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A Study to Examine Teacher Perceptions of Leadership Characteristics That
Middle School Principals Should Have to Be an Effective Instructional Leader

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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August 2011

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Keywords: {Accountability, Instructional leader, School Improvement}

ABSTRACT

A Study to Examine Teacher Perceptions of Leadership Characteristics That Middle School Principals Should Have to Be an Effective Instructional Leader

by

Gary D. McCann

This study was designed to investigate teachers' perceptions of the role middle school principals played as instructional leaders in 2 rural schools in southwest Virginia. The 2 middle school participants in the study included only teachers in schools classified *Fully Accredited* by the accountability standards of the *No Child Left Behind* for changing the academic status of their schools from *Needs Improvement* in 2005 to *Fully Accredited* for 2006 to 2009 inclusive. This study examined teachers' perceptions of the principal's role as an instructional leader for school improvement in changing the status of the schools from *Needs Improvement* to *Fully Accredited*.

This study examined middle school teachers' perceptions of 3 leadership characteristics middle school principals should possess as an effective instructional leader for school improvement.

This qualitative research project examined middle school teachers' perceptions of the impact of school vision, teacher collaboration, and student academic needs for improving student achievement during a school improvement process. This qualitative study gathered information through the use of online surveys, interviews, and summative student achievement scores to determine teacher's perceptions of the effectiveness of their principals as instructional leaders.

Results of this study suggested principals should rely on researched-based practices for maintaining and sustaining high student achievement and high teacher expectations for instructional accountability. This study provides useful information for future instructional research on 3 leadership characteristics and their impact on instruction and student achievement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my doctoral committee for their patience, wisdom, and guidance: Dr. Catherine Glascock, Chairperson, Dr. Cecil Blankenship, Dr. Eric Glover, and Dr. Pamela Scott. I appreciate their expertise and encouragement.

I am grateful for the opportunity to reach and share this milestone in my life with such a wonderful and supportive cohort. I will miss the challenges and collaboration of my colleagues, but treasure the valuable relationships we forged throughout this process. Thanks for your friendship and being there when I needed it most: Wandaleen Adams, Vickie Brown, Renia Clark, Brian Dean, Lynn Metcalfe, Jim Myers, Lisa Stewart, Robb Widener, and Michelle Wilder.

To my family Rita, Steve, and Ryan, I am blessed to have such a devoted and supportive family. You have always given me the encouragement and enthusiasm to accomplish my pursuits and commitments. Without your support, this accomplishment would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Every child in America deserves a world-class education...this is a moral imperative – the key to securing a more equal, fair, and just society. The efforts will require the skills and talents of many, especially our nation’s teachers, principals, and other school leaders. Our goal must be to have a great teacher in every classroom and a great principal in every school.

President Barack Obama, *A Blueprint for Reform* (2010, p. 1).

Context Setting and History of the Issue

The leadership role of a school principal calls for exceptional skills in meeting ever-changing demands of the modern instructional environment. Veskatesh (2008) stated a need for school principals to have an understanding of leadership skills and knowledge of accountability demands related to student learning and achievement. The demands of educational leadership call for principals to have a positive influence on the teaching-learning process that provides a strong emphasis on curriculum and instruction.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) studied the art of leadership, seeking to define characteristics of successful leaders. They stated leadership was based on practices not personality. Their research described practices of effective leaders as one of active involvement in inspiring and providing practices for needed organizational change. Three of the five practices they identified are: shared vision, enabling others to act, and providing an encouraging and collaborative environment for change. A vision was defined by Kouzes and Posner (2002), as a “force that invents the future” (p. 15). Principals need an internal desire to make things happen, to change the way something is done, or to create something new by providing a vision in teachers’ minds

of end results. One of the most important tasks of principals is seizing the opportunity to revitalize instruction by professional development.

Jackson and Davis (2000) supported the need for principals to be knowledgeable with core leadership skills and competencies for sustaining school improvement. Middle school research, specifically *Turning Points 2000*, described effective schools as learning institutions where the role of the principal serves as a vital lifeline for sustaining school improvement and improving student achievement. Teachers and principals are accountable for school improvement decisions that give the public the assurance that best practices and systemic learning are embedded in the curriculum.

Supovitz and Poglinco (2001) researched the leadership role of middle school principals in an effort to describe the role of an instructional leader. The term instructional leadership was generally defined as actions leaders take to improve teaching and learning resulting in improved performance in student achievement (King, 2002).

Studies by Halawah (2006) have shown that academic integration, peer relations, faculty concerns, and student commitment to academic success had a significant impact on the intellectual development of students. Hart and Fellabaum (2008) researched school climate and its instructional impact and determined that working conditions in which administrators, teaching staff, and students interact affected the quality of instruction. However, there was little consensus on how best to define or measure quality of instruction or a set of best practices for assessing school climate. Gladwell (2000) emphasized the need within this country for the American public school system to create a school culture for world-class schools. His studies showed that enthusiasm, passion, and accountability can have a major affect on student

performance. Fullan (1999) described the principal of the 21st century as possessing leadership skills to align student success with needed school improvements efforts.

Effective leadership strategies have been developed and improved over the past decades. Lashway (2004) described *instructional leadership* in the 1980s as a shift for principals because research indicated that successful school leaders paid close attention to curriculum and instruction. However, this thought was followed and replaced in the early 1990s by school-based management and facilitative leadership. Fullan (1991) best described this shift as instructional leadership based on persuasion. Lashway (2003), in describing the role of the school leader, stated that school leadership was the process of influencing contextual factors such as policy formation, goal development, and teachers' practices. Fink and Resnick (2001) described the principals' role as one that goes beyond a competent manager of various tasks and responsibilities to one as an instructional leader focused on continuous school improvement. The federal law, *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*, mandates standards-based accountability thus shifting the instructional focus to test results. The reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), A Blueprint for Reform*, proposed to strengthen and improve the development of instructional leaders and teachers for reducing student achievement gaps for more successful schools (USDE, 2010). Principals as instructional leaders need to provide teachers instructional tools and practices that lead to student success in a standards-based curriculum aligned to instructional standards and assessment. Principals continuously focused on instructional challenges and professional development that addressed instructional needs of students. *NCLB* focus on *Highly Qualified* classroom teachers and the student option to transfer to successful schools help provide public education students with world class education they

need. Therefore, principals not only should be engaged in the curriculum but should know the curriculum and instructional strategies and move beyond the management of the building to become actively involved in the academic life of the school for effective change and school improvement (Fink & Resnick, 2001).

Educational leadership policy standards adopted by the National Policy Board of Educational Administration (2008) strengthen school leadership by defining six standards.

These standards are:

1. setting a widely shared vision;
2. developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff development;
3. ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment;
4. collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources;
5. acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and
6. understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts (ISLLC, 2008, p.6).

These standards provide principals with guidance and insight to the responsibilities expected of school leaders (ISLLC, 2008). Standard one states the importance of principals articulating a common vision for faculty. Standard two described the school leader as promoting the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and teachers' professional growth.

Standard four addresses the need for collaborative school environments for making teacher accountable for student learning.

Historical research has identified and determined what essential leadership characteristics school teachers recognized as common among school principals for supporting school improvement. Abrams (1998) examined the principal's role as an instructional leader as one that supports collaborative school culture, establishes a shared common vision, and disaggregates student data for curriculum alignment. Abrams' (1998) study also examined three themes identified in qualitative literature sources as effective leadership characteristics for school improvement. The three themes in this research study are: (1) placing the needs of the students in the center of all decision making, (2) building collaborative school cultures, and (3) articulating a common vision for improving student achievement.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine middle school teacher perceptions of leadership characteristics that a middle school principal should have to be an effective instructional leader. According to King (2002), one of the greatest challenges school administrators face is providing a school environment that is conducive to professional growth of faculty for sustaining collaborative school cultures and for improving student achievement. Instructional leadership is not only defined actions to improve teaching and learning (King, 2002) but also actions principals take to develop a productive and satisfying work environment for teachers with desirable learning outcomes for students (Greenfield, 1987). Although principals may have

preconceived perceptions about their role as a school leader, their success depends on teachers' support and how teachers perceive their administrator. Therefore, it is necessary to identify important leadership characteristics of successful middle school principals as perceived by supporting teachers. This qualitative study examined the leadership role of two middle school principals and teachers perceptions of three leadership characteristics that made them effective school leaders.

Research Questions

A qualitative approach was used to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. How does your school principal use academic needs of students in the decision-making process?
2. How does your principal build a collaborative school culture and what leadership skills have you observed in this process?
3. How does your principal use a guiding vision to lead teachers to student success?

Significance of the Study

Schmoker (2006) stated the significance of the need for effective instructional leaders as necessary for tackling persistent achievement gaps in public schools.

“The kind of significant, sustained improvement that we need in schools will not occur in an isolated, free-lance culture, where no one knows what anyone else is doing or what each others’ goals are. That is a system of disarray” (p. 40).

Shin and Zhou (2007) examined how team diversity under transformational leadership conditions related to an atmosphere of instructional creativity for teachers. They studied 75 heterogeneous teaching teams, and their research suggested that there is a relationship between supporting transformational leadership styles and educational specialization to instructional creativity resulting in positive student outcomes.

The principal’s role for continuous school improvement calls for unique leadership qualities in meeting the demands of a changing society with global needs. Principals as instructional leaders require a reservoir of strategies to support instructional practices to provide students with skills for good citizenship and success in a global marketplace. The task of keeping an instructional focus on positive student outcomes is a challenge for many school administrators in sustaining effective schools (Fullan, 2002). Kuhns (2007) described the 21st century educational leader as someone well versed in the educational needs of students who understands the advantage of students being able to compete in a global economy and survive in an entrepreneurial society where value is placed on knowledge and the capacity to analyze and synthesize information for innovative thinking. Educational leaders should be visionaries equipped with a new set of leadership skills to lead others in developing effective learning systems (Kuhns, 2007).

The principal of the 21st century should be an effective instructional leader for sustaining school improvement for school practices that promote positive student achievement in a safe environment. The *No Child Left Behind* legislation renewed emphasis on safe schools, basic skills, and accountability for student achievement. The goals of *NCLB* continue to focus on

testing and stakeholders accountability (United States Department of Education (USDE), 2006). In the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (*ESEA*), a priority in the blueprint for reform is to ensure that every classroom has a great teacher and a great leader by improving teacher and principal effectiveness (USDE, 2010). According to USDE (2010) the Reauthorization of *ESEA* will provide pathways for strengthening teachers and instructional leaders through professional development activities that prepare them to measure and evaluate student academic growth. Recognizing, encouraging, and rewarding excellence as measured by the percentage of students scoring in the advanced proficiency range on assessments are planned components of the Reauthorization *ESEA* Act.

Levette and Watts (2002) suggested a strong relationship existed between teacher perceptions on principal leadership and the success of any school. Furthermore Levette and Watts (2002) examined how teachers perceived the leadership role of their principal as a primary indicator for the success or failure of a school. A poor perception of the role of the principal often results in poor teacher performance. Supportive systems provide principals with assistance needed to run an effective school. Levette and Watts's (2002) research was significant to understand how teachers perceived the role of their principal and the importance of a common vision, focusing on student needs, and the impact that building a collaborative teaching culture has on the successful school leadership. With the reauthorization of the *ESEA* calling for skillful teachers and leaders in every school, greater accountability will be placed on states and school districts to develop and implement systems of evaluation that support identifying highly effective teachers and principals based on student academic growth and achievement (USDE, 2010). This study will provide insight on how a common vision, collaboration, and meeting academic needs

of students have on making significant progress in addressing achievement gaps in student learning and achievement.

Definitions of Terms for this Study

Accountability - describes the responsibility of educators to help improve the academic achievement of all students in relations to performance indicators for reaching high academic expectations (United States Department of Education, 2000).

Autonomy - refers to the degree or level of [freedom](#) and [discretion](#) allowed to an [employee](#) over his or her job (Business Dictionary, 2010).

Collaborative School Culture - describes a positive school environment that fosters desirable student outcomes for academic growth while stimulating the professional growth of teachers (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990).

Instructional leader- describes actions undertaken with the intention of developing a productive and satisfying work environment for teachers with desirable learning conditions and outcomes for children (Greenfield, 1987).

School Improvement - describes a systematic, sustained effort aimed at changing learning conditions in school(s) with the ultimate purpose of accomplishing educational goals more effectively (Hopkins, 2001, p.12).

Perception - describes the knowledge, insight, or intuition gained by understanding (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2006).

Visionary Leaders - are described as builders of a new dawn, working with imagination, insight, and boldness to meet the challenges of an organization by bringing out the best qualities of individuals working together around a shared sense of purpose. They work toward organizational alignment for a higher purpose seeing the big overall picture and thinking strategically (The Center for Visionary Leadership, 2001).

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations consisted of the selection of two middle schools in southwest Virginia serving the educational needs of students in a rural and low-income area in grades six through eight. Participants of the study included only teachers in schools classified *Fully Accredited* by the accountability standards of the *NCLB*. The study used only student data for grades 6-8 from middle school population and excluded grade 6 and 7 data at K-7 schools. Student data used to determine what schools would participate in this study were based on *SOL Student Performance Data* collected from the *NCLB AYP* annual measurable objectives in math and reading from 2006-2009. An online survey was the method used to collect student data from participating teachers.

Limitations of this study consisted of evaluating online responses that may have been limited in terms of honesty, perception, and thoroughness in completing the survey questions. The quality of responses is dependent upon the participant's knowledge and understanding of the online survey process, its reliability to produce data pertinent to the study, the availability of internet service to participants, and researcher ability to interpret the participants' short responses accurately with little or no misrepresentation (Meho, 2006). A major limitation is the wording of

questions for administrators. The word principal was used in the instrument when the survey was administered to assistant principals. Also, findings are limited by the validity and reliability of the questionnaire and the focus on the uniqueness of the structure of middle schools rather than schools organized K-7. Surveying middle school teachers in public elementary schools serving only Lee County in southwest Virginia limited this study. During the research of this project, several teachers and instructional leaders were transferred during the improvement process and time of this study. However, participants in this study were limited to teachers and administrators engaged in the school improvement process from 2006 to 2009 inclusive which included 29 teachers out of 84 and 4 school administrators.

Chapter Summary

This case study is organized and presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the problem and provides background information on the examination of middle school teachers' perceptions of the leadership characteristics that a middle school principal should have to be an effective instructional leader. Additionally, Chapter 1 states the problem, the purpose and significance of the study, delimitations and limitations, and definitions of terms used throughout the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the related literature and develops the basis to support this research project. In researching the core qualities of leadership, the *review of literature* addressed leadership competencies such as character, vision, behavior, and confidence as important leadership characteristics that school administrators should have to support school improvement.

Chapter 3 provides an explanation of the methods and procedures of investigation used during research. Chapter 4 presents the results of the research and an analysis of the case study. Chapter 5 offers a summary, findings, implications, and conclusions of the case study and makes recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“Learning doesn’t happen without leadership” (Institute for Educational Leadership [IEL], 2000, p. 2). Leadership is more than someone in authority trying to persuade followers (Braskamp & Wergin, 2008). According to IEL (2000) experienced educational leaders with backgrounds in school improvement agree that the principal's role has to be redefined as an instructional leader to meet the needs of the 21st century.

Research shows that principals must do more than be an effective building manager. Studies show the crucial role principals play in improving teaching and learning. It is clear that principals of today must serve as leaders for student learning. They must know academic content and pedagogical techniques that serve to strengthen teaching skills. Today’s principal must rally students, teachers, and parents around common goals resulting in raising student performance. They must also have the leadership skills to exercise autonomy and authority to pursue good teaching strategies and meet student performance goals. Principals must be enabled by communities to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century guiding student learning to higher levels of success (IEL, pp. 2-3).

Bass (2000) described the school leader of tomorrow as someone with the ability to inspire teachers and students in a changing world.

The principal’s role for continuous school improvement calls for unique leadership qualities in meeting the demands of a changing society with global needs. Fullan (2002) suggested that principals as instructional leaders require a reservoir of instructional skills and strategies for effective action in order to sustain an acceptable advantage. The task of keeping school improvement as a priority is a challenge for many school administrators in sustaining effective schools. Chapter 2 presents leadership competencies such as character, vision,

behavior, and confidence that school administrators should have as educational leaders in school improvement.

Today, principals need a future focus on effective instructional practices for sustaining improvements that promote positive student achievement in a safe and secure environment.

Nanus and Dobbs (1999) described leadership as moving the organization in the right direction for making progress by stating, “Leadership is where tomorrow begins” (p.6).

Archer (2008) discussed the difference between being in a position of leadership and showing leadership. Successful leaders are those who choose the right actions along with the words they speak. They are skilled at both avoiding and resolving conflict to meet their objectives.

Fullan (1997) described the principal as the school's gate keeper. According to Fullan teachers are encouraged to follow their principal during times of uncertainty, careful in the pursuit of silver bullets and legislative mandates that offer to fix public education such as *NCLB*. Fullan (2001) referred to leadership that makes changes based on the sheer number of innovations as principals of "Christmas Tree Schools." Fullan (2001) stated, "These schools glitter from a distance—so many innovations, so little time—but they end up superficially adorned with many decorations, lack depth and coherence" for sustaining student achievement (p. 36).

Principal's Role as Instructional Leader

The principal doesn't have to be the most knowledgeable person in the school building, but an instructional leader for the community of learners in the school (D'Orio, 2010). Hoerr

(2007) asserted principals are more effective as facilitators of teacher learning. Phelps (2008) wrote that having and achieving a vision was an important concept for instructional leaders to grasp in making a difference in the classroom. Mentoring teachers, establishing a nurturing atmosphere conducive to constructive professional development, communicating academic needs for instructional improvements, and school reform are essential ingredients for improving student performance.

In Virginia regulations establishing Standards for Accrediting (*SOA*) for public schools were not specific in stating measurable outcomes concerning the principal's role in school leadership and improvement until the *SOA* were revised in 2006. Revisions in the *SOA* expanded the principal's instructional leadership role to:

1. protect the academic instructional time from unnecessary interruptions for maximum time in the teaching-learning process,
2. ensure the school division's student code of conduct is enforced to maintain a safe school environment,
3. analyze school's test scores annually for appropriate interventions and remediation for students not passing the SOL tests,
4. involve the teaching staff in identifying staff development needs and activities,
5. analyze classroom practices for improvement of instruction
6. ensure proper records are maintained for proper placement, promotion, and instructional interventions,
7. monitor and evaluate the quality of the instruction for staff development and support for improvement in instructions

8. maintain records of students who drop out of school, including reasons for dropping out and appropriate action taken to prevent students from dropping out, and
9. notify parents of rising 11th grade and 12th grade students of the number of verified units of credit required for graduation and the number of such units of credit needed by individual student to graduate (VDOE, 2006).

McEwen, Carlise, Knipe, and Neil (2002) described the job of the middle school principal as one of the most crucial in the educational system. McEwen et al. (2002) stated that the middle school principal was central to the school serving the diverse educational needs of its students. Jackson and Davis's (2002) study found that successful schools require instructional leaders who recognize the importance of learning strategies that enabled everyone to develop and accomplish the school's educational mission. Jackson and Davis (2002) described the school principal as important to initiating and sustaining student performance in the middle school.

Murphy (2006) stated that school leadership in the 21st century was more of an entrepreneurial enterprise replacing traditional school leadership roles. Hollar (2004) further asserted that the principal of a school comparable as the CEO of a major business. Murphy (2006) alleged instructional leaders should follow the path of organization leaders in other fields that feature a more transparent leadership style. Murphy (1994) indicated that effective leadership strategies have been developed and improved over the past decades. He stated the role of the principal was to supervise classroom teachers, operate schools in a business manner, manage discipline, and be good at public relations. Decision-making has become more involved at school levels with teachers and parents becoming active in educational decisions that impact

students (Caldwell, 1998). National and state funds for public education supported more decentralized local decision-making involving community partners and parents.

Lashway (2004) described instructional leadership as more focused on instruction and curriculum than in the 1980s. Fullan (1991) described the early 1990s as a period in which principals, teachers, students, and parents were given more control of decisions through school-based management. Fullan (1991) further described this change in school decision-making as a form of leadership change based on persuasion and facilitative management. *NEA Educational and Practice Educational Policy Brief* (2008) stated that principals were consistently changing during the 1990s to take charge of the instructional curriculum in meeting the needs of the diverse learner. Consequences of their actions resulted in risk-taking that lead their schools to meaningful school improvement but did so with fewer resources. They were also expected to improve classroom instruction, produce quality teachers, and provide safe learning environments for students.

According to Lashway (2003) a school leadership is the process of influencing contextual factors such as policy formation, goal development, and instructional practices. The principal's role goes beyond being a competent manager of various tasks and responsibilities to one as the instructional leader focused on continuous school improvement (Fink & Resnick, 2001).

NCLB mandated standards-based accountability, consequently shifting the instructional focus to curriculum (Miners, 2008). As a result of *NCLB* principals became obligated to be the school's instructional leaders, leading teachers to produce tangible evidence of academic success by making sure students meet standards-based learning requirements as measured by

standardized tests (United States Department of Education, 2005). Principals were required to continuously focus on instructional challenges and professional development that addressed instructional needs of students and teachers for continuous school improvement. *Highly Qualified* classroom teachers and the rights of students to transfer to successful schools were *NCLB* components that changed the educational focus and framework for school improvement. Consequently, principals became more engaged in curriculum and instructional strategies for improving student performance (Fink & Resnick, 2001).

Esposito (2006) described instructional leadership as a mean to facilitate deeper and more meaningful conversations with teachers and principals about what takes place in the classroom. He said, “For continuing school improvement resulting in high student achievement it is important that everyone speak in a common language, and learning and evaluation systems should be aligned with a common focus” (Esposito, 2006, p.11). The public demands greater emphasis on school accountability, assessment, and effective leadership that will sustain school improvement for the success and benefit of student achievement.

Hogan (2008) indicated that the American populace supported greater emphasis on school accountability, assessment, and effective leadership that sustained school improvement for the success and benefit of student achievement. Public schools have mandated standards for students under *No Child Left Behind*. *NCLB* created educational reform to protect the interest of stakeholders. Quality school organizations should escape the criticism of sweeping some things under the rug (Hogan, 2008).

Leadership

Leadership takes many forms. Hoy and Miskel (2008) suggested that there are no established sets of absolute characteristics that determine how leaders are transformed or how they influence others within the workplace. Primarily leadership varies with the situation, participants, and events. Hoy and Miskel (2008) stated that demanding circumstances assist in creating the leader. However, Timberland (2008) implied that there is no single way to prepare leaders. Some leaders are born with leadership characteristics that promote their leadership styles. Because leadership involves relationships with others, it has ethical implications in doing what is good for all stakeholders in the organization.

Hoy and Miskel (2008) defined leadership as the relationship between administrators and subordinates that emphasized adaptive change for organization efficiency and stability. According to Hoy and Miskel (2008) leadership is a process of getting people to agree about what needs to be accomplished in the best interests of stakeholders. Bainridge and Thomas (2002) defined leaders as volunteers to take on the woes of the people.

The United States Department of Education (2005) defined leadership for principals to include responsibilities for budget oversight, curriculum alignment, facility operations, and student discipline. This definition broadened the leadership role beyond customary administrative and managerial duties. Principals were defined as instructional leaders responsible for the academic performance of their students and were expected to be acquainted with effective classroom instructional practices for continuing improvement in student performance (Anthes, 2002). Ogawa and Bossert (2000) added another important factor to the equation by emphasizing the importance of school leadership providing necessary resources for

quality learning opportunities for teachers and students. Kozol (2005) criticized the disparities and inequities in public education funding. He estimates that more than \$100 billion dollars is needed to fix the infrastructure of public education to address the causes of underachievement. Virginia recognizes the principal as the instructional leader of the school, responsible for effective school management that promotes positive student achievement, a safe and secure teaching environment for teachers and students, and efficient use of resources (VDOE, 2006).

Burns (1978) described leaders as active listeners who were open-minded, accessible, and approachable by those they serve. He described leaders as being able to provide wholesome working relationships that reflect mutual trust and respect for subordinates and their feelings. Effective school leaders were expected to develop positive relationships with teachers establishing mutually attainable goals for all stakeholders. Lunenbery and Orstein (1991) stated it was the leader's responsibility to maximize teaching-learning opportunities in schedules and assignments to foster open communication that ensures followers are working to capacity.

A Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (2004) study reviewing factors and practices associated with school performance in Virginia emphasized the need for strong and stable instructional leadership at all levels as a key to student success. According to JLARC (2004),

One of the keys to academic success for students appears to be strong leadership provided by the school principal. In successful schools, the principals have had extensive experience as teachers, and serve as the instructional leader of their schools. They set the vision and tone in their schools, develop the overall instructional strategy, and ensure that academic achievement remains the school's highest priority (p. 63).

The Principal as an Educational Leader

The Institute for Educational Leadership (2000) indicated that school leaders serve as advocates for student learning. The IEL (200) research suggested school leaders know academic content, critical learning skills, and be successful at implementing pedagogical techniques and practices for effective schools. Furthermore, principals collect, analyze, and use data to improve student learning and work with teachers to strengthen instructional skills for school improvement. Instructional leadership begins with a knowledgeable understanding of educational research, innovations, and programs that allow for effective instruction. School leaders should be prepared for changing educational needs, demanding leadership responsibilities, and the challenge of curriculum accountability from all stakeholders. The role the school leader plays is an important key in the daily organizing, functioning, and execution of numerous processes and tasks that permit schools to accomplish goals as an ever-changing community of learners (Speck, 1998). Fleck (2007) reflected that principals as instructional leaders are the key to high student achievement.

Dufour and Eaker (1998) cannot agree that principals have a strategic role in the decision making process for effective school practices and instructional methods for sustaining school improvement and student achievement. A clear vision shared by all stakeholders and a shared knowledge of effective classroom practices are vital components of effective school leaders.

Research conducted by Utley (2005) examined leadership from the perspective of six elementary schools relating to school improvement. Utley's (2005) research defined leadership practices that could be associated with effective schools in curriculum improvement and

leadership attributes that could be easily observed. Utley (2005) identified seven common leadership practices for effective school improvement:

1. a strong and positive relationship with faculty,
2. strong instructional leadership skills,
3. sharing of power,
4. providing time for meaningful professional development,
5. effective use of student data to guide instruction,
6. valued parent involvement, and
7. the use of curriculum guides for consistent and effective instructional deliver (p. 1).

Willison (2008) defined the principal as an instructional leader who focused on school improvement as it related to student achievement and the quality of classroom instruction. Two common themes were identified in effective schools: 1) creating a school culture that makes student learning a top priority and 2) providing the necessary resources for supporting the improvement of student learning (Willison, 2008).

As the school's instructional leaders for school improvement, the principal depends on transformational leadership skills for implementing change that directly and indirectly affects teacher satisfaction (Bogler, 2001). School culture and climate should be positive in order to influence effective change in student behaviors and outcomes as well as provide dignity, respect, and support to teachers in the classroom (Smith & Lambert, 2008). Too often leadership is defined as routine behaviors and tasks that take place daily within a school for it to operate. In school improvement instructional leadership leads the way in helping schools achieve their goals by making the school function well enough to allow the principal's role to evolve and emerge.

The public demands school leaders not only to be skillful managers but also to address student academic needs and issues for school improvement (Smith & Piele, 1996).

The school leader assumes the role of principle teacher by bringing professional expertise and instructional guidance to teaching, educational program development, and supervision. In this position, the principal is capable of diagnosing educational problems, counseling teachers, and providing for supervision, evaluation, and staff development for enhancing instruction for effective school improvement (Sergiovanni, 2001).

Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL, 2000) indicates that schools in the 21st century will require a new kind of principal. A school leader's role will be defined in terms of instructional leadership skills that focus on strengthening teaching and learning, professional development, and data-driven decisions for more reliable accountability in school improvement.

Accountability and the burden for school improvement are both responsibilities taken on by administrators in today's schools. Common themes and instructional practices of successful schools are facilitated leadership, responsible delegation of duties, empowerment of teachers, accountability, and effective communication among, teachers, students, and parents (Crum & Sherman, 2008).

Instructional leadership means becoming involved in the instructional challenges teachers face in today's classrooms and supporting effective practices for school improvement. As an instructional leader the principal ensures that instructional programs are comprehensive in meeting the academic needs of students and are research-based. Principals are given the responsible for making sure that students are given the opportunity to learn. The principal makes every effort to maximize instructional time by protecting it from interruptions and disruptions.

Successful instructional leaders participate frequently, almost daily, in meaningful classroom observations. School leaders having essential teaching skills is not enough to meet the challenging demands of today's classroom (Lashway, 2003).

Instructional leaders are expected to internalize examples of effective classroom practices so they can make accurate judgments and provide useful feedback to teachers for effective school improvement. Principals are expected to be able to recognize whether lessons are aligned with the standards-based curriculum, develop assessments that are consistent with standards, and be able to determine if students' work is meeting the academic standards (Lashway, 2003).

During classroom visits effective school leaders focus more on talking and interacting with students to determine the quality of students' work rather than on observing teacher's behavior. Principals should be able to assess student performance and identify specific areas in which they can be of assistance to teachers (Brewster & Klump, 2005).

Fullan (2002) described school improvement efforts without leadership guidance and support as having a more probable likelihood of failure than success. Principals should be equipped to handle the complex, rapidly changing teaching-learning environment that fosters needed reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achievement and school improvement. Support best comes from the understanding that almost all teachers want to do a good job and are more than willing to put forth the effort to make a difference in the lives of their students. However, when incorporating change for school improvement, the support of the instructional leaders is important. Sullivan and Harper (1996) defined the principal is the instructional leader in charge of school improvement, responsible for establishing a safe environment to foster experimentation, and risk-taking. Empowering teachers to try new

strategies in wholesome teaching environments that stakeholder's understand is not viewed as disrespectful in the learning organization, but essential for growth (Sullivan & Harper, 1996).

According to Gitlin and Margonis (1995)

We believe teachers' initial expressions of cynicism about reform should not automatically be viewed as obstructionist acts to overcome. Instead, time should be spent looking carefully at those resistant acts to see if they might embody a form of good sense – potential insights into the root causes of why the more things change the more they stay the same. (p. 386-387)

An instructional leader provides professional development opportunities for teachers and staff enabling them to present the best instructional practices for students. Principals should set expectations for continuous improvement in teaching. The sustained development of the teaching professional is the heart of an emerging and growing learning community. The principal's role in promoting, facilitating, and participating in professional development is integral to developing a school culture where educators are continual learners (Speck, 1998).

Effective professional development is a continuous process. One of the most effective forms of professional development involves communication among peers, both within a school and among schools. Given a forum for sharing such as a grade level meeting, teachers can benefit greatly from other teachers' experiences. Although teachers need plenty of class time with their students each day, they also need time away from their students to become better teachers. They need time with peers, coaches, or consultants who can advise and support them. Teachers can learn from each other and need time to observe effective teaching practices in other classrooms. Teachers sharing instructional strategies, providing feedback and assistance, and the freedom to learn from each other are effective components of school improvement. An effective instructional leader can help by scheduling times for teachers to collaborate and by hiring

substitutes so that teachers can attend workshops. The goal is to make professional development a part of the teaching process for school improvement. The principal should find new ways, based on research and best practices, to promote professional development in order to improve student learning (Speck, 1998).

The instructional leader has the responsibility to collect and analyze student data in planning for specific professional development opportunities for teachers. The effective instructional leader will not promote professional development as a fast answer to instructional issues but will encourage a commitment to continuous learning as a way to improve student success (Kuhns, 2005).

Lashway (2003) indicates the need for today's principals to be effective school leaders. He defined principals as lifelong learners, not just doers, always looking for new educational opportunities, solutions, tools, and ideas for continuous school improvement. Lashway (2003) suggested that successful school leaders learned the importance of their role to improving student performance and school improvement and explored current practices, beliefs, and assumptions that serve as a basis for posing questions that produce schools that produce students ready for a global society (p.9). Lashway's (2003) concluded that effective leadership for school improvement resulted in new approaches to student learning and based on his studies, realistic benchmarks for school improvement be established with accountability for measurable results. "School leaders providing the appropriate conditions for sharing the responsibility for effective decision-making develops a strong commitment among the stakeholders for promoting school improvement for the next century" (Lashway, 2003), p. 10).

Timberlake (2008) described effective school leaders as change agents and recognized the need for principals to respect their followers and be risk-takers. Principals should model behavior they wish to see in their subordinates that supports the rules of the organization. According to Timberlake (2008) principals provide opportunities for input and suggestions from subordinates and stay abreast of innovative instructional practices that will benefit performance of the stakeholders and organization.

Prior to the paradigm shift of principals being instructional leaders, principals were expected to run a school much like a bureaucratic organization focusing on humanistic needs to meet established goals (Beck & Murphy, 1994). Lambert (2002) described principals in the past decade as instructional leaders with a keen focus on learning and student achievement. Liethwood and Riehl (2003) emphasized the importance of professional development, collaborative school cultures, and student-centered decision-making for providing professional learning experiences for teachers that drives effective classroom instruction. Lambert (2002) recognized the need for principals to learn more about issues concerning curriculum, instruction, and assessment for sustaining continuous student improvement.

Visionary Leadership

Sternberg (2006) stated that vision is the most creative administrative skills a school leader can possess. According to Sergiovani (2001) “When both vision and covenant are present, teachers, and students respond with increased motivation and commitment and their performance is beyond expectations” (p. 149). Sergiovanni (2001) described the need for leadership to make school visions personal because the heart of leadership is based on a person's

commitment to beliefs, values, and dreams. Bennis and Nanus (1995) stated that a vision was important for the organization to survive and acknowledged that an attractive, worthwhile, and achievable vision not only gives but drives the organization in a sensible direction for future existence. They argued that organizational success depends on common-sense strategies for attaining realistic organizational goals. Bennis and Nanus (1995) stated visionary leadership was indispensable for organizational growth and it was of equal importance for leadership to share their perception if the organization was to have any prospect of a future. Bennis (1985) described visions as vague as a dream or as precise as a goal or mission statement. What is critical is the leadership's ability to articulate the vision into a realistic, credible, attractive future for the organization that is better than the present conditions.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) described the effects of school leadership on student learning as second only to a quality curriculum and effective classroom instruction. However, their studies showed that leadership appeared most effective when student learning was promoted by a common vision ensuring resources and scientifically researched-based practices were in place to enable teachers to do their job well.

Kouze and Posner (2002) defined vision as a "force that invents the future" (p.15). Leaders need to create an internal desire to make something happen. Often this requires a change in the way something is being done, which results in something new. This is why it is necessary to have a mental picture of the end goals. Newcomb (2008) stated, "A leader is instrumental in bringing hopes and dreams into the life of others by providing them with a chance to accomplish exciting possibilities of what the future may hold for the common good of all stakeholders" (p. 14).

Kouzes and Posner (1995) identified five practices that leadership should engage in to accomplish extraordinary outcomes in an organization:

1. model a way,
2. inspire a vision,
3. challenge the process,
4. enable others to act, and
5. encourage the heart. (p.13)

Finzel (2000) stated that one of the worst things a leader could do is fear the future and suggested that most organizational methods are obsolete, needing leadership's constant attention to refine, improve, and define by listening and learning about our roles and responsibilities in any organization. According to Finzel (2000) fear can slow progressive innovations as was mentioned in Martin Van Buren's letter to President Andrew Johnson in 1829 calling for legislative action to stop the threat of a new form of transportation, called the railroad, to this country's canal system.

The railroad threaten to undermine the nation's economy by the serious unemployment of ship captains, cooks, drivers, hostlers, repairmen, and lock tenders who would be left without means of a livelihood, not to mention the numerous farmers now employed by growing hay for horses (p. 180).

Burch (2008) indicated that educational leadership integrate contemporary theories on scholarship and practices for building effective frameworks for student success and performance referred to this process as "Crafting a Wider Lens" (p.34). Emery and Ohanian (2004) explored the relationship between tests and learning and their impact on students and teachers and ridiculed *NCLB* as a government mandate to engulf public schools with standardized testing as an attempt to promote the educational framework of one size fits all. Ohanian (2008) depicted

public education as in need of a superman as administrative leadership attempts to make standards-based education meet the needs of all students rather than address individual multi-facet reforms over the long term to fix failing schools. Better schools meant enhanced curriculums and competent teachers who have high student expectations that inspire students to higher standards of achievement.

Siskin and Rosenback (1992) described the new role of principals as visionaries who make decisions based on student achievement data. Fullan (1991) concluded that principals as instructional leaders do not create an independent vision and impose it on teachers; they develop a collaborative culture in which all stakeholders build a common vision together. This required instructional leaders to work together to maximize student performance in positive school cultures practicing effective teaching strategies. A moral purpose, an understanding of the change process, the ability to build relationships, the ability to share acquired knowledge, and team building were five essential leadership characteristics noted as being effective for instructional leaders to possess (Fullan, 1999).

Murphy (1994) placed the principal at the center of the organization instructional process rather than at the top for enabling and supporting teachers for success. Also, later studies by Beck and Murphy (1994) described the role of the principal as a visionary who leads from the center of the organization and build a community of learners.

The Institute for Educational Leadership (2000) indicated that visionary leadership requires an extraordinary amount of energy, commitment, and entrepreneurial spirit to support learning at high levels. It also requires leadership skills to inspire others with a common vision both inside and outside the school building. According to Dwyer (1983) successful principals

had a vision to guide their actions. Speck (1999) summarizes the importance of vision by quoting Barth:

The personal vision of school practitioners is a kind of moral imagination that gives them the ability to see schools not as they are, but as they would like them to become. I find practitioners' personal visions usually deeply submerged, sometimes fragmentary and seldom articulated. A painful pause usually awaits anyone who asks a teacher or principal, "What is your vision for a good school?" But I am convinced the vision is there. I find that it usually emerges when school people complete sentences like: "When I leave this school, I would like to be remembered for..." (p. 117).

United States Department of Education (2000) describes tight funding, negative media, and conflicting community demands as major distractions for school administrators to keep a close and continuous focus on student achievement. Many times similar circumstances pave the way to a dysfunctional system preventing the critical focus teaching professionals should have on student achievement. Principals, as visionary leaders, keep everyone on track to accomplish a vision where student learning is the primary focus (Pascopella, 2008).

Student-Data Centered Decision-making

In addressing issues of leadership practices, Williams (2006) researched principals of high achieving schools for common trends in leadership that made a significant impact on turning low achieving schools around to schools of excellence. Teachers were surveyed in high performing schools to determine what leadership competencies they could identify as effective leadership traits for success. The study identified five essential leadership competencies principals should have for success in school improvement. They were:

1. a vision,
2. a believer of student learning,

3. a developer of teacher leadership,
4. a facilitator of shared decision-making based on student data, and
5. a builder of school culture and community support (Williams, 2006, p.1).

A conclusion derived from the study was that principals who placed the needs of the students in the center of shared decision-making established the foundation for transformational behavior that motivated staff members for change in successful schools.

Del Greco (2000) examined the importance of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to meet the challenges of school improvement. He identified other common factors of school leadership that contributed to long-term change in school improvement. Leadership behaviors recognized as important to the process of creating transformational change in conventional classroom practices included principals serving as positive role models, key communicators, and providers of staff development opportunities. In addition, principals maintained PLCs were an ongoing process and school climate played a major role for facilitating change for school improvement.

Ruebling et al. (2004) advocated that school leaders work closely with teachers to identify problems and intervene quickly to determine solutions during school improvement. Teachers should conduct student assessments and analyze performance data in their classes for curriculum alignment that results in improving student performance. In addition, principals compare assessment data across classes to measure both student and teacher performance to effectively identify program alignment strengths and deficiencies. By following these suggestions, the principal stayed informed and knowledgeable about issues and developments in the data assessment. By comparing disaggregated student data, principals can generate individual classroom reports for cross-sectional analysis for teachers to evaluate for instructional

improvements. Effective instructional leaders hold themselves, as well as teachers and students, accountable for achieving academic excellence. According to *NCLB* accountability is closely tied to measurable outcomes and results of student data. Caution should be exercised by principals to make sure that assessment programs are reliable and valid for school improvement. Making everyone accountable for teaching the curriculum and using appropriate assessments are essential for effective data-driven decision-making in the process of school improvement (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001).

In developing school improvement reforms for academic achievement, it is important to consider how crucial assessment literacy is for aspiring to have greater coherence in groups.

Fullan (2001) defined assessment literacy as consisting of:

1. The capacity of teachers and principals to examine student performance data and make critical sense of them (to know good work when they see it, to understand achievement scores [for example, concerning literacy], to disaggregate data to identify subgroups that may be disadvantaged or underperforming)
2. The capacity to develop action plans based on the understanding gained from the aforementioned data analysis in order to increase achievement
3. The corresponding capacity to contribute to the political debate about the uses and misuses of achievement data in an era of high-states accountability. (p. 117)

Brewster and Klump (2005) indicated that principals as effective instructional leaders have begun to focus on effective teaching practices, professional development, and data-driven decisions for accountability purposes for measuring student progress. Key elements they identified as essential for school reform for instructional leadership were:

1. defining the school mission and setting school goals,
2. manage and promote curriculum alignment for quality instruction and improving student achievement,
3. promote high expectations for students and teachers, and
4. establish a strong collaborative work culture among teachers that supports stronger links between home and school (p. 206).

The American Association of School Administrators (2006) developed 10 guiding questions to use as a standard for measuring effective classroom instruction:

1. What is the teacher doing?
2. What is the teacher saying?
3. What are the students doing?
4. What are the students saying and to whom?
5. What kind of student work is in view? Where?
6. Are students engaged?
7. What evidence exist that instruction is informed by pre-lesson student performance diagnostic data?
8. What evidence exist that instruction is adjusted to reflect the level of student skill and knowledge?
9. What evidence exists that the appropriate standard course of study is being taught?
10. Is the instructional objective posted or otherwise known to the students? (p.11)

From these questions they developed a guiding instrument to help school administrators determine what good teaching practices look like in the classroom from the principal's perspective.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission Study of the Virginia General Assembly (2004) study stated “Successful school divisions use data analysis to improve student performance and accountability” (p. 83). High-scoring and successful school divisions use data from the *Virginia Standards of Learning Assessments* to target essential resources for providing support for student achievement. Although principals had mixed feelings regarding whether division level leadership or school staff should perform student data analysis, they all agreed that extensive data disaggregation training was important for effective guidance in reducing the achievement gap among students and raising the performance level of students in public schools (JLARC, 2004).

Marzano (2004) stated, "The extent to which students will learn new content is dependent on factors such as the skill of the teacher, the interest of the student, and the complexity of the content, the research literature supports one compelling fact: what students already know about the content is one of the strongest indicators of how well they will learn new information relative to the content"(p. 1). Marzano (2009) developed a broadened, comprehensive approach to formative assessments and standards-based learning by categorizing testing into three types: (1) obtrusive, (2) unobtrusive, and (3) student generated assessments. Obtrusive assessment is a form of 100 point test, discussions, projects, and demonstrations of knowledge. Unobtrusive assessment is when students do not realize they are being assessed. Student generated assessments demonstrate the level of knowledge based on rubrics, and nontraditional grading scales based on student individual pace.

Schmoker (2006) stated that student achievement data provided valuable information for instructional leaders to assess the quality of instructional programs. According to Schmoker

(2006) student data should be the driving force of school improvement models and valuable tangible evidence of the impact of instructional programs on students, and the lack of student data crippled teacher morale. Without student data teachers lack a tangible system that provides constructive information on the progress of student learning. By collecting student data teacher decisions are based on solid tangible assumptions and instructional adjustments can be made early to avoid extensive remediation (Schmoker, 1999). Furthermore, student achievement data provides the framework in which teachers meet goals, improve student achievement, and meet instructional accountability standards (Schmoker, 2006).

Poverty Affects Student Achievement

Title I was enacted in 1965 as a part of the War on Poverty. *Title I* provides federal funding to school districts to assist with the instructional needs of the socioeconomically disadvantaged student population. Government research has identified an increasing achievement gap between high-and low-poverty schools, with students at high-poverty schools showing declines in achievement as compared with students at low-poverty schools showing increases in achievement (USDE, 2000). The instructional leader should focus on the achievement data of the subgroups and recognize the need for programs and policies that help children living in poverty. It is crucial that educators be conscious of the many factors that play a vital role in student classroom interactions and the impact it has on student achievement. High-poverty schools can succeed with high expectations with the support of the entire learning community. It is essential that the principal leader build relationships among the staff. A divided staff influences students' perceptions about the value of relationships. Therefore, staff collaboration

and collegiality are keys to making your school work. According to Jensen (2009), good teaching can change the effects of low socioeconomic status and lack of school resources. “Your staff is the key to students’ success...the quality of your students’ education will not exceed the aggregate quality of the teaching staff at your school” (p. 119).

Elmore (2000) further elaborates that learning requires modeling:

Leaders lead by modeling the values and behavior that represent collective goods. Role-based theories of leadership wrongly envision leaders who are empowered to ask or require others to do things they may be willing or able to do. But if learning, individual and collective, is the central responsibility of leaders, then they must be able to model the learning they expect of others. Leaders should be doing, and should be seen to be doing, that which they expect or require others to do. Likewise, leaders should expect to have their own practice subjected to the same scrutiny as they exercise toward others. (pp. 21-22)

Kozol (2005) describes what he sees as the inequalities of the educational system:

Urban schools increasingly resemble factory production lines. He notes that “raising test scores,” “social promotion,” “outcome-based objectives,” “time management,” “success for all,” “authentic writing,” “accountable talk,” “active listening” and “zero noise,” all constitute part of the current dominant discourse in public schools...observes that many urban public schools have adopted business and market “work related themes” and managerial concepts that have become part of the vocabulary used in classroom lessons and instruction. In the “market drive classrooms,” students “negotiate,” “sign contracts,” and take “ownership” of their learning. In many classrooms, students can volunteer as the “pencil manager,” “*soap* manager,” “door manager,” “line manager,” “time managers” and “coat room manager.” In some fourth grade classrooms, teachers record student assignments and homework using “earning charts.” In these schools, teachers are referred to as “classroom managers,” principals are identified as “building managers,” and students are viewed as “learning managers.” It is commonplace to view schoolchildren as “assets,” “investment,” “productive units” or “team players.” Schools identify skills and knowledge students learn and acquire as “commodities” and “products” to be consumed in the ‘educational marketplace.’” (p. 2).

Kozol (2005) further commented, “The most pressing question is, what social standards do we use to measure the effects of poverty, hunger, and emotional and physical abuse on the

academic achievement and performance of children” (p.2) Kozol (2005) contends that the public schools today face the problems of growing race and class inequality over the last 2 decades. The challenges public schools face today will continue to exist throughout the 21st century.

Collaborative School Cultures

Developing a learning community requires employing methods that encourage the joint efforts of teachers, administrators, staff, students, parents, and other members of the learning community. It is not easy for principals to create a collaborative educational climate for teachers to emerge as a cohesive body on any current educational practice (James, Dunning, Connolly, & Elliott, 2007). According to Fullan (1997), “disagreement is not bad” it is good for growth in learning organizations. (p. 18-19). Champy (1995) stated,

A culture that squashes disagreement is a culture doomed to stagnate, because change always begins with disagreement. Besides disagreement can never be squashed entirely. to emerge later as a pervasive sense of injustice, followed by apathy, resentment, and even sabotage” (p. 82).

Fullan (1997) emphasized that fundamental change in the culture of schools relates to “leaders and learning organizations knowing that both individualism and collaboration must co-exist” (p. 21). Paine (2007) emphasized the positive impact organizational culture and climate has on school leadership. Mitchell admitted a top-down leadership philosophy didn’t work when he attempted to mandate change for school improvement. “I developed goals and non-negotiable things and shoved them down everybody’s throat. It didn’t work worth a hoot.” (p. 53) Realizing the lack support for school improvement Mitchell created a coalition of teachers and asked them for input on how to improve their school. Using some of the same ideas, the

teachers took the lead and positive things resulted “Sometime one retirement at a time” (as cited in D’Orio, 2010, p. 53). Cunningham and Gresso (1993) suggested that empowering teachers in a cohesive effort to revitalize schools requires their professional and combined wisdom to make effective decisions impacting student achievement. They stated the competence of any organization can rarely be credited to any one individual. Success generally resides in positive relationships, effective work habits, and the collective skills of a network of people. Organizational competence relies on the collective knowledge and skills of individuals in a cooperative and collective effort to improve the organization (Wilkins, 1989). Without a united spirit, closing the achievement gap would be all but impossible to accomplish (Sergiovanni, 2005).

Fullan and Hargreaves (1999) described the nature and impact of school cultures on student achievement. The two most contrasting school cultures are individualistic and collaborative. The individualistic school culture isolates teachers from one another and stifles school improvement. Collaborative cultures foster cooperation and capacity building. The collaborative culture involves everyone who has a stake in education, helping everyone develop the necessary skills to face changes for school improvement.

Gruenert (2008) researched how culture influences teacher performance. According in Gruenert (2008) the only way to change the culture was to analyze the climate of the teaching environment. Gruenert (2008) suggested the use of team-building strategies that would change the mood of the teaching staff in support of a more sharing, collaborative school culture. The research maintained that happier teachers produce a higher quality of instruction that supports the need for school leadership to research strategies that create a more collaborative culture at

their school. Principals too often rely on extrinsic rewards or a quick fix to educational problems. Principals should focus on changes that promote positive teacher morale for a more effective collaborative culture. According to Galdwell (2000) doing little things to improve teacher morale had a direct relationship on improving the quality of classroom instruction through collaboration.

Dufour (2008) discussed the issues surrounding top-down versus bottom-up leadership strategies in efforts to improve school districts and concluded that top-down leadership strategies may be popular but were not as effective an approach as bottom-up strategies. Dufour (2008) further concluded that many times faculty and staff rejected new practices in which they have little input causing teachers to become entrenched in sustaining status quo. According to Dufour (2008) the highest achieving school districts employed top-down administration strategies. He called this direct empowerment model *Loose and Tight Top-Down Leadership*. Dufour's model held all stakeholders accountable for student achievement by getting tight about certain proven practices and processes while at the same time getting loose by fostering autonomy and creativity within a systemic framework for student success. The model encouraged open disagreement among members of the teaching staff as an opportunity to draw out assumptions and knowledge for building clear priorities and establishing common ground. Nirenberg (2002) described top-down leadership as ineffective because it did little to promote positive relationships horizontally and vertically within the organization. Leadership by its nature assumes expressed superiority over others. Bottom up leadership allows people not ordinarily in leadership roles, such as teachers, to take on more responsibility thus allowing stakeholders more control over day-to-day decisions, which creates a strong buy in factor (Lukaszewshi, (2008).

Data from elementary teachers and principals in Florida were collected to determine perceptions of the effects of high-stakes accountability in public education and determined that the tension and strain of high-stakes testing influenced the learning process (Jones & Egle, 2006). According to Jones and Egle (2006) teachers who were supported by principals in more collaborative settings communicated their instructional goals better, thus producing higher student outcomes than principals who were more traditional in their leadership style.

Kelley, Thornton, and Daugherty (2005) determined that principals are in a position of power to make an impact on school climate and culture. They emphasized the necessity for principals to understand the needs of the teachers and include them in the vision process to create a more positive school environment for collaboration. The collaborative processes involves effective interaction between the principal, teachers, parents, and students in establishing a positive school climate for collaboration resulting in improving student performance. Fullan's (1997) study referenced "empowerment acts as a safeguard against being wrong, but an essential component for implementing serious improvements. Miles (1987) stressed that while improvement initiatives come from the principal, power sharing is critical. The principal should move forward with teacher support, adequate resources, time, money, and competent personnel. It is essential that principals "express what they value as well as to extend what they value" (Fullan, 1997, p. 33).

Duffy (2008) emphasized the importance of external stakeholders to ensure the success of internal stakeholders in creating change for improvements in school systems. With *NCLB* and the ever increasing scrutiny under federal regulations, he argued leadership behaviors actually change to meet the demands of accountability rather than maintaining status quo.

Vangen and Huxham (2003) researched the importance of building within the organizational structure a supportive collaboration network for effective management and practice. Vangen and Huxham's (2003) study suggested: (1) building trust is problematic; (2) management of trust implies the ability to cope with situations where trust is lacking; (3) leadership often has the job of building trust where it is possible but virtually absent; and (4) noted the difference between initiating and sustaining trust within an organization. Vangen and Huxham's (2003) argument is well rooted on the presumption that trust is based on the anticipation that something will be forthcoming or on satisfactory past experiences. Trust was best understood in terms of the organization's ability to meet expectations concerning future behaviors and goals of co-workers.

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (2008) adopted six standards for school leadership. Standards 1, 2, and 4 described school leaders as advocates for promoting student success by encouraging, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and professional growth of staff. A school leader promotes the success of all students by the assurance of effective management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment (ISLLC, 2008).

Venkatesh (2008) proposed that the key to effective organizational leadership is the positive influence a leader initiates for managing change. Indispensable features for collaborative school networks were the empowerment of others, cultivating and refining relationships for improving performance, and communicating a common vision that will foster global sensitivity. He proclaimed that effective leaders create the direction for school accountability and high

standards of performance and sustain increasing levels of performance for students, teachers, and the community.

Ames-DeBrau (1999) researched the critical role principals played in initiating and sustaining continuous school improvement. The Ames-DeBrau (1999) study found that low socioeconomic schools that incorporated the Comer Zigler Model in the school's improvement program had a collaborative school climate, effective parental involvement, high expectations, and a transformational leadership style that promote student success. Leadership characteristics identified by this research supported the concept that effective school principals were visionary, risk-takers, practiced a transformational leadership style, and were change agent that integrated theory, service, and personality in the process.

Newcomb (2008) wrote that educational leadership emphasize the necessity of teamwork for developing crises strategies for solving key issues that plague the educational environment. Also Newcomb (2008) emphasized the need to create a sense of urgency for scanning for ideas to energize support teams as a fundamental process for reaching academic goal.

Hernandez (2004) measured student growth based on school wide test results. One hundred twenty-nine elementary, middle, and high schools in California participated in the study. Two individual achieving styles were found to relate to growth in student achievement. Collaborative teaching styles and self-contained classrooms that used competitive achieving styles were found to impact student achievement. Other factors found to correlate to improving students' academic performance were veteran teachers with many years of experience, socioeconomic status of students, and the percentage of English language learners at a school site.

The Institute for Educational Leadership (2000) indicated that school leaders should serve as advocates for student learning, should know academic content and critical learning skills, and be successful at implementing pedagogical techniques and practices for effective schools. The report supported evidence that principals collect, analyze, and use data to improve student learning and work with teachers to strengthen instructional skills for school improvement. Collaborative studies by Speck (2008) stressed that instructional leadership begins with a knowledgeable understanding of educational research, innovations, and programs that allow for effective instruction for school improvement. School leaders should be prepared for changing educational needs, demanding leadership responsibilities, and the challenge of curriculum accountability from all stakeholders. The school leader plays an important key in the daily organizing, functioning, and execution of numerous processes that permit schools to accomplish goals as an ever-changing community of learners.

According to Bass (1985) school leaders need to provide a school climate based on idealism and practicality, understanding the importance of goal setting and the significance of providing solutions. In addition Bass (1985) stressed that student success can only be obtained by hard work and support focused on increasing student performance. Furthermore, stakeholders have the ability to improve classroom instruction that challenges the resources of their school and educational system. Although difficult, everyone provides learning environments that provide democracy, equity, justice, and human dignity.

Hoy and Tarter (2006) determined what effective leadership characteristics impacted student achievement. Of the 96 diverse high schools studied, it was determined that a collaborative and positive school climate made significance differences in student achievement.

When these two factors were present in a school, there was a significant difference in student achievement scores regardless of the school's socioeconomic status. Jiminez (2004) determined that the capacity to do something new, to embed, and to share it school-wide most often resulted in a positive relationship between school climate and student learning. Mulford and Kendall (2004) found that lack of management, poor leadership, ineffective decision-making processes, negative school climate, and absence of collaboration produced stressful teaching environments that drastically affected student academic performance. Parkes and Thomas (2007) concluded that effective school principals maintained a positive school climate between teachers, students, and parents placed a high value on interpersonal relationships that encouraged collaboration among all stakeholders in the school.

Lambert (1998) indicated that principals in effective schools developed the instructional leadership capacity in teachers. By distributing task responsibilities among teachers and staff, they became active participants in a collaborative school community and became responsible stakeholders

Hartley (2007) defined the emergence of shared leadership as the combination of political considerations and cultural diversifications that merged into a distributive leadership role. Shared leadership provides a direct influence on school achievement that crossed several educational barriers. The idea that responsible leadership resides with the whole school community rather than with those in positions of authority was also supported by research by Blasé and Kirby (1992) that encouraged professional learning communities.

Summary

McEwen, Carlisle, Knipe, and Neil (2002) stated, “The job of middle school principal is one of the most crucial in the education system” (p. 158). The literature presented in this review supports the conclusion that principal’s leadership is an important key in initiating and sustaining high expectations for student achievement (Jackson & Davis, 2000). This review of research and expert opinion regarding the nature, responsibilities, and role principal's play in creating successful schools was examined to serve as the backdrop for this qualitative study.

While substantial research supports the conclusion that principals are important in improving student performance, every stakeholder plays an important role in the school improvement process. Leech, Smith, Green, and Fulton (2003) summarized it best by stating that principals re-examine how they manage their time and resources so they can effectively focus on student learning, curriculum, instruction, and assessment for reducing achievement gaps. By articulating a common vision that captures the essence of effective schools formed by all stakeholders, the principal shows the importance of commitment to learning for all stakeholders where student success and the well being of every student and faculty member is of the highest priority.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

This study was designed to investigate teachers' perceptions of the role middle school principals played as instructional leaders in two rural schools in southwest Virginia. The two middle schools represent a student body in grades 6 to 8 with total of 599 students, 268 students at one school and 331 students at the other school. The faculty represents a teaching staff of 42 members at each school for a total of 84. The two middle schools were designated as *Needs Improvement* as determined by the *NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress Report (AYP)* for 2006. Both middle schools were *Fully Accredited* in 2007, 2008, and 2009. This study examined teachers' perceptions of the principal's role as an instructional leader for school improvement in changing the status of the schools from *Needs Improvement* to *Fully Accredited*. This chapter presents a description of the processes designed to produce a valid study, data collection, and analysis of the findings.

Perspectives Used

This research was Action Research because the two schools are in the researcher's school district. Colleague perspective was used to counter possible researcher bias in the study. Methods employed are a mixture of survey, interviews, and quantitative data describing the results.

Babbie (2004) and Creswell (2003) agreed that the interview is used most frequently as a primary research tool for qualitative researchers. The interview process allows the researcher to identify common themes, instructional practices, and strategies by comparing the data from each session.

Kuhns (2005) indicated the importance of the school's instructional leader to collect and analyze student data in planning for specific professional development opportunities for teachers that encouraged a commitment to continuous student improvement for success. This research collected data from participants from two middle schools by analyzing student data and teacher responses to a survey instrument for common leadership characteristics for successful schools. The aim of the survey was to collect data on three instructional leadership behaviors in a way that the participant's views of such behaviors may be described and observed for proper analysis. By comparing the data from the research with previous research one can seek out common leadership themes and characteristics that promote student success in high achieving schools. The researcher collected data from the administrative staff and teachers of each middle school to determine what factors were identified as effective administrative behaviors, strategies, and practices promoting student success.

Research Questions

Fullan (2002) stated that leaders learned to trust the processes they establish by continually examining student data and looking for ways to sustain improvement. Researchers have determined that the principal's role as an instructional leader is multi-tasking and complicated.

Hoy and Miskel (2008) described the *Principal Leadership Questionnaire*, developed by Jantzi and Leithwood (1996) as an effective instrument to measure leadership behaviors. A similar PLQ instrument was created through the online service *Survey Monkey* to collect data from participating teachers for this study. The instrument consisted of question items to measure leadership behaviors and used a five-point Likert scale for responses with numbers 1 to 5. The measurement scale 1 represents strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 undecided, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. The online survey instrument measured three factors of leadership behavior:

1. The principal's ability to identify and articulate a vision for all stakeholders for sustaining student success.
2. How stakeholders are involved in building and creating a collaborative school culture for continuous school improvement for student success?
3. What degree does the principal place the needs of the students in the decision-making process?

Researcher's Role

According to Babbie (2004) the qualitative researcher may have a variety of roles that can be used in the data collection process. Fink (2000) described the various stages a researcher employs in qualitative research as a methodological process used to collect valid and reliable data. Because the researcher is involved in creating data collection instruments for the study, it is difficult for the researcher to remain unbiased in making generalizations about the subjects investigated and to get a true understanding of participant responses.

For this qualitative research study, the researcher used an online survey instrument to collect specific information from teachers on their perceptions of effective leadership. The survey instrument measured the respondent's perceptions on issues of interest for this study on how middle school teachers perceive the role of principals as instructional leaders for school improvement.

Population

As stated previously, the research is an Action Research approach employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The quantitative approach is one of descriptive because there were only 29 teachers who met the requirements to be part of the population. Therefore, the population was used.

The population for this study consisted of the teachers and administrators of two middle schools in the Lee County School District, which limits the size and diversity of the study. The two middle schools represent a student body in grades 6 to 8 with 599 students, 268 students at one school and 331 students at the other school. The faculty represents a teaching staff of 42 members at each school for a total of 84. The two middle schools were designated as *Needs Improvement* as determined by the *NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress Report (AYP)* for 2006. Both middle schools were *Fully Accredited* in 2007, 2008, and 2009.

Data Collection Methods

Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2010) stated the strength of qualitative research was in the researcher's ability to provide textual descriptions of how participants

respond to a given research issue. According to Mack et al. (2010) participant observation, in-depth interviews, and surveys are effective methods of collecting specific types of information. The researcher investigating the human side of an issue may often examine contradictory behaviors, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. Collins, Onwuegbuzie, and Jiao (2006) stated that observational behaviors may not lend themselves to developing generalizations about the population. Collins (2006) examined the in-depth interviews as a qualitative tool for gathering effective data when researchers wish to understand underlying attitudes and motivations toward given issues. Creswell (2003) stated that collecting data from participants most directly involved with the research experience provided valuable data to the research. Krathwohl and Smith (2005) indicated an interview instrument structured with open-ended questions allowed the interviewer to manipulate the question for greater clarity and understanding added to the authenticity of the data. Yin (2003) indicated the importance of the interviewer to follow an established line of protocol and to ask questions in an unbiased manner that will serve the needs of inquiry.

This research study gathered data from an online questionnaire with administrative leaders of each middle school who were directly involved in changes that influenced school improvement from status of *Needs Improvement* to *Fully Accredited* as determined by the *NCLB Adequate Progress Reports* from 2006 to 2009. The online survey collected information based on three of 15 research based questions developed from Jantzi and Leithwood's (1996) *Principal Leadership Questionnaire* and Kuhn's (2005) *Teachers Perception of Leadership and Instructional Leadership Questionnaire*. The online surveys addressed the principal's role as a visionary and in establishing a collaborative school culture as well as the effectiveness of

student-centered decision-making on student achievement. Data collected from both surveys gave the researcher a better understanding of the principal's role in the school improvement process.

Data Analysis Methods

Krathwohl and Smith (2005) described qualitative data analysis is a multi-phase process that examines the information gathering process of the study in terms of the nature of the research, prominent themes, related hypotheses, and point of view. Krathwohl and Smith's (2005) research indicated the need for controls to ensure consistency in collecting, handling, and analyzing data. Surveys, interviews, and questionnaires have multiple methods of gathering information that adds strength to the research while others need modifications. Rules should be established for the consistent handling of missing data from participants who refuse to respond or respond in some indecipherable and inappropriate way.

According to Byrne (2001) qualitative data increase the understanding of a phenomenon being studied by analyzing data from the population at large. Furthermore, Byrne's (2001) research suggested it was the researcher's responsibility to provide enough description about the context of the population studied so that others may adequately judge whether the findings apply to their own situation.

In this study the online survey instrument was administered to the teachers of two middle schools. Letters were emailed via *TaskStream*, an Internet communication network for all district schools, requesting their participation. The email provided an invitation to participate in the study, an explanation of the purpose and procedures for data gathering, confidentiality, and

the option to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. Participants were assured that personal responses to the online survey instrument were confidential and private.

The online survey with the instructional leaders consisted of three open-ended questions semistructured to ensure consistency of focus. The researcher did not have the freedom to modify questions or clarify responses for a more accurate understanding and interpretation of retrieved data. Administrative responses to the survey were directly cut and pasted from the online survey document into this research study.

Validity and Reliability

Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) determined that researchers wanted information obtained through the use of data collecting methods to support their research. Validity provides researchers with correct conclusions based on the data assessment. It is the process of collecting evidence to support inferences. Reliability refers to the consistency of the instruments used in the research study to produce the same or similar results.

Merriam (1998) described triangulation as the use of multiple methods for collecting and analyzing data that strengthens the reliability and validity of qualitative research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003) researchers use different methods such as observations, interviews, and documentation to validate research findings. Maxwell (1996) stated that multiple sources and methods of interpreting and collecting data gave a research study more credibility as compared to research limited to one source or method.

This research examined middle school teachers' perceptions of leadership characteristics principals should have in order to be an effective instructional leader. The study surveyed the

administrative leadership to gather information that was used with the data from the teacher perception survey to measure three leadership characteristics: vision, collaboration, and student-centered decision-making. This research used *NCLB AYP* data from the *Virginia Standards of Learning Assessment* on student achievement for this study. The triangulation of the data collection and analysis added credibility and validity to this research study for professionals who are seeking a better understanding of effective leadership practices for successful schools.

Ethical Considerations

For this research study it was necessary to show ethical considerations for all participants in the areas of respect of subjects, beneficence, and justice. These three core principles are articulated in *The Belmont Report* as universal principles for research ethics (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Participants in the study were told (1) the purpose of the study, (2) what was expected of a research participant, (3) expected risk and benefits, (4) participation was voluntary and one could withdraw at any time with no negative repercussions, (5) how confidentiality was protected, (6) name and contact information of researcher to be contacted for questions or problems relating to research, and (7) the name and contact information of person to contact about one's rights as a research participants (Family Health International, p.10).

To adhere to these ethical considerations, no names of participating teachers or administrators in the interview and survey process were revealed. The informed consent process ensured that all participants in the research study understood and decided in a conscious, deliberate way to participate. This process served to assure participants that the researcher was

committed to following ethical guidelines in the overall process. Explaining the purpose and significance of the study provided rationale for beneficence and respect. There was no anticipated physical or mental risk associated with the study and participants were informed of their right to withdraw without penalty. Justice was served by those who participated in the research as they will benefit from the knowledge generated by the study.

James and Busher (2007) discussed the complexity of establishing an atmosphere trust, dignity, confidentiality, and anonymity in interviews, especially email interviewing. James and Busher (2007) contended that in order to gather reliable data online a researcher should create an impression of authenticity based on solid principles of respect to those participants involved in the study. Meho (2006) expressed the researcher needs to clearly define the way in which online data and identities will be protected in the research study. Meho (2006) discussed the importance of emphasizing anonymity of the participant by assuring all links to the data and participant would be detached, thus removing any personal association linking them to the study. The lack of online accountability may cause participants to be less willing to provide sensitive information.

Chapter Summary

This chapter included a description of the study with the theoretical approach and research practices to be followed during this process. This qualitative study was designed to focus on instructional leadership skills of two middle school. Substantial gains in student achievement led to both schools being recognized as *Fully Accredited* under *NCLB* guidelines. The goal was to gather information through means of online survey instruments, reviewing

documents, and data analysis to determine if a connection exists between effective instructional leaders and student performance. By ensuring this research study conforms to established standards of qualitative research, the study may better inform future instructional leaders regarding leadership skills that contribute to student achievement.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

This research was designed to examine teacher perceptions of vision, collaboration, and student-centered decision-making of the instructional leadership role of two middle school principals in rural southwest Virginia. The study examined how middle school teachers viewed three leadership characteristics and the impact these leadership factors had on school improvement for changing the academic status of these schools from designated schools of *Needs Improvement* to *Fully Accredited* as determined by *NCLB AYP* for 2006 to 2009 inclusive. This study examined teacher perceptions of the principal's ability to develop and build a consensus for a school vision for all stakeholders, to develop a collaborative school culture, and to focus on developing student academic success. In addition, this study examined and collected data from the administrative staff of each middle school to determine what factors they identify as effective administrative behaviors, strategies, and practices promoting student success in the process of school improvement.

Data presented in this chapter were from email surveys from a population of 84 middle school teachers and four school administrators involved in the school improvement process during 2006 to 2009. The questionnaire contained six questions on teacher perceptions of the impact of three leadership characteristics for student success. Data collected through an online survey service (*Survey Monkey*) was used for objectivity and accuracy for analyzing teacher responses for a summative analysis for this study. Transcripts of administrative responses to online survey were copied and pasted directly as written by the administrative participants for

accuracy of transcription and interpretation. Summative student data from the *Virginia Standards of Learning Assessment Results* on student achievement during school improvement for 2006 through 2009 were used as the bases for measuring student achievement (VDOE. 2009).

Demographic Information

The population for this study consisted of four administrators and 84 teachers in two middle schools in the Lee County School District. The two middle schools represented a teaching faculty of 84 and a student body in grades 6 to 8 with total of 599 students. The middle schools represented in this study consisted of 268 students at one middle school and 331 students at the other facility. The faculty represents a teaching staff of 42 members at both schools for a total of 84. The percentage of teacher participation to the email survey was 21 for both schools.

Teacher Research Questions

Research Question #1

The principal, as the instructional leader of your school, used the academic needs of the students in the decision-making process for improving student performance for 2006-2009. Teacher Research Question #1 examined the instructional leadership's ability to use the academic needs of the students in the decisions-making process for school improvement and student success. Of the respondents who returned the survey instrument, 1 (4.8%) strongly disagreed, 12 (57.1%) agreed, 8 (38.1% strongly agreed with Research Question #1. Zero respondents disagreed and none were undecided. Ninety-eight percent of the teachers surveyed

agreed that instruction focused on the student academic needs in school improvement process as measured by a participant response mean score of 4.24.

Research Question 2

The principal encouraged teacher participation in developing instructional objectives for school improvement during 2006-2009. Teacher Research Question #2 examined teacher perceptions of the extent of their involvement in the collaborative process for improving student performance. Of the respondents who returned the survey instrument, 1 (4.8%) strongly disagreed, 2 (9.5%) disagreed, 0 undecided, 9 (42.9%) agreed, and 9 (42.9%) strongly agreed with Research Question #2. Eighty-five percent of the participants indicated they were involved in establishing student instructional objective as measured by the mean score of 4.10.

Research Question #3

The principal encouraged teachers to work toward goals with a vision of what may be accomplished if we work as a team. Research Question #3 addressed the concept of collaborative teamwork toward a common vision shared by all stakeholders. Of the respondents who returned the survey instrument, 2 (9.5%) strongly disagreed, 1 (4.8%) disagreed, 2 (9.5%) undecided, 7 (33.3%) agreed, and 9 (42.9%) strongly agreed with Research Question #3. Survey responses indicated that 76% participants agreed, or strongly agreed, that collaborative teamwork would develop meaningful results as indicated by a mean score of 3.95.

Research Question #4

The principal provided professional development to help me understand and implement changes for school improvement. Research Question #4 addressed the instructional leadership's ability to provide meaningful professional development to foster change for school improvement. Of the respondents who returned the survey instrument, 1 (4.8%) strongly disagreed, 3 (14.3%) disagreed, 3 (14.3%) undecided, 7 (33.3%) agreed, and 7 (33.3%) strongly agreed with Research Question #4. Sixty-six percent of the participants indicated that the instructional leadership did provide professional development activities to encourage teachers to understand and implement change for school improvement as measured by a mean score of 3.76.

Research Question #5

The principal made the teachers feel and act like leaders during the school improvement process in 2006-2009. Research Question #5 measured the instructional leadership ability to develop stakeholder ownership of the school improvement process in order to achieve established instructional goals. Of the respondents who returned the survey instrument, 3 (14.3%) strongly disagreed, 3 (14.3%) disagreed, 1 (4.8%) undecided, 5 (23.8%) agreed, and 9 (42.9%) strongly agreed with Research Question #5. The results indicated that 66% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the principal empowered teachers to be accountability for student success during school improvement as indicated by a mean score of 3.67.

Research Question #6

The principal used a guiding vision to lead teachers to student success during 2006-2009. Teacher Research Question #6 examined if the instructional leadership established a guiding school vision for student success in the school improvement process. Of the respondents who returned the survey instrument, 1 (4.8%) strongly disagreed, 4 (19.0%) disagreed, 1 (4.8%) undecided, 3 (33.3%) agreed and 8 (38.1%) strongly agreed with Research Question #6. The results indicated that 71% agreed and strongly agreed the instructional leadership did established a school vision as measured by a participant response mean score of 3.81.

Instructional Leadership Research Questions

The two principals and two assistant principals of the two middle schools were the instruction leaders responsible for the school improvement process for this research study. The principals' perceptions of the three leadership characteristics examined in this study were essential to understand and determine the significance of these leadership traits as they contributed to school improvement. The principals' response to the survey provided critical information in understanding their role as an instructional leader in their schools.

Research Question 1

How did you as the school instructional leader use the academic needs of the students in the decision-making process for improving student performance?

Participant 1 response:

District benchmark assessment, state assessment and formative assessment data were used to guide teachers to differentiate their instruction to meet individual student needs. Analysis of student performance and assessment data, along with teacher input, determined the student's academic placement in a remedial setting in addition to the daily class remediation.

Participant 2 response:

Various committees involving parents, students, teachers and community leaders were formed. Empowerment of others made my tasks much easier as I welcomed the diverse ideas and input. It made them have ownership of their practices and ideas. Upon the conclusion of numerous meetings, an analysis of current educational practices were reviewed. Upon review and implementation of best research-based practices, I

- ensured that the practices currently utilized were designed to ensure alignment
- monitored lesson plans daily for proper alignment with the state pacing guides
- staff development was offered according to the needs of the teachers and students
- cooperative team planning was essential and implemented
- sought services for underperforming students
- welcomed partnerships
- enlisted volunteers for before/after school tutoring
- paired students with mentors and peer tutors
- various incentives were offered for student achievement
- parent-student nights/activities implemented
- ensured up to date data was available to teachers, parents, and students in a language each understood

Meeting the needs of the students was essential in improving student performance. It was our guiding force.

Participant 3 response:

As we all know student performance is based upon the Virginia Standards of Learning. All decisions are data driven. You maintain doing things that are working and change things that are not. It is my belief that if you do the same things you get the same results. If you are below standards and do the

same things you will still be below standards. Standards that you are below level on something has to change. Change being the key word.

Participant 4 did not respond to questionnaire.

Research Question 2

How did you as principal build a collaborative school culture network in your school and what leadership skills were essential to the success of this process? As worded, the two assistant principals could not answer this question.

Participant 1 response:

A collaborative school network was built around shared leadership that included all members of the school community. Shared leadership empowered teachers to make the most important decisions regarding the educational success of their students.

Participant 2 response:

The single most important leadership skill was and is empowering others. The faculty had great ideas, many of which they had already implemented and never had the opportunity to share. Upon empowering them, I assisted by creating a *reflective dialogue*. My faculty and staff felt comfortable in receiving and implementing new ideas. Thus, all of us grew professionally and constructively. We had a *collective focus* on student achievement and understood the importance of **collaboration and diversity**. Furthermore, we had *shared values and vision*. With that in mind, failure was not an option. I feel that I provided *research based resources* for my teachers. I understood that their job was to teach, and that it was essential to keep them abreast of current trends in education. The *collegiality* among all of us required and ensured that students would succeed. (Words in **bold** are leadership skills the participant considered essential)

Participant 3 response:

As an instructional leader of the school, I developed a collaborative school culture by showing the people you work with that you are going to work also.

Instructional leaders have to show colleagues that we are willing roll up our sleeves and get in there with them. Leadership skills must change as needed. I like to call my style of leadership D-D-D. You try to be democratic as much as possible. When total democracy fails you become diplomatic and try to obtain consensus on the task at hand. Then the final D. If democracy fails and diplomacy fails you have to have the backbone to step into a dictator role. You must be able to recognize and do what is best for the student.

Participant 4 did not respond to questionnaire.

Research Question 3

How did you as principal use a guiding vision to lead teachers to student success?

Participant 1 response:

Visionary leadership is based on collegiality and trustworthiness. Creating a climate and a culture for change was crucial. Teachers were encouraged to become actively involved in decision making and were given the opportunity to work together in a supportive, caring and encouraging atmosphere to promote student success.

Participant 2 response:

That vision has to be through empowerment. It gives ownership, which is always easier to digest than someone having to tell you what is going to be. The vision must also be shared with obtainable-measurable goals by common stakeholders.

Participant 3 response:

My vision is that all students can learn. However, to get the most out of our students and staff I use what I call a 10-80-10 rule. These numbers will not always be exact - used for illustration only. The tens represent the bottom and the top. Eighty represents the middle. Not many of the ten percent at the bottom ever get out of the bottom. Different reasons for this could be a long discussion. The ten percent at the top are going to succeed no matter what. This includes teachers as well as students. Where do you get the increase is

the eighty percent in the middle. This group is what I call movers. They have the best opportunity to get better. Most resources are used with this group. So we focus on this group for movement to see our improvement. This is not to say we do not provide educational service to the other two groups. We give them the same opportunity as the others. This is especially true with the instructional staff. There are teachers at the bottom protected by tenure that will never move up. The ones at the top are going to do well anyway. Here, focus on the middle group also.

Participant 4 did not respond to questionnaire.

Academic Data on Student Achievement

Virginia's accountability system for student achievement supports rigorous academic standards, known as the Standards of Learning. Annual assessments of overall student achievement in English, history and social science, mathematics, and science were measured to establish student instructional objectives for accountability of student academic progress. *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)* indicates the school's progress being made toward reaching these instructional goals. School division scores for student achievement for 2005 to 2010 are presented in the following tables. *Table 1* represents the division's passing rate for all students for *AYP*. *Table 1* and *Table 2* indicate student progress for five elementary schools with grades 6 to 7. The three academic indicators for the middle schools making *AYP* were math, English, and science.

Table 1 information was retrieved from the Virginia Department of Education (2009) website. *Table 1* indicated division proficiency scores for all students for determining Lee County's *AYP* status.

Table 1. Division AYP Status for 2005-2010

<p style="text-align: center;">AYP Status NCLB Average Yearly Progress (AYP) Passing Rates of Lee County Schools 2005-2010</p>						
<p style="text-align: center;">Division Proficiency Scores for All Students</p>						
	Grades	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
English Performance	KG-5	80%	92%	90%	89%	90%
	6-8	63%	79%	86%	92%	91%
	9-12	89%	96%	95%	95%	95%
Math Performance	KG-5	85%	93%	89%	85%	91%
	6-8	64%	83%	79%	85%	86%
	9-12	81%	86%	91%	93%	92%
Science	K-12	88%	91%	91%	90%	90%
Writing	K-12	NA	NA	91%	88%	82%
History	K-12	NA	NA	89%	92%	91%
Graduation	12	75%	67%	70%	62%	70%
Attendance	K-12	94%	94%	93%	93%	93%

Disaggregated student achievement data for the two middle schools for 2006 to 2009 are presented in *Tables 2 and 3*.

Table 2 Jonesville Middle School Average Yearly Progress (AYP) for 2006 to 2009

AMO Objective	2006	2007	2008	2009
English	91	94	94	94
Math	93	78	89	87
History	na	96	98	82
Science	97	91	96	89

Table 3 Pennington Middle School Average Yearly Progress (AYP) for 2006 to 2009

AMO Objective	2006	2007	2008	2009
English	82	78	93	88
Math	89	70	88	90
History	na	87	91	82
Science	94	94	98	89

In 2006 Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) for history or social science was not applicable for making *AYP*. Middle schools are *Fully Accredited* if students achieve passing rates of 70 % or above in all four content areas. Schools begin to receive *Fully Accredited* ratings based on revisions to the Standards of Accreditation effective in September 2006 for spring 2007 Standards of Learning Assessments (VDOE, 2006).

Summary

Chapter 4 included the analysis of teacher perceptions of instructional the leadership role from two middle schools located southwest Virginia. The study examined how middle school teachers viewed three leadership characteristics and the impact these leadership factors had on school improvement for changing the academic status of these schools from designated schools of *Needs Improvement* to *Fully Accredited*. The chapter focused on teacher perceptions of three leadership characteristics. The responses from the survey of teachers and principals involved in the school improvement process were analyzed for effective administrative behaviors, strategies, and practices promoting student success in process of school improvement.

Summative student data from the *Virginia Standards of Learning Assessment Results* on student achievement during school improvement for 2006 to 2009 were presented as ancillary data for the reader's information.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

Sergiovanni (2001) examined the difference between high and low achieving schools and determined that the principal was a key player in setting the tone for school improvement. Sergiovanni (2001) stated, "In higher achieving schools, principals exerted strong leadership, participated directly and frequently in instructional matters, had higher expectation for success, and were oriented toward academic goals "(p. 162). According to Fullan (1997) the principal should be willing to empower and be supportive of others, visible, and sensitive to the staff, stand up to the district for the good of the school, be positive and open minded, and believe every child can succeed. Research indicated there are many aspects of leadership behaviors that impacts students' success and teacher perceptions of the principal's role as an instructional leader. This study investigated only three factors that influenced leadership behavior. This study examined teacher perceptions of the principal's ability to identify and articulate a school vision for all stakeholders, building and creating a collaborative school culture, and the extent the instructional leadership placed the academic needs of students in the decision-making process for fostering and sustaining student success. The findings of this study and future research on this study have implications for practice and training institutions for identifying effective leadership traits and their impact on school improvement and student achievement.

Data for this study were collected from responses of six Likert Scale survey questions from 21 middle school teachers about their perception of three instructional leadership

characteristics for effective school improvement, an open-ended survey question with three administrators, and comprehensive student achievement data. Triangulation of data sources for this study was accomplished through analysis of data through *Survey Monkey* from middle school teachers and administrators. This research study examined the effectiveness of three leadership characteristics used for school improvement as perceived by middle school teachers and emerged into the six general findings.

Summary of the Findings

Participants were requested to agree, or disagree with six research statements on the teacher survey and three open-ended questions on the principal's survey. The following section addresses findings from the analysis of the data relating to the research questions:

Research Question #1

The principal as the instructional leader of your school used the academic needs of the students in the decision-making process for improving student performance for 2006-2009.

Miller (2004) explained the importance of school effectiveness with a clear objective in mind. School effectiveness as measured in terms of student achievement reflects on the quality of classroom instruction, teachers, and instructional leaders. The analysis and findings of Research Question #1 suggested that the majority of the teachers perceived the principals as instructional leaders focusing on the academic needs of students in establishing objectives and goals for school improvement. More than 95% of the participants agreed that sustaining positive student outcomes and achievement were important components of the school improvement

process. Principals responsible for the instructional leadership during the school improvement process agreed that the *Virginia Standards of Learning Assessments* guided classroom instruction resulting in improved student achievement. Teaching strategies such as differentiated instruction, implementation of standard instructional guides, remediation, and professional development were important components of the school improvement process that focused on the student academic needs.

Research Question #2

The principal encouraged teacher participation in developing instructional objectives for school improvement during 2006-2009.

Sashkin and Sashkin (2003) described effective leaders as administrators who neither maintain nor venture to beat the odds but professionals who had a strong sense of sharing control with stakeholders after they have consensus on the design that would lead to success. Furthermore, past research on school improvement indicates this process is not a one person show. It takes stakeholders being on the same page, sharing a common vision, and being willing to do what it takes to accomplish established goals. School improvement focuses on instructional practices and strategies that improve student achievement. It takes collaborative teaching environments to support teachers to design instructional objectives with supporting skills. Teacher participation is critical to positive instructional outcomes relating to the success of school improvement. Teachers committed to the teaching-learning process have the ability to instruct their students to positive academic outcomes. Frequently, teachers that lack commitment to quality instruction view school improvement as someone else's problem.

Findings of Research Question #2 indicated that teachers perceived they were involved in establishing measurable instructional objectives for school improvement. Eighty percent of the middle school teachers who participated in the survey indicated they were involved in establishing instructional outcomes for their students. The principals as instructional leaders of their schools stated that they relied on the collaborative environment to make the teachers more accountable for student outcomes. The principals considered collaborative school networks as a crucial component of school improvement by empowering teachers to make new and constructive changes in instruction as well as making changes that meet the needs of a more diverse learner.

Research Question #3

The principal encouraged teachers to work toward goals with a vision of what may be accomplished if we work as a team.

Based on the participants' responses to research question 3, teachers perceived that principals encouraged teachers to work toward a common vision of improving student achievement by working as a team. Greenfield (1987) conducted a *Harris Interactive Survey* on the effectiveness of performance teams and found that teams with success established positive and collaborative tones in building consensus and making decisions. According to Greenfield (1987) team building seems to be more about building supportive relationships that are not reluctant to share knowledge to get the job done.

Research Question #4

The principal provided professional development to help me understand and implement changes for school improvement.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) described an effective leader as one who never asks people to function in ways they are not prepared to serve. Principals who promote professional development activities are more involved with the professional development of their teachers. Teachers who participated in professional development taught lessons of higher instructional quality and were provided with expectations on what was to be done to ensure student success (VCOE, 2011). Sixty-six percent of the teachers surveyed for Research Question #4 indicated that professional development provided by their principals prepared them with the essential skills to reach the school vision and instructional goals.

Research Question #5

The principal made the teachers feel and act like a leaders during the school improvement process in 2006-2009.

Sixty-six percent of the teachers surveyed for Research Question #5 indicated the principal was the key to developing stakeholder ownership of the school improvement process in order to obtain established instructional goals. The surveyed instructional leaders focused on empowering and sharing ownership of the school improvement process by inspiring teachers to make a difference and feel confident in the process at hand. Principals responded that they did not take the primary responsibility for improving student achievement during the school improvement process. Principals were successful by discussing what possibilities could be

accomplished rather than setting limitations. Creating an atmosphere for open communication supported risk-taking and creativity.

Research Question #6

The principal used a guiding vision to lead teachers to student success during 2006-2009 inclusive.

Timberlake (2008) described vision as a critical leadership trait that could have a negative impact on the organization if leadership failed to establish future goals. Timberlake (2005) proclaimed that organizations needed to know where they were going for future survival. The participants responding to Research Question #6 indicated that there was an overall guiding vision setting the tone for high expectation in instructional quality and student achievement during the school improvement process as determined by more agreeing than disagreeing (15 out of 21). This vision was the basis for establishing a collaborative school culture, sharing leadership roles, and providing professional development for instructional improvements.

Conclusions

The middle school teachers in this study perceived the principal as playing a significant role in providing teachers with a focused approach for quality instruction resulting in improving student achievement. Based on the analysis of the findings from this study, teachers perceived the role of the principal to be important in providing:

1. Professional development to assist teachers with instructional strategies and practices for quality instruction for improving student achievement,

2. Conditions for a collaborative school culture supporting teacher participation in developing instructional objectives and strategies for meeting student academic needs,
3. Common school vision for reaching established instructional goals for school improvement and student success,
4. Instructional leadership contributions that resulted in establishing instructional practices and strategies for successful schools that are measured by student achievement data.

Recommendations for Future Research

Principals as instructional leaders are important to successful schools. School leadership research indicated that schools are complex learning communities in which principals share an important role with teachers in influencing the direction the school takes during the school improvement process. Future research should be continued at the middle school level to provide practicing principals with additional research on the challenges and contributions instructional leaders face in promoting continuous school improvement for success.

The following recommendations for future research are proposed:

1. Conduct additional research to examine how middle school teachers perceive the principal's role in providing professional development and adequate instructional resources for improving instructional practices.
2. Conduct additional research on teacher perceptions on how government legislation, such as the mandates of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, impacts the principals' roles as instructional leaders.
3. Conduct additional research on how poverty, teacher competence, and parent involvement influence principal decisions on student achievement.

4. Conduct additional studies on the variations in teacher responses in their perceptions of the impact of professional development, collaboration, use of student data, and common vision for improving student achievement.

Summary

This study examined teacher perceptions of the principals' role in two middle schools involved in school improvement. The findings of this study suggested that principals who invest in teacher learning and improving instructional practices are more likely to reach their instructional goals. Teacher perceptions examined in this research suggested that when the instructional leadership uses the academic needs of students in a collaborative teaching environment student achievement improved. Most of the teachers agreed the principal's involvement in the collaborative process helped establish a work environment in which teachers were willing to participate in establishing instructional objectives for improving student outcomes. Most of the teachers agreed that the principal's ability to articulate the stakeholders' vision for student outcomes improved student achievement during the school improvement process. Teachers acknowledged the instructional leader's ability to provide for meaningful professional development was important to developing the capacity of teachers to determine what should be done. Good teacher practices and strategies to get the job done were important during the school improvement process. Teachers indicated a common vision for all stakeholders and the extent of teacher participation in instructional objectives were related to the principal's ability to be involved with teachers during the instructional process.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Email Questionnaire for Teachers

1. The principal, as the instructional leader of your school, used the academic needs of the students in the decision-making process for improving student performance for 2006-2009. Mark Only One.

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

2. The principal encouraged teacher participation in developing instructional objectives for school improvement during 2006-2009.

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

3. The principal encourage teachers to work toward the same goals with a vision of what may be accomplished if we work as a team.

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

4. The principal provided professional development to help me understand and implement changes for school improvement.

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

5. The principal made the teachers feel and act like leaders during school improvement in 2006-2009.

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

6. The principal used a guiding vision to lead teachers to student success during 20062009.

Strongly disagree Disagree Undecided Agree Strongly Agree

Appendix B

Email Questionnaire for Administrators

Please save to Microsoft Word and respond to the following three questions:

As the instructional leader of your school during the school improvement period of 2006-2009:

1. How did you as the school instructional leader use the academic needs of the students in the decision-making process for improving student performance?
2. How did you as principal build a collaborative school culture network in your school and what leadership skills were essential to the success of this process?
3. How did you as principal use a guiding vision to lead teachers to student success?

Appendix C

IRB Approval Letter

IRB APPROVAL – Initial Expedited Review

January 7, 2011

Mr. Gary McCann
999 Nash Mill Rd
Ewing, VA 24248

Re: A Study to Examine Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of the Leadership Characteristics that a Middle School Principal should have to be an Effective Instruction Leader

IRB#: c1010.1sd

The following items were reviewed and approved by an expedited process:

- Form 103; Narrative (08/20/10 stamped approved 12/23/2010)*; Potential Conflict of Interest (no conflict identified); CV; Assurance Statement; Informed Consent Document (no version date stamped approved 12/23/2010)*; Introduction to the Survey (stamped approved 12/23/2010)*; Survey; Introduction to the Interview (stamped approved 12/23/2010)*; Interview Questions

The item(s) with an asterisk(*) above noted changes requested by the expedited reviewers.

The following documents with the incorporated requested changes have been received by the IRB office:

1. Narrative (08/20/10 stamped approved 12/23/2010)
2. Informed Consent Document (no version date stamped approved 12/23/2010)
3. Introduction to the Survey (stamped approved 12/23/2010)
4. Introduction to the Interview (stamped approved 12/23/2010)

On **December 23, 2010**, a final approval was granted for a period not to exceed 12 months and will expire on **December 22, 2011**. The expedited approval of the study *and* requested changes [Narrative (08/20/10 stamped approved 12/23/2010); Informed Consent Document (no version date stamped approved 12/23/2010); Introduction to the Survey (stamped approved 12/23/2010); and Introduction to the Interview (stamped approved 12/23/2010)] will be reported to the convened board on the next agenda.

This study has been granted a Waiver of Requirement for Written Documentation of Informed Consent under category 45 CFR 46.117(c)(2) as the research involves no more than minimal risk to the participants because it is an anonymous online survey of adults. The research involved no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside

of the research context because it is an anonymous online survey of adults with minimal or less than minimal risk.

The following **enclosed stamped, approved Informed Consent Documents** have been stamped with the approval and expiration date and these documents must be copied and provided to participant prior to participant enrollment:

- Informed Consent Document (no version date stamped approved 12/23/2010)
- Introduction to Survey (stamped approved 12/23/2010)
- Introduction to Interview (stamped approved 12/23/2010)

Federal regulations require that a copy is given to the subject at the time of consent.

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subject or Others must be reported to the IRB (and VA R&D if applicable) within 10 working days.

Proposed changes in approved research cannot be initiated without IRB review and approval. The only exception to this rule is that a change can be made prior to IRB approval when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the research subjects [21 CFR 56.108 (a)(4)]. In such a case, the IRB must be promptly informed of the change following its implementation (within 10 working days) on Form 109 (www.etsu.edu/irb). The IRB will review the change to determine that it is consistent with ensuring the subject's continued welfare.

Sincerely,
Chris Ayres, Chair
ETSU Campus IRB

Cc: Catherine Glascock, PhD

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

East Tennessee State University

November 1, 2010

Principal Investigator: Gary D. McCann

Title of Project: *A Study to Examine Teacher Perceptions of Leadership Characteristics Middle School Principals should have to be an Effective Instructional Leader*

This Informed Consent Form will explain about a research project in which I would appreciate your participation. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to participate. By no means is there any pressure for you to participate in this research.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research study is to learn more about the perceptions of teachers regarding leadership characteristics a principal should have to be an effective instructional leader. This study will examine middle school teacher perceptions of three leadership characteristics effective principals should have as an instructional leader and the impact on student achievement. The goal of this study is to gather information through the use of online surveys, interviews, and to gather student achievement scores to determine if a connection exist between effective instructional leaders and student achievement.

DURATION

Each teacher will receive an email survey consisting of six questions on the principal's use of student academic needs in the decision-making process, collaborative school culture and skills observed in this process, and the use of a guiding vision to lead teachers to student success. The email survey will require 3 to 5 minutes for teachers to respond online. Principal interview questions will consist of short narrative response on their perception on how these three leadership characteristics improved student achievement. Response time will vary depending upon the length of the narrative response of the participant.

PROCEDURES

In this study, data will be gathered by the use on an online survey service – *Survey Monkey*. The online survey will be completed at each participant's convenience via *TaskStream*. *Survey Monkey* will organize the response for analytical purposes and confidentiality. Principal interview responses will be collected via email and printed in the research study as presented for accuracy.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

No known risks or discomforts should be associated with this research, nor is there any direct benefit or compensation to the volunteer participants.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS AND/OR COMPENSATION

There will be no monetary compensation offered to volunteer participants in this study. Any potential benefit to the participant would arise from that individual's reflection upon the items contained in the survey and interview resulting in a better understanding of instructional leadership skills that improve student achievement. Other than a better understanding of how instructional leadership skills impact student achievement, the participants will receive no direct benefit from their participation in this study.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, or problems, relating to the online survey, you may call Gary D. McCann at (276) 346-2107 or Dr. Catherine Glascock at (423) 439-7629. You may also call the Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at (423) 439-4430 for any questions you have about your rights as a research participant. I can also be contacted at gary.mccann@leecountyschools.net.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that the data collection information is confidential. *Survey Monkey*, an online survey service, will tabulate participant responses per survey question in a summative format. Numerical numbers will be assigned to interview narratives for confidentiality. This study does not attempt, or need, to retrieve any personal information.

The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, East Tennessee State University/V.A. Medical Center Institutional Review Board, and the ETSU College of Education have access to the summative data.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

The nature, demands, risks, and benefits of the project have been explained to me as well as are known and available. I understand what my participation involves. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to ask any questions and withdraw from the study, at any time, without penalty.

I have read, or have had read to me, the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A signed copy has been given to me. Your responses to the survey and interview will be maintained in strictest confidence according to current legal requirements and will not be revealed unless required by law.

