. In: Crothers L., Lockhart C. (eds) *Culture and politics.* New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Putnam, R. (2015). *Our kids: The American dream in crisis*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

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.

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

Ricon-Gallardo, S. & Fullan, M. (2016). Essential Features of effective networks in education. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community 1(1),* 5-23.

Riehl, C. L. (2008). The principal's role in creating inclusive schools for diverse students: A review of normative, empirical, and critical literature on the practice of educational administration. *Journal of Education, 189*(1), 183-197.

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.

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.

Sanders, M., Sheldon S., & Epstein, J. (2005). Improving schools' partnership programs in the national network of partnership schools. *Journal of Educational Research & Policy Studies, 5(1),* 24-47.

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

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

Sheldon, S., & Epstein, J. (2002). Improving student behavior and school discipline with family and community involvement. *Education and Urban Society, 35 (1),* 4-26.

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

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.

Spillane, J., & Thompson, C. (1997). Restructuring conceptions of local capacity: The Local Education Agency's capacity for ambitious instructional reform. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 19*(2), 185-203.

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.

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.

Taylor, K. (2018). *Leadership practices that affect student achievement: Understanding the role of mission and vision and how central office leaders and building level leaders influence student achievement and equity* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.

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

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

Valli, L., Stefanski, A., & Jacobson, R. (2014). Typologizing school–community partnerships: A framework for analysis and action. *Urban Education, 51*(7), 719-747.

Valli, L., Stefanski, A., & Jacobson, R. (2016). School-community partnership models:implications for leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, DOI:10.1080/13603124.2015.1124925*

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.

Wahlstrom. K., Louis, K., Leithwood, K., Anderson, S. (2010). Learning from leadership: Investigating the links to improved student learning. *Educational Research Service*, *65*(3), 1-11. http://doi.org/10.1634/theoncologist.2013-043

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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

Appendix C

Open Ended Interview Protocol for School Level Personnel – A

Question / Domain Alignment Key

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

Background Questions:

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

Overarching Questions:

2. Why is your school successful?

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

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

Specific Questions:

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

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

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

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

Appendix E

Open Ended Interview Protocol for School Level Personnel – B

Question / Domain Alignment Key

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

Background Questions:

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

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

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

Specific Questions:

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

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

Appendix F

Open Ended Interview Protocol for District Level Personnel

Question / Domain Alignment Key

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

Background Questions:

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

Academic Achievement:

2. Why do you believe Standmore is successful?

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

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

Building Mission/Vision:

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

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

Appendix G

Open Ended Interview Protocol for External Stakeholders

Question / Domain Alignment Key

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

Background Questions:

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

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

Overarching Questions:

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

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

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

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

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

Specific Questions:

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

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

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)