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by

Theresa M. Campos

May 2013

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRINCIPAL PREPARATION PROGRAMS TO
INCREASE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

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DEDICATION

For José Luis Campos, my husband:

You have always encouraged me to push myself in the pursuit of knowledge, even when that meant you had to assume the majority of the duties we usually share. You have always said it was more important that I complete my “homework”. In my three-plus decades as an educator and student, that meant a lot of sacrifice and extra work on your part. I want you to know how much I appreciate how unselfishly you did it and never complained. You did it for me. You said many times that’s what real love truly is. What a tremendous role model you have been for our sons, Joseph and Andrew. You taught them so many lessons about what a husband’s support and encouragement look like through the years. Now they are showing their children, Victor, Israel, Carmen and Daniel how real men support the pursuit of educational goals and how loving husbands unselfishly support their wives on a daily basis. Thank you for all your encouragement and faith in me. Te Amo.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Engraved on the silver bracelet I wear almost daily is one of my favorite quotes. It is from Phillipians 4:13. It states, “I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.” This quote has motivated and sustained me through challenging times in my life and is certainly what sustained me through the challenges of writing the doctoral dissertation and pursuing this degree. It enabled me to ask myself the question: “What would you do in your life if you knew you would not fail?” For me, it was pursuing a doctorate. I knew that I would be given the mental and emotional strength, perseverance and assistance needed to complete this task. I could not and would not fail because it would be through Him that I would have the strength to be successful.

First and foremost I wish to express my gratitude to the members of my committee, Dr. Busch, Dr. MacNeil, Dr. Fernandez, and Dr. Watson. Your wisdom, sage advice and encouragement have been priceless. I was gratified that you expressed such confidence in me. To the principals who participated in my focus group I owe a huge debt of gratitude. Your perceptions and honesty will help shape the future of principal preparation programs. To my family, for your constant support, encouragement and patience during the times I just “checked out” to accomplish this great task. To the members of my cohort – you are the amazing. Josephine – we did it.

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Campos, Theresa M. "The Importance of Principal Preparation Programs to Increase Student Achievement." Unpublished Doctor of Education Dissertation, University of Houston, May 2013.

Abstract

In an era of rigorous accountability for student achievement, the manner in which principals are prepared is subject to increasing scrutiny. Principals' preparation programs often fail to select individuals with the ideals and beliefs to drive urgent change efforts and lead school turnaround. Current curricula lack rigor and collaborative efforts are not aligned with what districts desire - bold principal leadership.

This qualitative phenomenological study involved a focus group of elementary principals from a large urban Gulf Coast district whose schools had at least one subgroup that was rated academically unacceptable. As a result of this study, an analysis of principals' perceptions revealed that several gaps exist in principal preparation programs. The principals' responses revealed what they perceive is lacking and what is needed for principals to cease the momentum of school failure, systematically rid schools of the toxicity of ineffective instructional practices and achieve increased student achievement.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

The role of the 21st century school principal requires a blending of exceptional knowledge, skills and abilities into a dynamic, ever-shifting environment. In addition, a principal's ability to successfully adjust to his or her environment is often compounded by increasing level of pressure brought on by a variety of responsibilities, such as high-stakes testing and accountability. Many challenges face today's principals. The pressures of school accountability and the results of high-stakes testing contribute to the high turnover rate of principal leadership. Faced with escalating school violence, shrinking school funding and the ever-increasing sense of urgency to turn around dismal proficiency rates in math and reading, principals are challenged to find creative ways to stop the plummet of failure and turn around historically low-achieving schools. (Kowal & Ableidinger, 2011) Until now, college-based principalship certification programs were intended to elucidate the knowledge, skills, and attributes (KSAs) necessary for all successful school leaders. However, as documented by the Wallace Foundation's annual report on school leadership, many of today's principals are poorly trained and lack the broad-based skills necessary to cope with the complexities, volume and scope of what their role entails (The Wallace Foundation, 2010). The central critique here is that there remains a significant chasm between what principal preparation programs have taught and the skills that were actually needed to deal with the realities of the day-to-day work (Portland State University Administrator Licensure Planning Forum, 2002).

Leadership development programs have been criticized in recent decades. Arthur Levine, former President of Teachers College at Columbia University, is one of the foremost critics of such programs. In 2005, Levine (2005) wrote that many educational leaders were ill prepared to be effective leaders because university-based programs responsible for leadership training were not rigorously preparing principals to improve the quality of instruction crucial for student success. A great deal of literature has emerged to highlight a principal's critical influence upon the school campus – better yet, each individual student – under his or her charge. It is important to note that the influence of school leadership is second only to daily classroom instruction. In particular, with regard to its impact on individual pupil learning, school leaders can have an enormous impact on teaching and learning through their ability to mitigate issues related to staff motivation, commitment and working conditions (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). A study chronicled in *EducationNext* (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2013) measured the impact of effective principal leadership on student achievement. Using a measure similar to the value added model, researchers in Texas indicate that the increase in student achievement equal to two to seven months of additional learning can be attributed to the effects of principal quality. Conversely, lower achievement at similar amounts can be associated with ineffective principal leadership.

Given the complex and multifaceted everyday role of the principal in today's schools, it is essential that preparation programs recognize the potential impact of principal leadership on student achievement and match relevant training methods to that end. John Kotter's 1995 description of the typical leader's task is even more relevant in our current school climate. In subsequent year's Kotter explains that leadership often

involves change that is messy and full of the unexpected. (Kotter, 2007). Hence, principal preparation programs must begin to frame programs that can send school leaders into the field with a useful and powerful repertory of job-based competencies that can drive rapid, dramatic change. In the defense of principal programs across the nation, such a solution seems simple on its surface. However, research related to successful school turnarounds better explains the issue by distinguishing between qualifications (i.e., principal certification and/or degrees) and competencies (i.e., reoccurring patterns of thought and action) (Steiner & Hassel, 2001). Historically, a high-rate of well-meaning, doe-eyed school leaders have emerged from preparation programs with little knowledge of how to turnaround an ailing campus. Therefore, those in charge of such preparation programs are faced with the formidable task of developing dynamic course selections that somehow account for the presence of specific competencies necessary for school turnaround success. Additionally, program developers must find a way to produce principal candidates who can apply incisive, fluid and effective approaches in response to the “pulse” of their individual campuses (Sterrett, 2011). More specifically, rather than an overarching theoretical understanding of leadership concepts and principles, today’s school leaders must have not received specifically tailored approaches to this country’s most pernicious challenges, such as closing the achievement gap in reading and mathematics, leveling the academic playing field among students of color, and the issue of student dropouts (Suarez-Orozco, 2002).

This chapter will examine the issue related to the effective organization and execution of highly effective principal preparation programs based on the available the research in the field, as well as current practices within higher education. Secondly, it

will investigate the efficacy of these principal preparation programs in preparing school leaders with the skills and knowledge as instructional leaders to halt the vertiginous spiral of student failure. The chapter will also dissect the components of competency-based leadership preparation needed to address effective leadership practices that promote greater student achievement.

Statement of the Problem

The accountability for student achievement and, to a greater degree, school turnaround rests heavily on the shoulders of the principal. Murphy (2006) holds that leadership drives the organization. For a plethora of reasons, statistics project that approximately 60 percent of school administrators will retire within the next five years. This issue is further compounded as a result of other predictable factors, such as an influx in the number of school principals that have reached the age of retirement (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001). And, as potential candidates consider the role of today's school principal, there is an increasingly negative perception associated with the long hours, multiple stressors and increasing pressure related to accountability (Munby, 2006). Thus, for some, the principalship has grown into a less-than-coveted position.

While certain challenges exist within collegiate-level principal preparation programs, there are also fundamental flaws within the principal pipeline at the district level. "The criticisms of university preparation programs are not new. What is needed, however, is not just another indictment, but a deeper analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of these programs and what can be done to improve them." (Busch, MacNeil, & Baraniuk, 2011). For instance, the Institute for Educational Leadership (2000) issued a report highlighting and addressing the issue of principal shortages. More specifically, the

report provided a survey of superintendents who were left with the task of filling at least one principal slot in their previous year. When asked whether they were experiencing a surplus, shortage, or had had a sufficient number of qualified candidates, over 50 percent of those surveyed reported a deficit.

Hence, there approaches a significant crisis within the principalship – that is, how to ensure that a sufficient number of quality and, more importantly, competent principal candidates are filling the void. A failure to do so would inevitably translate to negative overall effects for our nation’s students and teachers. This study will attempt to expose gaps in principal preparation program design in how and who prepares principals with the knowledge, skills and overall competencies that impact a principal’s ability to increase student achievement. This research will attempt to account for the dissonance between a preparation program designs that merely produce “qualified” candidates and ones that focus on relevant training that prepares a leader to turn around failing schools and increase student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of current, urban elementary principals on how prepared they were to increase student achievement as a result of their principal preparation program. “Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school.” (Leithwood, Luis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). As documented in the Wallace Foundation’s annual report on school leadership, (The Wallace Foundation, 2010) many of today’s principals are poorly trained and lack the skills to cope with the volume and scope of job responsibilities as they strive to improve the quality of

instruction and increase student achievement. What is currently in place in university and “grow-your-own” district leadership development programs and academies does not adequately prepare educators to be turnaround leaders (Joseph, 2009). Researcher and writer, Arthur Levine, former President of Teachers College at Columbia University, expounded in a controversial 2005 landmark study that many educational leaders were ill prepared to be effective administrators because university-based programs responsible for principal training lacked sufficient rigor to teach principals how to improve student achievement (Levine, 2005).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its relevance in ascertaining the perceptions of principals on how effectively they were prepared with the knowledge and skills to increase student achievement, and by whom. The perception themes revealed through this focus group as a result of this qualitative, phenomenological study will inform the design framework of future principal preparation programs.

Research Questions

Three over-arching questions were addressed to determine common meaning in the perceptions of principals regarding the impact of the preparation of their skills and knowledge as instructional leaders accountable for increasing student achievement.

1. To what extent does the relevance and rigor of the program hinge on the personnel facilitating instruction?
2. What gaps exist in preparing principals to lead schools and increase student achievement?

3. What essential knowledge and skills need to be embedded in principal preparation program design to effectively prepare instructional leaders to improve teaching and learning?

To answer these questions, a focus group of principals with less than five years of experience was conducted asking the following questions to gather principal perceptions regarding the level of preparation he/she received.

The following questions will be presented to those principals participating in the focus group:

1. Did you notice a difference in the rigor or relevance of the knowledge and skills taught by instructors who were practitioners with field experience compared to instructors without administrator field experience?
2. Explain your perceptions of how effectively your own principal preparation program prepared you for the role of the principal in increasing student achievement.
3. What specific skills and knowledge can you identify as part of the content in your principal preparation program that impacts your role as principal in increasing student achievement?
4. What specific content can you identify as lacking in your principal preparation program that impacts your role in increasing student achievement?
5. What specific leadership skills do you believe are most crucial in increasing student achievement?
6. How effectively do you perceive your principal preparation program prepared you with those specific skills necessary to increase student achievement?

7. What skills and knowledge do principal preparation programs need to focus on in order to effectively prepare leaders to increase student achievement?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of understanding the relevant terms used throughout this study, the following terms are defined as follows:

Attribute: This term is described as a quality or property (Merriam-Webster, 2012).

Bracketing: This term means the first step in the process of analyzing qualitative data in which the researcher investigates preconceived attitudes and biases they may have regarding potential responses to a phenomenon. (Cresswell, 2013)

Code: This term means a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldaña, 2009).

Demographic: This term means the statistical characteristic of a segment of the population.

Focus Group: This term means a group of people whose responses to questions are studied to determine perception or opinion.

Knowledge: This term is defined as all information that can be learned through experience or study (Merriam-Webster, 2012).

Skill: This term is defined as ability to do something well; something requiring training to do well (Merriam-Webster, 2012).

Leader: This term is described as an individual who guides, especially by going in advance; one who directs a course or direction (Merriam-Webster, 2012).

Leadership: This term represents a collaborative enterprise to produce greater opportunities to embrace civic humanism and reduce socioeconomic disparity, which schools perpetuate (Papa & English, 2011).

Phenomenology: This term is described as the study of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences (Saldaña, 2009).

Phenomenological Study: This term is described as a study conducted to determine the understanding or common meaning of an experience or phenomenon.

Protocol: This term is a detailed and specific procedural guideline for conducting an experiment in qualitative inquiry (Saldaña, 2009).

Turnaround Leadership: This phrase represents a condition, situation or process of reversing declining performance; a consequence, or end state, of successful strategic actions (Murphy, 2006).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The role of the school principal is crucial to successfully establishing a school environment that optimizes a focus on successful learning for every student (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). An important 1983 publication, titled *A Nation at Risk*, ignited a movement that focused the energies of principals on the instructional happenings within each individual classroom – hence, the movement educational reform began to gain increased momentum. Years later, in October of 2000, a Task Force of the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) report stated that, if they hoped to address the needs of 21st century schools, systems must “reinvent the principalship” (IEL, 2000). This particular report further punctuated the need for leadership in learning as a top priority, coupled with the need for a re-designing effort of the role of the principal in creating a vision for student learning. The Task Force stated the obvious, which still holds true today. Namely, our schools need principals who can effectively shift away from managerial roles, adopt, and apply competencies befitting of an instructional leader, such as honing a laser-like focus on high expectations for rigorous learning.

Principals have always been instructional leaders to some extent; yet, in the era of heightened accountability driven by *No Child Left Behind*, the principal is held accountable for students making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (Finkel, 2012; No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001). Principals are still responsible for ensuring that teachers and students have the materials necessary for teaching and learning; for ensuring that buses run on time; and, for ensuring that testing is conducted in a secure

environment. Nonetheless, it is the accountability for students learning – not just daily managerial problem solving – for which the principal is directly responsible, and for which the accountability is high.

The Need and the Challenge

The increasing need for highly effective principals in many school districts has reached a crisis stage. Due to predictable factors, such as an influx in the number of school principals that have reached the age of retirement, and a perception held by some that the position of the campus principal is a less-than-coveted position to which one aspires, districts are faced with a decline in the numbers of candidates adequately prepared for the rigors of school leadership (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001; Munby, 2006). Moreover, there is even a greater dearth of leaders equipped with the knowledge, skills and disposition to effectively turn an under-performing school into one that simultaneously raises the standard for career and college readiness for every student, while also closing the achievement gap for America's children. There are educators that possess the credentials and certifications. However, a litany of different reasons, such as job stress, compensation, excessively long hours, difficulties with challenging parents, etc., cause many qualified candidates to opt out of the principalship as a career path (IEL, 2000). In 2005, Arthur Levine, then President of Teachers College at Columbia College, predicted that, just like during the two previous decades, 40 percent of principals could be expected to vacate their jobs (Levine, 2005). One-fifth of new principals leave their schools during their first two years as an administrator. Sadly, the figures are even higher for administrators in low performing, high-needs schools (NAESP, 2012).

School districts across the country struggle with the challenge of attracting and retaining an ample supply of highly qualified candidates for the role of school principal (Knapp, Copland & Talbert, 2003). Researchers and policy makers have wrestled with possible solutions to the impending shortage of qualified, highly effective school leaders for decades. Volumes of data exist outlining the skills, knowledge and dispositions needed to transform schools that can effectively and efficiently eliminate the achievement gap and provide a safe, instructionally rigorous education for every student. Districts are facing an unprecedented crisis in school leadership (Heifetz, 1994). For many years, school reform efforts neglected to focus on the importance of the role of the principal in determining the increase in student achievement rates (Wells & Maxfield, 2010). The principal, as the primary leader of a school, is the most influential person in the school (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). School leaders have an impactful role to play in what and how students learn, as well as the rate at which they are successful. In their key findings outlined in a study commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson (2005) discovered that a school leader's influence on student achievement is manifested through the development and support of effective teachers and the implementation of focused processes and systems within the organization. The Southern Regional Education Board, which includes Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia as member states, has outlined the role of the principal in its goals for educational progress. As documented in the optimistic *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education, "Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance – and leadership begins with an

effective school principal” (SREB, 2006). The ability of the principal to provide a safe learning environment, as well as to focus on communicating high standards and rigorous expectations for instruction, is pivotal to student success. That being said, the 15 member states of the SREB report that it is a significant challenge to find qualified candidates to lead in underperforming schools (i.e., “turnaround principals”) (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001).

The Changing Role of the Principal: A Historical Perspective

The role of the principal has evolved significantly since the first public education system was established in Massachusetts in 1789 (Shen, 2005). By the end of the 18th century every town was required to establish a school that was supervised by the town council. The town council, in turn, appointed a head teacher or principal teacher. Then, not until the need to compensate an employee for arriving early to light the schoolroom fire to provide heat did the term “principal” first become utilized. As this example depicts, the role of the first principals was defined by need – that is, the need for a heated learning environment during the cold winter months. In addition, early duties of the principal included teaching, accounting for student attendance data, providing up-keep of the school building, and distributing and maintaining school supplies. Eventually, when the rural school setting merged with a new and progressive urban setting, the supervisory role of the principal emerged and the teaching role of the principal vanished (Campbell, 1987).

Interestingly, the role of the principal has closely mirrored the historical significance of each decade. For instance, during the 1920s, there existed an expectation that untrained principals manage school facilities and supervise staff. Later, during the

World War II era, school leaders were expected to mold the next generation of young people into productive citizens. Thus, as the decades passed, the role of the principal continued to evolve to reflect the needs, expectations and concerns of the given period. During the first half of the 20th century, the role of the principal was perceived primarily as an administrative site manager of the building and the accoutrements of learning. The principal managed the budget, the building and the book inventory (Halinger, 1992). The 1950s saw the role of the principal change from one who operated a school, to someone who was formative in leading and engaging the school community. The 1960s experienced a less than favorable change in attitude regarding the role of the principal. Like the CEO of a company, the principal was expected to be a visionary with a definitive mission to create greater student achievement.

With increasing emphasis on math and science in the era of Sputnik, the role of the principal during the 1960s and 1970s focused primarily on teacher supervision and school management. Due to the criticisms brought forward by the *A Nation At Risk* report in 1983, the 1980s were typified and influenced by America's ambitious pursuit to improve the nation's schools – a Zeitgeist that exist in our current education climate. As a result, a new descriptor for the role of the principal was coined – that is, the principal as “change agent” (Shen, 2005). The corollary of this new moniker meant that a greater emphasis was placed on the principal's role as an “agent of change” and less on compliance and maintaining the status quo. Therefore, a greater emphasis was placed on improving leadership preparation programs, infusing technology and paying greater attention to practical, relevant learning experiences. The state of education in the United

States was in crisis mode – hence, it was the responsibility of the principal to see that every student would achieve academic success.

The 1990s saw an emphasis on standards-based leadership with the publication of the 1996 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, which was created as a joint effort of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Policy Board of the Educational Administration (NPBEA) (Hoyle & Torres, 2007). The ISLLC standards were the first set of universal standards for educators. The standards focused on the role of the education leader in promoting success for every student. Thus, in order to promote student success, the educational leader subsequently creates a vision for learning; nurtures and sustains school culture and instructional programs that impact student and adult learning; manages a school environment that is safe and effective for learning; collaborates with the school community in mobilizing resources; acts ethically and with fairness and integrity; and, responds to the political, social, and economic context. Now, with the phrase “success for all students” embedded into each of the six standards, the 1990’s role of the principal was guided by rigorous, standards-based leadership that focused on student achievement. These standards, which were designed by collective wisdom, focused on measurable outcomes that would gauge a principal’s impact on student achievement. Moreover, the advent of the 21st century saw principals faced with increased accountability and scrutiny as a result of the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (Lytle, 2012). An aggressive set of goals outline by President George Bush in his *America 2000 Agenda* – later renamed *Goals 2000* under President Bill Clinton – have yet to be reached more than one dozen years later. In 2008, the Council of Chief State School Officers spearheaded the move to publish the Educational

Leadership Policy Standards, an update of the ISLLC Standards published in 1996 (ELCC, 2008). These standards highlighted the role of the principal as he or she promotes the success of every student by working to improve teaching and learning. Also in 2008, the Educational Leadership Policy Standards were adopted by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA). These standards, which were adopted or adapted by 44 states, outlined what an education leader promotes in order to impact student achievement.

Even considering the principal's shifting role as denoted above, the first decade of the 21st century highlighted the brevity of time principals could actually devote to classroom observations and timely feedback with teachers. The principal, therefore, whose time should be spent in charge of instructional quality control, is often constricted by the demands of high-stakes testing. One year later, in 2009, United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, echoed the words of President Barack Obama in the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009*, who drew a line in the sand with a new federal mandate. This particular directive proposed that by the year 2020, the United States would have the greatest percent of college graduates in the world. The Obama/Duncan *Blueprint for Reform* outlined that all students must be part of a rigorous and fair accountability system, and further mandated improving teacher and principal effectiveness and implementing college and career-ready standards for all students (US Department of Education, 2010).

It remains to be seen whether or not the current trend to appoint non-educators as Chancellors, such as Hearst Publishing Chairwoman, Cathleen Black of New York City, filters down into the schoolhouse, where the goals of college and career readiness and the

development of a rigorous and fair accountability are achieved (Lytle, 2012). The role of the principal has migrated into an era far removed from the one when the principal teacher lit the morning schoolhouse stove to provide a warm, welcoming environment for students.

The Profile of an Effective Principal

There is no definitive list of skills, knowledge and dispositions that exists to outline the attributes of a highly effective school leader. There is neither a playbook with flowcharts and timelines that can be handed down to a principal the day he or she accepts the formidable challenge of leading a school (Kowalski, Lasley, & Mahoney, 2008). However, it is essential that these individuals possess and/or acquire an in-depth understanding of what leadership is and how it contributes to increased student achievement. For many school leaders, the actualization that the term “leadership” has been defined as the influence and power to create compliance of one’s subordinates does not sufficiently outline the roles and responsibilities of the school principal (Wren, 1995).

Moreover, this lack of understanding of the role of the principal has been one of the factors that contribute to the disincentives of school leadership. Among these deterrent factors are the following: fluctuations in state funding and the resulting ebb and flow of school budgets, job-related stress, managerial demands that pull principals away from the instructional focus they desire, the emphasis on testing, and the realization that maintaining job status is accountability-rating dependent (Quinn, 2006). The role of the school principal varies widely, but a highly effective school leader must possess a wide, specialized, in-depth knowledge on a myriad of topics.

Leithwood (1994) outlined the following essential skills for leading in the 21st century:

1. It is incumbent on the principal to give individual consideration to staff members, especially those on the fringe of inclusion.
2. The principal should model intellectual stimulation regarding how to look at challenges from different perspectives.
3. The principal should constantly communicate to teachers a message of inspiration and high expectations.
4. The principal must influence teachers by modeling character and positivity.

Further key components of successful 21st century leadership are based on mountainous empirical studies and a meta-analysis over a 30-year period conducted by Marzano, Walters and McNulty (2003). Nearly 25 percent of what influences student learning is attributable to the role of the principal. Improving the quality of principal leadership is the catalyst needed to improve teaching and learning at the broader, school-wide level. In essence, therefore, principal leadership matters. More specifically, it matters greatly in terms of its impact on student achievement.

In one of the largest meta-analyses conducted, with over 70 independent studies chosen from a field of 5,000 studies on school leadership and student achievement, Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) concluded that a 10 percent increase in student achievement is attributed to effective principal leadership (Marzano, 1998). They concluded that there is an effect size averaging a .25 correlation for each standard deviation of improvement in principal leadership. A one standard deviation increase in principal leadership is associated with a 10-percentile point gain in school

achievement. An increase from the 50th percentile to the 84th percentile in principal leadership behaviors advances an overall student achievement gain of 10 percent (from the 50th percentile to the 60th percentile). Principal leadership matters in student achievement rates (Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005). Conversely, a negative impact on student achievement can be attributed to poor principal leadership.

Consequently, 21 categories of principal leadership behavior, or responsibilities, were identified and resulted in a comprehensive leadership framework. Categorized under three domains, managing change, focus of leadership, and building a purposeful community, these 21 responsibilities include: change agent, flexibility, ideals and beliefs, intellectual stimulation, knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, monitor and evaluate, optimize, contingent rewards, discipline, focus, involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, order, outreach, resources, affirmation, communication, culture, input, relationships, situational awareness, and visibility. Each of the 21 leadership actions, or responsibilities, has an impact on student achievement; however, not all 21 have the same effect size. With responsibilities ranging in effect size from .50, which correlates to a 19 percent gain in student achievement, to .02, the key is for school leaders to focus on the right things, those leadership practices that capitalize on academic success for all students (Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005).

In a five-year study commissioned by the Wallace Foundation and jointly produced by the Universities of Toronto and Minnesota, titled *Learning from Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Achievement*, effective leadership characteristics including shared leadership based on input from stakeholders resulted in increased student achievement (Papa & English, 2011). Effective leadership is necessary

in order to catapult current student achievement rates, particularly in low and under-achieving schools. Principals want teachers to be successful, and teachers want to be successful and they want their students to be successful. However, the lack of district support, misaligned professional development and marginalized use of frequent data has a negative effect on school leadership, often resulting in principal turnover.

Consequently, principal turnover rate is viewed as producing a negative effect on student achievement as well. Research demonstrates that approximately every three-to-four years schools experience new leadership (NewsLeader, 2010). This average turnover rate produces the friction that effectively slows student progress and achievement.

What Effective Principals Do

Much of what we know and understand about the skills and knowledge of effective principals is catalogued in the volumes of salient work supported by the Wallace Foundation. Since 2000, this philanthropic foundation has sponsored dozens of projects that support and analyze effective school leadership and leadership preparation programs. For instance, a 2012 Wallace Foundation Perspective report identifies five practices at the crux of effective leadership (Mendels, 2012). Effective school leaders communicate a clear vision of what standards-based, success-for-all education looks like for all students; they establish a school climate that is consistently safe and enriching; they imbue leadership that is shared and valued throughout the organization; they spark conversations centered on improving instruction and maximizing student learning; and, they ensure that human capital and resources are used efficiently and focused on continuous improvement (Wallace Foundation, 2012). Schools led by highly effective leaders are infused with a nonnegotiable vision that serves as the cornerstone and

foundation for the belief that all students can achieve at high levels. The principal sets a tone infused with a sense of urgency and invests time and energy to participate in data-driven, rigorous planning. Teachers work collaboratively, and never in isolation, to be solution-oriented and proactive.

The theory of transformational leadership, first introduced by James MacGregor Burns in 1978, and further expanded by the research of Bass and Riggio (2006), indicates that effective leaders are able to transform groups and motivate them to achieve high levels of performance and leadership potential by the strength of their vision and style (Burns, 1978). Bernard M. Bass developed “Burns’ theory” by introducing four components of transformational leadership. Referred to as the four I’s, they include (a) intellectual stimulation, (b) individualized consideration, (c) inspirational motivation and (d) idealized influence (Bass & Olivio, 1994). Effective transformational leaders gain the admiration and respect of their followers because they are focused on influencing the lives of the members of the organization and helping them experience success.

In the 2010 British National College for School Leadership study entitled *10 Strong Claims About Successful School Leadership*, Lytle (2012) further identifies the following eight key components of successful leadership:

1. Values that are implicitly communicated;
2. Consistent, basic leadership practices;
3. Context is aligned to nature, direction and pace of leadership actions;
4. A combination of actions and strategies contribute to student learning and achievement;

5. Three phases of successful leadership: successful staffing, curricular focus, and innovations and changes in the curriculum;
6. Leadership growth is layered with strategies and actions;
7. Progressively distributed leadership; and
8. Trust as the basis for successful leadership distribution.

A highly effective school leader is proficient at building teacher capacity in the area of content knowledge throughout the curriculum (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Nonetheless, equally important is the principal's role in promoting a no-excuses growth mind-set. Students achieve greater academic success when teachers fight negative stereotypes and send students the message that learning is fluid and risky (Dweck, 2010). Guiding teachers to promote the expectation that at times learning may be a struggle for almost any scholar is pivotal to persevering when students experience discouragement and frustration. The principal sets the tone and the expectation as he or she molds the culture of the learning community.

As the instructional leader, the principal is responsible for saturating the culture with the message that all students can achieve high levels of success and grow academically. The campus principal sets the tone for what teaching and learning looks like in every classroom. It is important to observe the adult actions that lead students to believe they will be successful because their learning will be supported by the teachers and leaders who care for them. A bond of trust and mutual respect built on the relationships of the adults must be present (Leithwood, et al., 2004). Leading a group of teachers to communicate this hope and confidence and invest in students' learning with focused enthusiasm that motivates the disenfranchised toward envisioning their academic

success is no small feat (Lehman, 2012). School leadership, according to McLester (2011), however, also means the principal is charged with managing the responsibilities of a job that reaches far beyond the realm of instructional leadership. The principal who has his or her pulse on the nuances and shifts of each day's vortex, has an internal global positioning system (GPS) that optimizes the key roles he/she undertakes throughout the school day (Lovely, 2004) to remain focused on reaching the goals of student achievement.

While remaining tenaciously focused on student achievement above all else, principals are required to be competent at knowing, interpreting, and reporting on district, state and federal laws and policies including, but not limited to: compulsory attendance, custodial rights, foods of minimal nutritional value, allowable and non-allowable expenditures for federal funds, rights of lactating employees, emergency procedures for fires, tornadoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, as well as lock-down procedures for intruders, weapons, and chemical spills, union rights, immigration policies, human resource procedures such as interviewing, hiring, and family medical leave, and allowable accommodations for employees with disabilities. Principals must be experts on assessments, curriculum, state and federal laws, personnel, contractual and hiring laws, discipline, public relations, community building, and budgets and finance. Data on principal job dissatisfaction points to an overwhelming volume of work compounded by the perception by principals that they lack the skills to measure up to the standards set for the performance of their duties (Engles, Hutton, Devos, Bouckenooghe, & Aelterman, 2008). Aspiring principals and those currently in the position often are ill prepared to juggle the demands of the job while under pressure to increase student achievement

(Levine, 2005). While current standards promote shared leadership of the exhausting list of what a principal does on a daily basis, not all leaders are adept at engaging staff in appropriate and meaningful ways. Yet, recent laws in California threaten one particular principal with being fired as a consequence of becoming a low-performing school (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005) – a new and potentially game-changing precedent. Other states have begun to adopt formulas aligning performance pay and appraisal ratings with student outcomes. In Hillsborough County, Florida, for example, school-wide academic growth accounts for 40 percent of a principal's performance evaluation (Mendels, 2012). Through employment decisions in districts across the country are being made based on a principal's capacity to lead increased student achievement.

In addition, the principal, as primary advocate, must model and ensure a collective stewardship of compliance with state and federal laws protecting the rights of students identified as dyslexic, mentally retarded, bi-polar, visually impaired, autistic, hearing impaired, physically handicapped and emotionally disturbed. This exhaustive context is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg for the body of highly specialized knowledge a school administrator must possess (Lazaridou, 2009). While each of the needs listed above are critical to ensure the rights and safety of everyone on the campus, none constitute the primary role of instructional leader and have little to do with curriculum, instruction and assessment, let alone how and what to rigorously teach in reading, math, writing, science and social studies.

Hess and Kelly (2007) reported on a 2004 survey conducted by *Education Week* that revealed on any given day, 82 percent of administrators are involved in managing

facilities and resources, and that 86 percent spend part of each work day ensuring a safe and secure learning environment. With those aspiring leaders intent on become principals and a focus on the essence of instructional leadership in mind, Michael Fullan (2008) offers practical guidelines to assure a laser-like fidelity to the goal of getting into classrooms on a daily basis in order to monitor teaching and learning. Fullan challenges leaders not to allow anything short of an urgent crisis to distract them from leading constant improvements in teaching and learning. Words like “relentless”, “fearless” and “non-negotiable” are desired qualities in leaders who will tenaciously stay the course and maximize the impact on increased student achievement by minimizing the torrent of predictable distracters. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004) report that in his or her role as an influencer and instructional leader, the principal must chart the course of change for instruction. Rosabeth Moss Kanter (2004) also suggests that an effective leader emulates positive expectations for success by leading the stakeholders with confidence to invest what they have (i.e., time, resources, and expertise) in pursuit of successful turnarounds.

In the face of heightened accountability, and shrinking budgets due to the current crisis in school funding, school administrators are additionally faced with almost unfathomable job demands. To emphasize the increased accountability pressures on the school principal, data from the National Conference of State Legislatures (2011) confirms that, among the influences on student achievement, the role of the principal is second only to the classroom teacher in its impact on student achievement (Leithwood, Seashore-Lewis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Principals’ skills are critical to creating and sustaining schools that promote rigorous instruction, which is achieved primarily through

their influence on people and school systems. Leithwood, et al. (2004) highlight three core leadership practices that influence student achievement:

1. Providing intellectual support and offering guidance and modeling;
2. Effectively communicating goals and monitoring progress; and
3. Focusing on school culture and eliminating what undermines progress.

In further studies, Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi (2010) outlined the following principal behaviors (all of which are aligned to ELCC Standards [2008] and the 21 responsibilities of the Balanced Leadership Framework [Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005], and contribute to improved student achievement): (a) providing a safe and orderly environment, (b) fostering strong parent and community relations, (c) being knowledgeable about an aligned curriculum and strong pedagogy, (d) developing relationships build on trust and mutual respect, (e) navigating the political and social context of the school and its culture, (f) practicing effective hiring practices and making consistently accurate appraisal and staffing decisions, (g) promoting appropriate distributive leadership, (h) exercising data-driven decisions, and (i) ensuring resource allocations aligned with student achievement goals. To do all of this effectively, principal leadership development must be strategically aligned and differentiated, and must be supported by strong mentoring and coaching focused on reflection and built on a relationship of trust that allows for a slow and steady learning trajectory (Lytle, 2012).

In a recent study on the categories of knowledge principals most frequently rely on in their day-to-day work, knowledge of the organization was referenced most often (Lazaridou, 2009). This class of knowledge includes six sub-categories, including substantive knowledge of external and internal constraints, job complexities, laws and

regulations, resources and time. To assess the time school leaders spend on the varied aspects of the instructional day, Phillip Schlechly (2002) suggests that principals reflect over a six-week period and categorize their work in terms of the direct impact on improving instruction. Upon analysis of what they actually spend significant amounts of time doing that directly impact improving teaching and learning, Schlechly also suggests that principals quit doing the things that have no direct influence on improving learning. Hence, this particular focus emphasizes shifts from what to do, to what to quit doing.

Principals, especially novices, often lack experience in the factors that affect schools from outside sources and the confidence to work collaboratively with constituencies, such as civic organizations, community fundraising groups, teacher unions, local agencies, school boards, and parent-teacher organizations. Investing the time to listen to their mission and vision, developing a personal relationship with these stakeholders, and understanding their agendas takes know-how, as well as political and business savvy. According to Leithwood & Strauss (2009), building a collaborative school climate is among the core leadership actions that successfully contribute to turnaround efforts that impact schools quickly. Principals that commit to working collaboratively with stakeholders send the message that they are eager to build relationships that will prove to be an investment in the work of educating students for the betterment of the local community. Teaching and learning in a school infused with a culture that is focused on positive and affirming relationships has a tremendous impact on motivation. This aspect of school climate, in turn, has a significant impact on student achievement (Busch, 2003). Therefore, students will thrive in a supportive and

collaborative climate where the culture is built on the adults committing to doing whatever it takes for students to be successful.

Laws and regulations regarding school governance, board policies, and professional ethics are also among the many compliance issues that principals must be prepared to face each day. Providing the necessary resources for teachers was also rated among the core leadership actions that impacted effective turn-around efforts (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009). Resource allocation may involve such mundane matters as textbooks, technology hardware, programs, consultants, classroom supplies and playground equipment. It is incumbent upon the principal to assure that resources be judiciously allocated and aligned with campus improvement goals.

At some point in their career, every school principal has been a “first time” novice in their role. And, for some, the novelty of their role as “boss” will inevitably result in an internal struggle with the dynamics of authority (Jentz, 2009). First time administrators not used to being at the helm are often faced with new and difficult personal challenges. For instance, a new principal may suddenly find him or herself in a zone of exclusion – that is, an isolated and lonely place to be for someone who was just recently thrilled to be named to a new position of authority. For some, this is the role they have worked diligently to achieve for years – perhaps decades. Then, for other individuals, this moment marks the affirming realization that they are entrusted with the task of impacting the lives of students and staff in a positive way. It is an awesome responsibility and the accountability stakes are very high.

A new principal may be surprised and hurt when suddenly employees react with a change in demeanor, tone, and content when the boss suddenly enters the room. This can

actually lead to a feeling of powerlessness and confusion. Employees may like you and your decisions, or they may not; moreover, an aspiring leader has to have the emotional maturity to live with the decisions that are best for students and focus on student achievement – regardless of whether the adults agree or disagree. Good leaders make decisions based on what is best for students, not what is convenient or easy for teachers. Research by Jentz (2009) reiterates the message that a novice school leader must know how to stand his or her ground, not take things personally, and respond appropriately and professionally regardless of the individual context of a situation or issue. Remaining focused on the vision of what needs to happen in every classroom to increase student achievement is part of every novice principal's learning curve.

Assuming the role of a campus principal means learning that the key to handling the complexities of job-related responsibilities lies in balancing personal and professional roles (Lindley, 2009). Who among us has not heard the analogy of the flight attendant reminding us to put on our own oxygen mask prior to assisting others? Yet, the challenge exists for facilitators of principal preparation programs to model this deliberate attention to self and purposefully prioritizing the demands of time management. This is especially important for a principal of a low-performing school – a context wherein time is of the essence. Lack of time is extenuated when the stakes for failing schools is so high and student success is at serious risk. Supportive mentors and coaches understand that feeling valued helps retain the top-talented principals (Lovely, 2004). Knowing that the job description is complex, the stress is non-stop, and the accountability un-nerving, what can universities, school districts and non-profit organizations do to attract and train the next generation of highly effective principals?

Criticisms of Principal Preparation Programs

A 2001 Public Agenda survey report disclosed that 69 percent of principals and 80 percent of superintendents found that leadership development programs are not in touch with the current reality of running a school (Lashway, 2003). Criticisms of leadership development programs have been plentiful in recent decades. Among the critics is Arthur Levine, former President of Teachers College at Columbia University, who offered a brutally honest exposè. In addition, Levine (2005) wrote that many educational leaders are ill prepared to do their job because many university-based programs responsible for principal training were not adequately preparing leaders to improve the quality of instruction crucial for student success. Recently, moreover, research sponsored by the Wallace Foundation claims that of the more than 500 university programs where most school principals are taught, most (300) have failed to keep abreast with the changing role of the principal in the current era of increased accountability (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). Nevertheless, there are currently six university-district collaborative leadership development programs, sponsored by a \$75 million-dollar grant from the Wallace Foundation in 2011, that are providing data from exemplary principal leadership preparation programs. These districts include Prince George's County (Maryland); Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina); Hillsborough County (Florida); Denver (Colorado); Gwinnett County (Georgia); and New York City (New York). With multi-million dollar funding from the Wallace Foundation, these districts are hoping to turn the tide of current principalship preparation trends by creating a pipeline of highly effective principals (Mendels, 2012). It should be noted, though, that there is no panacea or quick-fix methods that can remedy the need for a pool of

qualified principal candidates. With this in mind, the Wallace Foundation (June, 2012) states, “Preparing not just *more* aspiring principals, but the *right* ones, has to start when the first decisions are made about who should and should not be admitted to leadership training. Exemplary programs are far more rigorous than others in their review of candidates’ skills, experience and leadership dispositions. And almost invariably, they feature strong partnerships in which districts take a much more active hand in identifying, recruiting and screening prospective training candidates with the potential and desire to lead schools” (p. 8). Critics of current university- principal preparation programs point to flaccid standards, lax admission requirements and diluted entrance requirements. Little or nothing of what is recorded on admissions paperwork has any reflection on the applicant’s potential as an effective school leader (Levine 2005). Moreover, many programs admit all that apply, with little or no input from supervisors or district leaders who know of their work experience and competence. Often what is recorded on the admission paperwork suffices for background information, with admissions counselors and program directors failing to interview applicants and probe into their experience with teaching and learning. Additionally, course content and delivery is lacking within many preparation programs. With only six percent of university faculty having principal experience, programs often lack practitioner perspective. Hence, those programs taught by professors without field experience as school administrators tend to focus largely on theory, rather than appropriate, relevant and useful practice-based approaches (SUPES, 2011). Furthermore, university programs employ outdated, ineffective instructional techniques, fail to collaborate with school districts and do not provide relevant and

practical internship experiences (Kelley & Peterson, 2000). Hence, districts are urged to collaborate more with universities to improve participant selection and principal training.

It is important to highlight that principal preparation programs are charged with the responsibility of preparing leaders with the skills and knowledge to impact student achievement. Leadership development that focuses on beliefs and actions is key. Leaders that refuse to accept the status quo and focus relentlessly on highly effective instructional practices with a laser-like focus promote a culture of high expectation for every student (Papa & English, 2011). Through both word and action, these types of principals model that failure is not acceptable and expect everyone to have high expectations for student achievement. Exemplary preparation programs identify and train candidates who possess basic competency levels and have the ability and passion to be effective school leaders. These candidates also possess the no-excuses attitude of transformational leaders (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). Among the core components of exemplary programs is the internship experience which surpasses the passive standard of internship – shadowing an experienced leader and involves in-depth, content-rich, problem-based learning projects such as developing a professional development plan for teachers whose students are not showing adequate gains in frequent benchmark test data, tackling an ineffective campus-wide system for reading interventions by leading professional development activities targeting specific research-based strategies, or pursuing the support of a teacher in developing skills at differentiated instruction. Exemplary programs emphasize the importance of mentors that can provide timely feedback, as well as opportunities for collaborative coaching from both university professors and school district leaders (Wallace Foundation, 2012).

Many district-developed principal preparation programs have designed their curriculum based on the standards of an effective school leadership framework and the resulting skills, knowledge and dispositions. For example, Gwinnett County, Georgia, The NYC Leadership Academy and the Providence, R. I. school district stand as exemplars in a curriculum that provides differentiated professional development for new principals coupled with sustained mentoring (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). The majority of programs are competency-based; that is, national, state, and regional standards provide the curricular framework for effective leadership (Leithwood, 2005). In addition, program delivery varies from site to site, district to district, and state to state. There are multiple curricula to address the need to prepare a legion of aggressive and zealous school leaders whose impact will successfully close the achievement gap and increase student achievement for all. In two reports from the Institute for Educational Leadership Task Force, *Restructuring District Leadership* (Usdan, McCloud, Podmostko & Cuban, 2001) and *Preparing School Principals* (Hale & Moorman, 2003), several questions are asked of districts preparing to identify, develop and retain leaders (Lovely, 2004). Among the questions worth pondering are how districts leaders are involved in the preparation, support, training, and compensation of new leaders.

Successful principal preparation programs focus on developing leaders with the beliefs, values and attributes aligned with the prerequisite skills, knowledge and dispositions needed to lead schools toward excellence. The Wallace Foundation (2010) states, “As much as anyone in public education, it is the principal who is in a position to ensure that good teaching and learning spreads beyond single classrooms, and that ineffective practices aren’t simply allowed to fester. Clearly, the quality of training

principals receive before they assume their positions ... has a lot to do with whether school leaders can meet the increasingly tough expectations of these jobs” (p. 20). How successfully a school maintains a focus on instruction is dependent on its culture, and the principal plays a major role in developing the tone and culture (Engles et al., 2008). Exemplary principal preparation programs focus on relevant learning about how principals influence student achievement through their interactions with teachers. In a school where the culture is collaborative in nature, conversations about effective teaching and rigorous learning have a direct impact on student achievement. In such environments, teachers work collaboratively and engage in honest dialog about planning and lesson delivery. Moreover, within collaborative environments, feedback is timely and focused on teaching and learning; data is shared and dissected; and, said data is used to drive effective instruction. There are early indications, for example, that better-trained principals contribute to increased scores on standardized tests. Participants of the NYC Leadership Academy saw a greater student growth trajectory in math and English Language Arts compared to schools led by principals not participating in the Leadership Academy (Mendels, 2012).

The Current State of Principal Preparation Programs

Gaps still exist in what we know about how successful principals balance the myriad of managerial duties that absorb their precious time with effective instructional leadership that reaches into classrooms on a daily basis. It is the responsibility of the principal to ensure and sustain the conditions optimal to rigorous learning (Hargraves & Fink, 2003). To do this effectively, principals make learning the main focus of collaborative conversations at school each day. More often than not, however, the final

result is a constant tug-of-war over managing facilities and systems and monitoring instructional practices. This occurrence is evidenced by the list of required trainings that face new leaders before they can manage to focus on instruction (Joseph, 2012). In most cases, the preparation priority is to check off the essential trainings, which ultimately pulls a new principal away from their campus during the first one hundred days on the job. These trainings may include budget coding, website design, strategic marketing, payroll approval, food service guidelines, discipline coding, communications, legal investigations and documentation, personnel management, procurement, textbook inventories and audits, strategic partnerships, federal and state compliance guidelines, employee benefits, developing formative assessments, planning staff development, creating a budget for intervention assistance, and technology training. This long list of perfunctory duties can be responsible for the pull principals experience as they attempt to stay focused on their role as the instructional leader. For new principals this can seem like dealing with a tornado on a daily basis.

Having standards for principal preparation is not enough to reshape principal preparation programs (Lashway, 2003). Leading government and non-profit agencies have noted the crisis in school leadership and supported in-depth investigations into the commitment of improving principal preparation as a component of school reform (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Foleno, & Foley, 2001). The US Department of Education, The Ford Foundation, and The Wallace Foundation are among the many entities that support research into improving principal preparation programs at the university and district levels.

As stated in the 2001 Public Agenda report, titled *Trying to Stay Ahead of the Game: Superintendents and Principals Talk about School Leadership*, Farkas et al. (2001) report that 69 percent of school principals and 80 percent of superintendents believe that “practical vs. theory is still a problem in training” and that the typical leadership programs “are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today’s school district” (p. 31). Many university departments of education experience differences of opinion among faculty members about what relevant learning for school leaders looks like. Having a doctoral degree alone does not qualify an instructor to teach courses in education (Hassenpflug, 2011). Tenured faculty members are often out of touch with exemplary facilitation skills that create ownership for the student in principal preparation or leadership courses. For instance, Socratic methodology, role-playing and group-discussions lend relevant practice and in-depth discovery about what it takes to be a principal today. Yet, many college courses still rely solely on lecture and direct instruction that is far from content-driven (Davis, Darling-Hamond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). On the current principal preparation map, district-owned programs, university-district partnerships and third-party non-profit organizations provide a different kind of program architecture through which pipelines of qualified, highly effective school principals are being trained and prepared to meet the needs of low-performing schools. The need is so great and, although the results are promising, they cannot keep pace with the urgency of the need to halt another year of under-achievement.

University-District Preparation Programs

Collaboration between universities and school districts provide standards-based programs that are on the forefront of successful principal preparation to meet the

leadership needs of today's low-performing schools. Research by Whitaker (2006) supports the notion that best practices for successful university-district partnerships include joint selection of participants, a cohort model, district input on curriculum and instructional delivery, vision and goal setting, a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, shared resources and a clear commitment from university faculty. Among the six districts chosen as part of the 2011 Wallace Foundation grant, each was chosen to be part of this project because their district efforts were well underway at providing a more rigorous principal preparation program and ensuring a strong system of support and performance evaluation (Mendels, 2012). The Denver Public Schools and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina school district is among the several systems touting successful university-district partnerships. Each of these university-district partnerships emphasizes strong collaboration in the design of program elements that encompass recommendations from the National Staff Development Council (Sparks & Hirsch, 2000). Common program elements include long-term cohort involvement, job-embedded, problem-based relevant field-learning projects that mirrored real-life challenges facing principals, a strong curriculum base, including certification alignment and a current technology emphasis that focuses on the leader's impact on student achievement. Program participants are encouraged to solicit and reflect on mentor feedback and benefit from peer interaction throughout their learning.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg's "Leaders for Tomorrow" program was designed in partnership with Winthrop University to prepare principals to lead a diverse urban school. The partnership, initiated in 2008 in preparation for a 21 percent anticipated principal retirement projection, aimed at preparing 50 new principals for high-needs schools by the

year 2014. Additionally, program participants require a nomination from a principal to be accepted into the program and must commit to two years of coursework resulting in a master's degree in educational leadership and three internship experiences (Charlotte-Mecklenburg, n.d.). Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) has partnered with Queens University to create the School Executive Leadership Academy. This program is a research-based, action-learning experience that includes case studies and a one-year residency. CMS has also collaborated with a third principal preparation program, New Leaders (formerly New Leaders for New Schools), a non-profit organization currently located in nine cities across the United States (New Leaders, n.d.).

Another example of a current university-district principal preparation program has grown up from the Denver, Colorado school district. Specifically, The Denver Public School system has embraced a collaborative partnership with the Ritchie Program for School Leaders. This accredited principal certification program is part of the tri-lateral partnership between Denver Public Schools, the University of Denver and the Morgridge College of Education. Components of the standards-based, cohort-designed Ritchie program, Executive Leadership for Successful Schools (ELSS) includes one year of coursework to prepare for the Colorado principal license and a full-time, mentor-supported internship. Quarterly inquiry-based projects provide experiential learning and real-world applications. (University of Denver, n.d.).

In 2002, under then Superintendent Arne Duncan, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) instituted sweeping reforms that included raising the eligibility standards for principals for the nation's third largest school district. At the time, Chicago was facing a shortage of principals. Furthermore, under Duncan's leadership, and armed with input from local

stakeholders, CPS created the Office of Principal Preparation and Development. Core leadership competencies of this particular office included the following: creating and communicating a belief system through words and actions, leading and developing faculty, instructional leadership, leading and managing change, and operational management (Orr, King, LaPointe, & Wallace, 2010). The school district also selected university and third-party programs to provide principal preparation. Among them was a partnership with the University of Illinois at Chicago, New Leaders for New Schools, in conjunction with National-Louis University, and a collaborative effort between Teach for America and Harvard University. Conversely, CPS discontinued its association with Northwestern University and its LAUNCH program because graduates of the program did not adequately demonstrate proficiency with CPS's principal competencies.

A strong partnership between Springfield Massachusetts Public Schools and the University of Massachusetts was developed as a response to a staggering principal retirement projection of 80 percent. Focusing on school turnaround, a preparation program that included a summer institute and paid internship was initiated to provide a strong pool of certified candidates better prepared for urban school leadership (Wallace Findings in Brief, October, 2010). While many university-district programs address the alignment of curricula and focus on district priorities, these programs are not without their shortcomings. For those willing to embrace change, there exists the struggle to balance educational theory with the real-life relevancy of principal leadership. Equally challenging is maintaining collaborative conversations about how program participants perform throughout the program itself, finding sufficient numbers of qualified mentors, providing a funded internship with a principal exemplar, program sustainability through

times of district-leadership turnover, and quantifiable data that supports an increase in student achievement attributable to principal training and development (Wallace, October 2010). In summary, the Wallace report (2010) indicates the following: “What we can conclude is that the new approaches taken by district-university affiliated programs have potential for yielding better-prepared candidates” (p. 3).

Grow Your Own Principal Academies

Many school districts and institutes of higher education have responded to the need for principal development by establishing leadership programs at the district level alone. Some school districts have addressed this need for leadership training by developing “grow your own” programs focused on a standards-based model of principal preparation that teaches the prerequisite skills and knowledge educators must have to be successful at leading today’s schools and managing the change required to increase student achievement (Joseph, 2009). The Educational Leadership Policy Standards (ELCC) (2008) clearly delineates the competencies of what is necessary to be an effective school leader whose goal is increased student achievement. It is not a matter of principals working harder or just doing a better job. School leaders committed to transforming low performing schools need a highly specialized skills set that includes a vision and game plan on what needs to be done, exactly how to accomplish the task and must have the heart of a leader with convictions to act quickly (Papa & English, 2011).

“Grow your own” leadership programs are infused with a current body of research that is based on ELCC standards (Bustamante & Combs, 2011). These standards, along with a district-level competency framework or individual state principal competency model, serve as the foundation for leadership development programs at the district level.

These standards also provide the skills, knowledge and dispositions needed to lead effective change and increase student achievement (Joseph, 2009). Principal preparation programs often include a residency or job-embedded internship that incorporates an action-learning, problem-based project or an adaptive challenge, such as those based on the work of Ronald Heifetz (1994). Heifetz (1994) theorizes that leaders or those in positions of authority often settle within the gap between the technical problems they face on a daily basis that can be addressed with knowledge and experience and adaptive challenges that have no easy solution; moreover, there is great stress within this gap because it requires that the leader learn a new skill set and exist outside of his or her comfort zone where discovery and learning are required. He states that many leaders often fail because they mistakenly address an adaptive challenge with a technical solution. Trying to turn around a failing school takes new learning and a path into uncharted territory for many new principals who are reminded that the adaptive challenges are, for most novice leaders, the most difficult because they exist within that gap between current reality and the desired state (Joseph, 2009). The desired state for a low-performing school is increased student achievement for every student. A new principal must be unwilling to accept the status quo and be willing to change the mindset of the school culture in order for every student to be successful (Papa & English, 2011).

Some principal preparation programs also stage adaptive challenge situations for cooperative learning teams in order to address the responsibilities of leadership that surpass the technical competencies of the school leader (Heifetz, 1994; Joseph, 2009). The skills required to address the technical aspects of leadership differ greatly from the adaptive challenges insofar as they require innovation and learning in a state of

disequilibrium. The Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) Leadership Academy, a non-profit provider of principal preparation, has been touted for such innovations in principal development. KIPP program facilitators choose each Fisher Fellowship cohort fellow from a nominated, diverse pool of leadership talent nation-wide. Selection of program candidates is based on a projection for results and participants are chosen to either open a new KIPP charter school or fill a vacancy on a well-established KIPP campus.

Applicants must have a minimum of two years teaching experience, a university degree and demonstrated leadership attributes. They must attend two weekend interview sessions and agree to an on-site visit by program team members at their job location. Once chosen, the cohort attends the summer institute at the Haas School of Business at the University of California at Berkeley. The curriculum infuses KIPP's focus on results with current business themes. KIPP leadership team members, university business faculty and education researchers co-teach the three curricular themes of instructional, organizational and operational leadership (Hess & Kelly, 2005). Business faculty, for example, facilitate case study examinations of successful business companies and help teams discover the application of successful business practices to school leadership. On-going learning involves two 4-week residencies at KIPP charters, including spending two weeks at a first-year KIPP campus. A one-month boot camp follows the residencies where participants experience additional formal learning and meet with KIPP regional teams. Then, the remainder of the year is spent undergoing three additional training sessions and work focused on the opening of a new KIPP charter site.

Nonetheless, KIPP participants sometimes struggle with obtaining state certifications. In an attempt to create an accreditation program, KIPP partnered with

National-Louis University, a leading provider of traditional administrator preparation.

This partnership assisted program participants who, even though they were able to advance through the rigors of the KIPP program, had to attend additional classes to meet certification requirements. Placement in a principal position is not usually problematic for participants, as they are molded to fit into a new or established KIPP charter school where a principal position awaits them.

New Leaders (formerly New Leaders for New Schools [NLNS]) is another example of a non-profit provider of principal preparation. Since the year 2000, the New Leaders organization has trained more than 800 school principals from more than 12 urban areas across the country. In addition, New Leader's Urban Excellence Framework is based on examining those individuals experiencing breakthroughs in student achievement and sharing that knowledge with aspiring principals. New Leaders has identified the following six principal effectiveness domains: (1) a vision for results and equity that communicates a sense of urgency and belief in every student's potential; (2) learning and teaching based on high quality instructional practices; (3) a school culture build on values aligned with a school's mission; (4) staff development including teacher observations and feedback; (5) planning and operations that monitor instruction; and, (6) personal leadership including resiliency and perseverance (Cheney & Davis, 2011). Similar to the KIPP approach, New Leaders has very selective admissions standards – specifically, only five to seven percent of applicants are accepted (NewLeaders, n.d.). Applicants must also have a proven leadership track record and a minimum of two years of teaching experience. Once admitted, participants form a cohort to undergo a rigorous, six-week, seven-day-a-week summer institute taught by education and business leaders.

Furthermore, participants are responsible for the development of three projects that focus on deliverable results (Hess & Kelly, 2005). Their purposefully school-based program also has a one-year residency that is focused on a sense of urgency for convincing adults to take responsibility for student achievement and not settle for mediocre results. Within this framework, veteran administrators mentor the new leaders during the post-residency period, and assist in analyzing data collected on such topics as parent involvement, teacher efficacy, student achievement, and school climate.

Conclusion

In short, the educational research literature demonstrates that principal leadership matters. In fact, it matters greatly in increasing student achievement for all. As the instructional leader of a school, the role of the principal is essential in communicating a sense of urgency and belief that every student has the potential to be successful. It is the principal who ensures every student is taught by a caring and effective teacher, and that he or she receives a continuously rigorous, standards-based education in a supportive culture and safe environment. Furthermore, the current literature evaluating many of today's principal preparation programs reflect that there is work to be done in collaborating on effective principal preparation programs. Many university principal preparation programs still remain out of touch with how to effectively prepare principals to turn around low-performing schools and increase student achievement. But, the lessons recently learned from district-university partnerships that have shown promising links between effective leadership practices and increased student achievement provides us with hope and optimism. Therefore, much work is required in the way of the design and delivery of relevant, standards-based principal preparation programs that arm

principals with the skills, knowledge and dispositions to effectively close the achievement gap and provide a college and career-ready education for every student.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

A qualitative, phenomenological study employed a single-category designed focus group for the purpose of gaining an understanding of principal perspectives regarding the effectiveness of their principal preparation program and the resulting skills and knowledge gained to increase student achievement. This chapter will describe the research design and format, provide descriptions of the setting and focus group participants, explore the instrumentation sequence utilized, describe the variables and limitations and explain the data collection and analysis procedures.

Three over-arching questions were addressed to determine common meaning in the perceptions of principals regarding the impact of the preparation of their skills and knowledge as instructional leaders accountable for increasing student achievement.

1. To what extent does the relevance and rigor of the program hinge on the personnel facilitating instruction?
2. What gaps exist in preparing principals to lead schools and increase student achievement?
3. What essential knowledge and skills need to be embedded in principal preparation program design to effectively prepare instructional leaders to improve teaching and learning?

To answer these questions, a focus group of principals with less than five years of experience was conducted asking the following questions to gather principal perceptions regarding the level of preparation he/she received.

Focus Group Questions

This study addressed the following questions:

1. Did you notice a difference in the rigor or relevance of the knowledge and skills taught by instructors who were practitioners with field experience compared to instructors without administrator field experience?
2. Explain your perceptions of how effectively your own principal preparation program prepared you for the role of the principal in increasing student achievement.
3. What specific skills and knowledge can you identify as part of the content in your principal preparation program that impacts your role as principal in increasing student achievement?
4. What specific content can you identify as lacking in your principal preparation program that impacts your role in increasing student achievement?
5. What specific leadership skills do you believe are most crucial in increasing student achievement?
6. How effectively do you perceive your principal preparation program prepared you with those specific skills necessary to increase student achievement?
7. What skills and knowledge do principal preparation programs need to focus on in order to effectively prepare leaders to increase student achievement?

Description of the Research Design

The goal of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of urban elementary principals acquiring the knowledge and skills to increase student achievement. The significance of principal preparation programs is relevant to those who share the experience of being the instructional leader in schools experiencing low student achievement; this is the phenomenon or focus of the study. A single-category design focus group was utilized to reveal principal perceptions and opinions regarding how effectively each was prepared with the skills and knowledge to increase student achievement (Krueger & Casey, 2000). A pre-determined sequential questioning route, which lasted approximately ninety minutes, was implemented to allow each participant an opportunity to respond. Within this protocol, probing questions were asked by the principal investigator in order to collect more in-depth information focused on the goal to the point that saturation is reached in each participants' response. (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Saldana, 2009). Further, participant perception statements were interpreted and clustered into themes, or meaningful units. A multi-dimensional insight was gleaned from participant responses. With this approach in mind, Creswell (1998) states, "The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p.15).

Setting

The focus group was held at a central location within a large, urban, Gulf Coast Region school district. A single room containing a large conference table, serving table, and comfortable seating was reserved in advance of the selected date. The room was spacious and comfortably accommodated eight principals and the principal investigator

with an area for refreshments. In addition, it is important to note, that the room was free of background noise and distractions and arranged so that all participants were able to see each other. A single window was covered to allow privacy for principal participants and a “Please do not disturb” sign was posted outside the door.

Subjects

Eight urban elementary principals of schools rated academically unacceptable (AU) in a sub-group as evidenced by the State of Texas school-rating system from 2007-2011, with at least 1 year and no more than 5 years of principal experience, volunteered and were provide informed consent documents to participate in the focus group. Subjects meeting study criteria were first contacted by the principal investigator by phone, email and US Mail and provided information regarding the date, time and location of the focus group. Each received a packet of information via email and US Mail containing the University of Houston Consent to Participate in Confidential Research form, (Appendix A); the letter of endorsement from the district elementary leadership offices, (Appendix B); district approval to conduct the study, (Appendix C); approval from the University of Houston, Division of Research, to conduct the study, (Appendix D); and a cover letter from the principal investigator. (Appendix E)

Instrumentation

The instruments utilized in this study were the focus group questions developed by the principal investigator and the long-table method of analysis of the data collected from the participant responses. Participants began by giving personal information regarding the number of years of principal experience and the name of the school at which they currently serve as principal. (Appendix F) The principal investigator

systematically asked the research questions and listed significant statements gleaned from the responses to each question. Adequate wait time was provided to allow participants to reflect on the question, and each question was read slowly and repeated several times. Each principal responded to all 8 questions. Specifically, participant responses regarding his/her perception of the focus of each question were recorded and the videotapes reviewed numerous times. Each response was paraphrased or quoted, and grouped into themes or units of meaning. (Creswell, 2013) A description of what the phenomenon meant to each participant was categorized in its context. This was followed by the responses describing how the phenomenon occurred. Finally the totality or essence of the phenomenon was summarized describing what the experience was and how it happened according to the perception and recollection of each respondent.

For the purpose of this study, modifiers were agreed upon to provide consistency in quantifying the frequency and extensiveness of the response. Krueger and Casey (2000) suggest the use of modifiers rather than numbers to represent findings. The investigator assigned the following numerical correlation between the quantity of respondents and the modifier to represent perception data.

Table 3.1

Modifier-Respondent Number Correlation

Number of Respondents	Modifier
0 principals responded	No One
2 principals responded	Few
3 principals responded	Some
4 principals responded	Many
6 principals responded	Most
8 principals responded	All

Cresswell (2013) suggests using a template for coding a phenomenological study. He suggests analyzing data for statements of significance or meaningful units, followed by textual and structural descriptions of the essence of the experience as perceived by the respondent. The following illustration represents the sequence that was used by the investigator to represent participant responses.

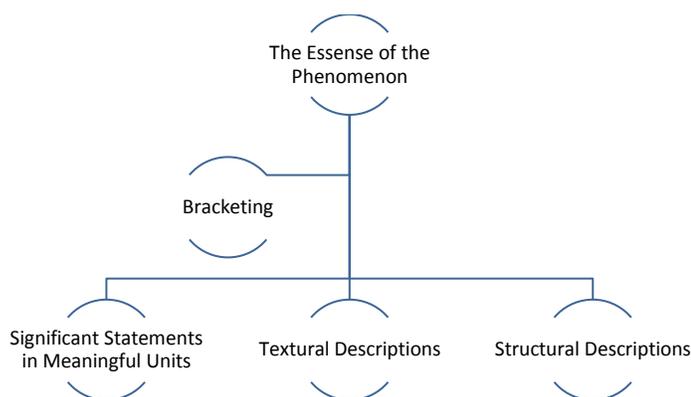


Figure 1. Sequence of coding. This illustration denotes coding components.

Bracketing

In order to understand any preconceived attitudes and biases the principal investigator may have regarding potential responses to the questions addressed in the focus group, a bracketing exercise was conducted in advance of the focus group. Cresswell (2013) reminds the researcher that his/her personal understanding may be incorporated into the study data because the researcher brings his/her personal assumptions to the topic or phenomenon. The investigator spoke with the university committee chairman prior to conducting the focus group regarding the importance of not influencing participant responses with any bias the investigator may have. The investigator proposed that she answer each of the focus group questions and capture her perceptions prior to conducting the focus group. The purpose of answering these questions in advance is to allow the analysis of the data without focusing on what the investigator would answer based on personal perceptions, thus limiting bias.

Variables

Variables include the number of principals participating in the focus group, the number of years of teaching, assistant principal and principal experience each participant has had, the year each participant received his/her graduate degree and the degree that was conferred, the number of students and the grades served in each school, the subgroup(s) identified as academically unacceptable and the unique challenges of the school community they currently serve.

Limitations

Although each participant met the pre-requisite requirements of at least one, but not more than 5 years principal experience, and whose school had at least one student sub-group rating academically unacceptable according to the state of Texas school rating system, the resulting perception data from this study should not be considered an exhaustive sample of the perceptions of principals regarding how their preparation programs prepared them to increase student achievement. Additionally, the number of principals participating in the focus group was less than ten, which limits the results of this study. All principals are currently leading a decentralized urban school in the state of Texas. The generalizability of the results will be limited based on those variables.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of principal perspectives regarding the effectiveness of his/her principal preparation program and the resulting skills and knowledge perceived as necessary to effectively increase student achievement. A single-category designed focus group was conducted with eight urban elementary principals with at least one, but not more than five years principal experience and whose school data from 2007-2011 identifies at least one sub-group as rating academically unacceptable on the State of Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).

Central Phenomena

To extract common themes in the perceptions of principals regarding the impact of the preparation of their skills and knowledge as instructional leaders accountable for increasing student achievement, three central phenomena were investigated in a focus group setting:

1. To what extent does the relevance and rigor of the program hinge on the administrative leadership experience of the instructor? To address this phenomenon, the following question was asked:

- a) Did you notice a difference in the rigor or relevance of the knowledge and skills taught by instructors who were practitioners with field experience compared to instructors without administrator field experience?

2. What gaps exist in preparing principals to effectively lead schools and increase student achievement? To address this phenomenon, the following questions were asked of the focus group:

a) Explain your perceptions of how effectively your own principal preparation program prepared you for the role of the principal in increasing student achievement.

b) What specific content can you identify as lacking in your principal preparation program that impacts your role in increasing student achievement?

c) How effectively do you perceive your principal preparation program prepared you with those specific skills necessary to increase student achievement?

3. And, finally, what essential knowledge and skills need to be embedded in principal preparation program course design to effectively prepare instructional leaders to improve teaching and learning that leads to increased student achievement?

a) What specific skills and knowledge can you identify as part of the content in your principal preparation program that impacts your role as principal in increasing student achievement?

b) What specific leadership skills do you believe are most crucial in increasing student achievement?

c) What skills and knowledge do principal preparation programs need to focus on in order to effectively prepare leaders to increase student achievement?

Eight elementary principals from a large, urban, Gulf Coast school district participated in the focus group. Each principal was contacted by school phone and email and provided with an overview of the study and an explanation of how the focus group

would be conducted. Each participant responded enthusiastically when asked to participate in the focus group, indicated their willingness to sign consent to participate and confirmed their availability at the date and time selected. Following initial contact and verbal consent, a packet of corresponding letters and forms was sent to each candidate via US Mail. Each principal was also asked to read the following: the University of Houston Consent to Participate in Confidential Research form (see Appendix A); the letter of endorsement from the district elementary leadership offices (see Appendix B); a district letter of approval to conduct the study (see Appendix C); the letter of approval to conduct a study from the University of Houston, Division of Research (see Appendix D); and a cover letter from the principal investigator (see Appendix E). In addition, each participant was given the cellular telephone number of the principal investigator and encouraged to call if he or she had any questions or concerns regarding the documents or the focus group. Subsequently, an email and an Outlook calendar invitation were sent to each principal reminding him/her that the focus group was scheduled for the next day.

The following tables provide a demographic description of each focus group participant:

Table 4.1

Principal 1 Demographic Data

Descriptor	Item
Elementary Principal	P1
Years of Principal Experience	2
Ethnicity	African American
Gender	Female
Years of Teaching Experience	16
Years of Assistant Principal Experience	1
Years at Current School	2
Academically Unacceptable Sub-Group	Hispanic Reading/ELA
School Enrollment	425
Grades Served	Kinder – Grade 5
Year Master’s Degree Conferred	2012
Degree Conferred	Master’s in Education

Principal 1 is an African-American female with two years principal experience.

The qualifying academically unacceptable sub-group identified on the 2007-2011 State of Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test was Hispanic Reading/ELA.

Table 4.2

Principal 2 Demographic Data

Descriptor	Item
Elementary Principal	P2
Years of Principal Experience	2
Ethnicity	African American
Gender	Female
Years of Teaching Experience	6
Years of Assistant Principal Experience	5
Years at Current School	2
Academically Unacceptable Sub-Group	African American Reading/ELA, Science; Hispanic Math, Reading/ELA, Science; Economically Disadvantaged Reading/ELA
School Enrollment	348
Grades Served	Pre-Kinder – Grade 5
Year Master's Degree Conferred	2005
Degree Conferred	Master's in Special Education

Principal 2 is an African-American female with two years principal experience. The qualifying academically unacceptable sub-groups identified on the 2007-2011 State of Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test included African American Reading/ELA, Science; Hispanic Math, Reading/ELA, Science; Economically Disadvantaged Reading/ELA.

Table 4.3

Principal 3 Demographic Data

Descriptor	Item
Elementary Principal	P3
Years of Principal Experience	3
Ethnicity	Hispanic
Gender	Female
Years of Teaching Experience	13
Years of Assistant Principal Experience	2
Years at Current School	3
Academically Unacceptable Sub-Group	African American Writing
School Enrollment	483
Grades Served	Pre-Kinder - Grade 5
Year Master's Degree Conferred	2009
Degree Conferred	Master's in Educational Leadership

Principal 3 is a Hispanic female with three years principal experience. The qualifying academically unacceptable sub-group identified on the 2007-2011 State of Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test included African American Writing.

Table 4.4

Principal 4 Demographic Data

Descriptor	Item
Elementary Principal	P4
Years of Principal Experience	3
Ethnicity	Hispanic
Gender	Male
Years of Teaching Experience	7
Years of Assistant Principal Experience	2
Years at Current School	3
Academically Unacceptable Sub-Group	African American, Reading/LA
School Enrollment	760
Grades Served	Pre-Kinder - Grade 5
Year Master's Degree Conferred	2008
Degree Conferred	Master's in Educational Leadership

Principal 4 is a Hispanic male with three years principal experience. The qualifying academically unacceptable sub-group identified on the 2007-2011 State of Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test included African American Reading/LA.

Table 4.5

Principal 5 Demographic Data

Descriptor	Item
Elementary Principal	P5
Years of Principal Experience	3
Ethnicity	White
Gender	Female
Years of Teaching Experience	16
Years of Assistant Principal Experience	1
Years at Current School	3
Academically Unacceptable Sub-Group	African American Math
School Enrollment	425
Grades Served	Kinder - Grade 5
Year Master's Degree Conferred	2012
Degree Conferred	Master's in Educational

Principal 5 is a White female with three years principal experience. The qualifying academically unacceptable sub-group identified on the 2007-2011 State of Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test included African American Math.

Table 4.6

Principal 6 Demographic Data

Descriptor	Item
Elementary Principal	P6
Years of Principal Experience	2
Ethnicity	African American
Gender	Male
Years of Teaching Experience	6
Years of Assistant Principal Experience	3
Years at Current School	2
Academically Unacceptable Sub-Group	African American Writing
School Enrollment	620
Grades Served	Pre-Kinder - Grade 5
Year Master's Degree Conferred	2003
Degree Conferred	Master's in Organizational Management

Principal 6 is an African-American male with two years principal experience. The qualifying academically unacceptable sub-group identified on the 2007-2011 State of Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test included African American Writing.

Table 4.7

Principal 7 Demographic Data

Descriptor	Item
Elementary Principal	P7
Years of Principal Experience	3.5
Ethnicity	Hispanic
Gender	Male
Years of Teaching Experience	4.5
Years of Assistant Principal Experience	2.5
Years at Current School	2
Academically Unacceptable Sub-Group	African American Reading/ELA, Science
School Enrollment	870
Grades Served	Pre-Kinder - Grade 5
Year Master's Degree Conferred	2007
Degree Conferred	Master's in Educational Administration

Principal 7 is a Hispanic male with three and one-half years principal experience. The qualifying academically unacceptable sub-groups identified on the 2007-2011 State of Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test included African American Reading/ELA and Science.

Table 4.8

Principal 8 Demographic Data

Descriptor	Item
Elementary Principal	P8
Years of Principal Experience	2
Ethnicity	African American
Gender	Female
Years of Teaching Experience	10
Years of Assistant Principal Experience	6
Years at Current School	1
Academically Unacceptable Sub-Group	Hispanic Writing
School Enrollment	412
Grades Served	Pre-Kinder - Grade 5
Year Master's Degree Conferred	1999
Degree Conferred	Master's in Educational Administration

Principal 8 is an African-American female with two years principal experience.

The qualifying academically unacceptable sub-group identified on the 2007-2011 State of Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test included Hispanic Writing.

The following table represents averages of the demographical data from focus group participants:

Table 4.9
Demographic Averages

Descriptor	Item	
Ethnicity	African American	4
	White	1
	Hispanic	3
Average Gender	Female	62.5%
	Male	37.5%
Average Years of Teaching Experience		9.81 Years
Average Years of Assistant Principal Experience		2.81 Years
Average Years of Principal Experience		2.25 Years
Average Student Population		585 Students
Average Grades Served	Pre-Kinder – Grade 5	87.5%
	Kinder – Grade 5	12.5%

Focus Group Procedure

Upon arrival at the designated location on the day of the focus group, participants were greeted by the investigator and were asked to produce the signed and dated copy of the University of Houston Consent to Participate in Confidential Research form. If the participant neglected to produce one, a copy was provided by the principal investigator and time was given for the participant to read, sign and date a University of Houston Consent to Participate in Confidential Research form (see Appendix A). Participants

were also asked to complete a demographic information sheet (see Appendix F). The investigator offered light refreshments. Once all participants were present and the required signatures and information secured, the investigator introduced herself, thanked everyone again for their willingness to participate, and reminded participants that the focus group was being videotaped and that they could discontinue participation at any time.

Norms were established and agreed upon that included confidentiality, speaking the truth as he or she perceived it and being actively engaged. The principal investigator reminded participants of the measures established to maintain anonymity. Participants were encouraged to help him or herself to refreshments during the focus group. The investigator explained that she would be scripting the responses and at times unable to make eye contact. The investigator assured the participants, however, that she would be actively listening to every response.

Throughout the focus group, the investigator captured principal perception responses on a self-created field-notes form (see Appendix G). Each participant responded to every question and provided sufficient supporting detail for the investigator to determine that saturation had been reached. After each of the eight participants had responded to a given question, the investigator invited additional comments before proceeding to the next question. When no additional comments surfaced, the investigator stopped the videotape, thanked the group for adhering to the pre-established norms and agreements, as well as for actively participating. The investigator reminded the group of the importance of maintaining confidentiality upon leaving the focus group.

Focus Group Results

Phenomenologists describe the experiences, or phenomenon that a group has in common (Cresswell, 2013). The human experience or phenomenon held in common by this group of participants is that each of them is accountable for expeditiously improving student achievement for a group or groups of students identified as scoring at the academically unacceptable level of performance on the state accountability assessment.

According to Morgan, Krueger, and King (1998), “Delay erodes the quality of analysis” (p. 12). Data collected from each question during the focus group were retrieved from the video recording and field notes taken by the principal investigator within hours of the focus group to minimize jeopardizing recall of emotion. Quotes were recorded and significant themes were drafted based on participant responses. As outlined by Krueger and Casey (2000), a Long Table Approach was utilized to code and organize each participant’s response. An analysis of the frequency with which a perception statement was made was recorded and specificity details verified. Visual enhancements including body language and the emotional tone of each response was noted as well. How extensively a perception statement or opinion was recorded by different respondents was verified and analyzed systematically.

Participants were first assigned a corresponding alphanumeric identification code, and any identifying personal information was masked for the purposes of anonymity.

For the purpose of this study, modifiers were agreed upon to provide consistency in quantifying the frequency and extensiveness of the response. Krueger and Casey (2000) suggest the use of modifiers rather than numbers to represent findings. The

investigator assigned the following correlation between the number of respondents and the modifier to represent data.

Response Analysis Themes

In order to understand the perceptions of principals regarding his or her preparation program, a focus group was held. Data analysis revealed three themes that fell under one main composite description. Overall, *principals perceived their university principal preparation program did not effectively prepare them for the role of increasing student achievement*. The three themes included the following: (1) Principals perceived they lacked the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively manage the financial and budgetary complexities in a decentralized school system; (2) Principals perceived they lacked effective instructional leadership skills; and, (3) Principals perceived they lack skills in how to effectively deal with the social-emotional needs of students and staff and the personal affect it has on them. In order to understand the themes, significant statements were pulled from the focus group recording.

Although usually taught by practitioners with field experience, most principals concluded that the training he or she received had limited bearing on the actual role of the principal. The relevance of what was taught by the practitioners was not aligned with the day-to-day demands of the job. The following are principals' responses expressing the lack of alignment:

- “Until you are in the seat you don’t really get a taste of what it’s really like.”
- “You learn in the trenches.”
- “I enjoyed the class, but it was not something I would use everyday.”
- “My university could have done a better job.”

- “The university did not prepare us at all.”
- “We just did the bare minimum. You need more than surface level.”
- “Well, I guess I’ll jump out there. I don’t think it effectively prepared me at all for student achievement. It prepared us to know some of the things to look for, but not effectively at all for student achievement. I paid them a lot of money and can look back now coming from them into the position and say I wasn’t prepared.”
- “I feel the same. It was just something I knew I had to do. I felt I needed to get through this to get the job. I knew most of it would be learned on the job.”
- “I do not feel it prepared me at all. Not at all. It’s a lot of work so maybe it prepares you that there’s a lot of work and that’s what the principalship is.”
- “There’s nothing specific I learned to increase student achievement, and I’m really thinking hard.”

Principals perceived they lacked the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively manage the financial and budgetary complexities in a decentralized school system.

There was a consensus among all principals that a budget and finance class was required coursework in their master’s degree program. There was a perceived lack of emphasis on school finance as it relates to managing a school budget and specifically how to monitor and appropriate funds in a decentralized school system. The general perception was that they were not prepared to manage a campus budget and effectively and appropriately monitor the expenditure of funds. Their responses included:

- “I learned budget on the job.”

- Our budget class should have been differentiated on what you need to know. None of this matters.”
- “I learned about budget, but it did not deal with how to do a decentralized budget. Not too many districts are decentralized. I didn’t learn about that.”
- “The budget stuff was more about personal finance, not about school finance. I learned how to balance my checkbook, but not about school.”
- “I didn’t learn about school finance, or budget coding, or when to transfer funds or what for.”
- “My university did not do a good job.”

Principals perceived they lacked effective instructional leadership skills.

In order to effectively increase student achievement, the principal’s role as instructional leader is paramount. Principal respondents perceived that knowing how to lead the implementation of the curriculum, monitor and evaluate effective instruction, and provide timely and relevant feedback as an instructional coach is lacking in most principal preparation programs. Building teacher efficacy in response to continuous reflection and feedback has to start with the principal acting as the lead learner.

Principals perceived that knowing how to collaboratively review and analyze data and what data serves as critical evidence to drive instructional decisions is at best taught at a superficial level in most university principal preparation programs. Knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment is more closely linked to the number of years of teaching experience and grade level or content area expertise. Responses included:

- “How many courses did I have about how students learn? I just recently picked up how primary reading should be taught at this level. I didn’t teach those grades. This was definitely missing in my program.”
- “What is very important, but was not covered enough is instructional leadership – how to teach. Universities don’t have enough time to teach it all.”
- “What was lacking was how to teach teachers to teach reading effectively.”
- “You don’t have to know the content if you know what good instruction looks like.”
- “What is lacking? Knowledge of curriculum. Instructional leadership. What is and is not good teaching and how to fix it. Having a vision and how to reach that vision. Have the ability to communicate well and make that a priority.”
- I lacked the skill of being knowledgeable of curriculum. You have to be to be credible. Skillful instructional leadership. You can lead people and they will follow because they trust you.”
- “The focus needs to be on becoming an instructional leader and every skill that leads to that.”

Principals perceived they lack skills in how to effectively deal with the social-emotional needs of students and staff and the personal affect it has on them.

The principal responses that were perhaps the most emotionally charged dealt with the challenges of dealing with the social-emotional needs of the school community. The investigator witnessed a shift in the rapport and camaraderie among the participants when principals discussed the challenges of working with children of poverty and crime,

disenfranchised parents, and struggling teachers. As expressed below, all participants expressed a heightened sense of passion when discussing these challenges:

- “I walked into a building that was culturally sick. I didn’t even know there were schools with adults like this. People were there for all the wrong reasons; it had nothing to do with kids. I definitely wasn’t prepared.”
- “But when you’re at the helm of the ship as a principal it is a completely different story. I’m human myself. I can’t do this anymore. Am I going to make it? I sometimes get home at 9 or 10 at night.”
- “Dealing with challenging, chronic misbehaviors. Working with parents took me by surprise.”
- “There should be a course on how to work with teachers and families. A child is unconscious. What do you do? How do you react? There are homeless, poverty, abuse, drugs, weapons, violence, but we are accountable for the STAAR test. I’d like to see what it’s like in other schools. Do they have to deal with construction and renovation, or if you’re not paying attention to the PTO and they’re unhappy?”
- “How to get resources to help people. The courses give you the impression that you’ll have support. You have to hustle to get resources. How do you get help? How many phone calls, how many emails does it take?”
- “The most important thing is transparency. You have to be willing to be a servant leader. And being transparent means – I tell my staff, if there’s a sword I’ll fall on it first because there’s never any doubt. I do it even when I

don't feel like doing it. You have to give stakeholders respect, allow them to opt in; it's very important.”

- “I can't do it all. I have to let go of the parent's lack of concern.”
- “We need classes on how to work with children of color and poverty. More classes on how to service these students. How can I help them? What am I missing? What's the most effective way to get the message out? How do I get them to receive my message? I'll take a course on that!”
- “Psychology courses should be part of the coursework – especially how to work with adults. How do you stay emotionally well? How do you balance everything? We go 24/7.”
- “How to work with children at risk. That was huge. A principal has to have that.”
- “There's a need for a better way to working with children with disabilities. Classes are getting bigger and bigger and resources are getting taken away.”

Summary

Overall, the principals who participated in this focus group perceived that their principal preparation program did not effectively prepare them for the role as an instructional leader accountable for increasing student achievement. The myriad relational and managerial complexities of the role lack focus and alignment in current principal preparation program design. What remains unclear is whether one in any profession (e.g. surgeon, dentist, pilot, pharmacist, etc.) shares the experiences of principals in feeling inadequately prepared to manage the everyday demands of their profession.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

Where a child lives and attends school should not be a predictor of decades of success or failure that charts the trajectory of his or her life. Knowing that principal leadership matters to the extent that a highly effective principal has the potential impact equal to seven-to-ten months of additional academic instruction (Branch et al., 2013), dramatic and sweeping changes are urgently needed to prepare principals to effectively turn around low-performing schools. Every school deserves highly effective school leadership, and that leadership rests on the shoulders of the principal.

In a seminal study conducted in 2004, researchers indicated that principal leadership accounts for 25 percent of the success rate for students (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Subsequently, after six additional years of research, the authors of this report, in conjunction with a team from the Universities of Minnesota and Toronto reaffirmed the findings of the original 2004 study, that leadership is the second most important influence in student academic achievement (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Mendels, 2012; The Wallace Foundation, 2012). It is the primary role of the principal, as the instructional leader, to ignite a swift transformational shift in culture and instructional practice and to drive a school-wide platonic momentum towards improved student achievement. Steiner and Hassel (2011) espouse that preparing school leaders “who already have most of the competencies needed for turnaround leadership, rather than relying on long-term development, may be the best way to achieve the rapid results a turnaround demands” (p.16). By selecting the right candidates, those with the beliefs, values and mindset willing to commit to the herculean

task of halting student underachievement, universities and districts can effectively prepare a legion of well-prepared, highly effective turnaround principals ready to tackle the urgent need of improving student achievement.

This chapter will include an overview of the qualitative phenomenological study of principal perceptions of the effectiveness of their principal preparation programs, discuss the perception themes that surfaced from the focus group participant responses, explore the implications for future principal preparation program design, and offer recommendations for future studies.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of principal perspectives regarding the effectiveness of principal preparation programs and the skills and knowledge gained as the instructional leader to effectively increase student achievement. A focus group was conducted with eight urban elementary principals with at least one year of principal experience (yet not more than five years of experience), and whose school data from 2007-2011 identified at least one sub-group as rating academically unacceptable on the State of Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).

Three central phenomena were investigated in a focus group setting to expose common themes in the perceptions of principals regarding the impact of the preparation of skills and knowledge each gained as instructional leaders accountable for increasing student achievement. Eight questions were asked of the focus group participants to determine their perceptions, and every participant responded and elaborated on each

question. The intent of this study was to reveal principal perceptions based on the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the relevance and rigor of the program hinge on the administrative leadership experience of the instructor?
2. What gaps exist in preparing principals to effectively lead schools and increase student achievement?
3. What essential knowledge and skills need to be embedded in principal preparation program course design to effectively prepare instructional leaders to improve teaching and learning that leads to increased student achievement?

Discussion of Results

Based on data gathered from the principal focus group, an overall perception analysis concluded that principals perceived their university principal preparation program as not effectively preparing them for the role of increasing student achievement. A focus on the role of the principal in increasing student achievement was not prevalent in participants' preparation programs. This perception echoes the findings of a landmark study conducted in 2005 by Arthur Levine, then president of Teachers College at Columbia University. In studying 1, 206 of the nation's education schools, Levine reported the following: "The findings of this report were very disappointing. Collectively, educational administration programs are the weakest of all the programs at the nation's education schools" (p.13). In speaking to the National Association of Secondary School Principals National Conference on February 28, 2013, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan reported:

It is telling that principals themselves are not happy with the training they

received for their job. One poll found that nearly 70 percent of principals—seven out of ten—report that traditional school leadership programs are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today's schools.

Focus group results echo similar themes voiced in Secretary Duncan's quote.

Three perception themes surfaced upon analysis of the focus group responses. Overall, principals' perceptions were that their preparation programs were lacking in preparing them with the skills required to increase student achievement.



Figure 2. Perception Themes. This illustration denotes overall perception themes.

As a result of the focus group, these overall perception themes surfaced. The first deals with how principals allocate resources to improve teaching and learning.

1. Principals perceived they lacked the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively manage the financial and budgetary complexities in a decentralized school system.

It is important to note that all of the eight principals who participated in this focus group are employees of a decentralized school district. Hence, principals in this decentralized system are accountable for budgetary decisions, including staffing core and ancillary instructional staff and key non-instructional support positions at each school. They are responsible for allocating funds for instructional resources and programs aligned with instructional targets as well as Title and grant monies used to support academic interventions for struggling students. Principals reported that the finance courses taught in most of the participants' preparation programs dealt with personal finance, and did not address the complexities of how to appropriate and monitor school budgets sometimes in excess of a million dollars.

A lack of basic school finance skills, including what and how much to spend on instructional supports, which also include people and materials, is compounded by high-stakes decentralized accountability. Knowing the appropriate amounts money to invest and how to prioritize spending of funds to promote student learning requires financial know-how regarding the concepts of return on investment. Investing in teachers' professional development can also lead to increases in student achievement (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010). The principals reported that this factor created a stressful learning curve as each struggled to remain in compliance with the allowable and non-allowable perimeters of federal and state funds, align spending rates with district expectations, and execute creative staffing decisions during a time of severe budget reductions and zero-based budgeting. Their principal preparation programs lacked courses directly germane to effectively allocating taxpayer dollars to promote increased student achievement. The results of a 2013 survey of 500 principals conducted by Harris

Interactive for MetLife Insurance Company found that “[s]eventy-eight percent rate managing the budget and resources as challenging or very challenging” (MetLife, 2013, p. 11). While managing the school budget and complying with legal fiduciary requirements is related to providing the personnel and accouterments necessary for a climate of effective instruction, it is not the primary focus of being a highly effective instructional leader and is also indicative of what pulls a principal away from the instructional leadership it takes to improve student achievement.

The second theme that surfaced from the principal focus groups dealt with what an instructional leader needs to know about pedagogy, curriculum, instruction, assessment and supervision. The coaching of teachers regarding instructional practices was perceived as inclusive in this theme.

2. Principals perceived they lacked effective instructional leadership skills.

Focus group participants spoke of the challenges that arose from a limited exposure to content knowledge and instructional practice aligned with a particular instructional level.

Respondents reported that when they were faced with having coaching conversations regarding classroom observations, they often felt unprepared to discuss instructional practice with teachers whether a particular teacher’s grade level or content areas differs from his or her own teaching experience. Principals perceived a lack of preparation in addressing the specifics of curriculum alignment with standards, high-impact instructional practices, and the ability to identify and promote effective assessment strategies and interventions. This factor can be especially problematic for an elementary principal engaged in a coaching conversation with a teacher on how to

improve phonemic awareness. If the principal is relying solely on his or her own experience as a high school business and accounting teacher, the knowledge base needed to effectively teach beginning reading skills will be weak at best. Knowing how phonemic awareness is effectively taught and monitored in an early childhood classes of second language learners is a significant learning curve for an instructional leader. Good leaders are sufficiently versed in research-based school and classroom practices to lead the faculty in redesigning the instructional program in ways that keep everyone focused on student learning (SREB, p. 16).

Hess and Kelly (2005) note that principal preparation programs address educational pedagogy and instruction only 11 percent of the time. They report that principal preparation programs miss the mark in preparing school leaders to drive instructional improvements. In a study of 43 school districts and 123 schools through the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education at the University of Virginia, senior director William Robinson and executive director Leann Buntrock, (2011) identified effective, sustainable conditions for increased academic achievement. Their findings report that successful turnaround leaders create individual plans to pro-actively address the academic needs of each student. To do this effectively requires the principal to possess an in-depth knowledge of educational pedagogy, the alignment of curriculum and assessment, how to consistently identify and demand high-yield, research-based instructional strategies, and to possess the analytic prowess to dissect data down to the root cause. This cannot be accomplished effectively when principals are ill-prepared and subsequently spend only 12 percent of their time dealing with instructional leadership (Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006). The focus has to shift to asking the right questions. How

many hours a day does the principal work on impacting instructional practices and what is the evidence of his or her impact on instruction and student achievement? A Wallace Foundation (2013) study on principals in urban schools postulates that “[d]istricts need to make sure not only that principals have time to focus on instruction but also the skills to use that time to help teachers improve” (p. 25).

The third theme struck an emotional chord with principals. Great empathy was also evidenced by their expressed body language and vocal tone. Principals exhibited concern and passion for the issues related to social-emotional wellbeing.

3. Principals perceived they lack skills to effectively deal with the social-emotional needs of students and staff and the personal affect it has on them.

Knowing how to support student learning for those who live in poverty, who are homeless, or who have a parent who is incarcerated, unemployed, working multiple jobs, or is addicted to drugs or alcohol is increasingly more difficult as the social agencies and mental healthcare professionals schools once relied on for assistance face budget and staffing cuts. These socioeconomic influences are often overlooked in the literature on school improvement (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010). Yet, research shows that social-emotional learning (SEL) is a boost to improved academic performance. Fullan (2008) states, “Well-being serves double duty. It directly supports literacy and numeracy; that is, emotional health is closely associated with cognitive achievement” (p. 46).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL] (2003), reports in its mission statement that “schools that encourage social and emotional development reap important rewards for their students, including greater academic

success, fewer problem behaviors, and improved relationships between students and significant people in their lives.” A landmark CASEL report for educational leaders further states, “Social and emotional learning programs help to reduce the achievement gap between high- and low-achieving youth by providing all students the necessary skills to be successful in school and in life” (p. 2). It is the responsibility of the principal to communicate the cultural imperatives of social-emotional health and wellbeing for all members of the school community, students, parents, and staff alike (CASEL, 2003). A caring, supportive, safe environment optimizes learning and promotes increased student achievement. Leadership that is inclusive, optimistic, and focused on the social-emotional development of all promotes a climate that maximizes student success. The most effective principals work at increasing student achievement by making the school climate one that is safe, supportive and emotionally healthy. To this end, Leithwood et al. (2010) states the following:

Without attention to the rational, emotional, organizational, and community conditions that affect every school, any change will be short-lived. Any gains in performance will be temporary, and another false dawn of recovery will demoralize and disappoint those who have worked hard and long to achieve it. (p. 255)

Implications for Principal Preparation Programs

The implications for principal preparation programs are critical because leadership matters in its impact on student achievement. Choosing the right educator and preparing them to effectively lead our schools is a critical call to action for universities, school districts, and independent entities providing principal training. Knowing how a potential

leader thinks, responds, and acts is critical. Prior exploration of competencies through a behavior event interview probes the interviewee's thought processes and provides a greater predictor of performance (Steiner & Hassel, 2011). The specialized skill-set required to halt the momentum of student failure in our under-performing and failing schools is also vital. Papa & English state, "Turning around schools means talking on beliefs and practices that demean and devalue students. In order to do this successfully, activists leaders must become aware of how schools really work to disenfranchise some students and advantage others" (p. 67).

Educational thought leaders and researchers are beginning to realistically define what beliefs and values must be woven into the mindset of effective principals, and what rigorous and relevant learning looks like in principal preparation program design. Effective leaders believe that intelligence is fluid and that it is important to keep learning at rigorous levels and communicate high expectations while instilling hope and confidence (Dweck, 2010). Results based on the perceptions of this focus group still point to the deficiencies in the content and instructional delivery of these programs, especially in the areas of how to lead instructional improvements that impact the quality of teaching and learning for everyone. Learning how to hire and retain highly effective teachers, improve teachers with developing instructional skills, and urgently taking the steps to rid a campus of the toxic impact of ineffective teachers is job one. In addition, knowing how to effectively use budgetary resources to fortify a collaborative campus-wide action plan must be embedded in the supporting role of the campus principal. Meeting the social-emotional needs of students, parents and staff by developing a safe and enriched school climate is critical to every part of the turnaround effort.

The body of research in the past decade regarding the gaps in principal preparation programs was echoed in the perceptions of principals who participated in this focus group. As a result, the education community at large must itself act like a high-performing professional learning community and respond when rigorous, impactful learning is not actualized. Understanding what principals perceive as lacking in their preparation program as it relates to the day-to-day challenges of their job is important to inform the design of future principal preparation programs. Steiner, Hassel, and Hassel (2008) suggest the following: “Time is the enemy when the status quo is failure” (p. 5). Our children deserve it and they have no time to waste.

Conclusion

What is needed to change the landscape of principal preparation requires bold, courageous changes in university-district collaboration efforts, program design and accountability. The stakes are high and the need is urgent. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in speaking to the National Association of Secondary School Principals National Conference on February 28, 2013, extolled, “With some notable exceptions, our current principal preparation programs are mediocre. Independent research has portrayed too many of them as having low admission standards, undemanding coursework, and inadequate clinical training” (NASSP, 2013). Now is the time to fortify and augment collaboration between school districts and principal preparation programs to address this mediocrity. According to Orr, King, and LaPointe (2010): “Such an undertaking requires districts and universities to work together to forge a new understanding of what school leaders need to know and be able to do to improve local schools, and to translate this understanding into leadership preparation strategies” (p.13).

Districts and the children they serve need highly effective leadership and skillful, exemplary turnaround principals who possess the skills to diagnose and cease the momentum of school failure, develop the conditions for strategic school improvement and collaboratively create a vision for increased student achievement. Kowal and Hassel (2011) state, “By establishing performance expectations that are clearly aligned with the district or state’s vision for the school, and providing incentives—financial and otherwise—for dramatic learning growth, education leaders can help focus the imported principal’s actions on a rapid turnaround that benefits children immediately” (p. 12). Educators at the district level must take the lead in bringing university and non-profit providers together to explicitly outline the specific expectations for what is required of an ideal candidate to become a highly effective principal for its low-performing schools. Once a profile is unambiguously communicated, fidelity to a high-reliability screening and selection processes must be employed to determine if a candidate has the beliefs, values and interpersonal skills to drive the school turnaround effort in any of its underperforming schools. The beliefs and attributes of a candidate are critical if the new leader is expected to learn how to effectively execute a change in school culture by communicating and modeling a high-expectations, no-excuses mindset and possess the relational capacity to mobilize stakeholders to be results-driven. Imperative in the candidate’s profile is proof that based on past performance, there was a significant, measureable impact on increased student achievement. This can be determined from evidence of performance data as a teacher or administrator, situational interviews and mock scenario demonstrations, or first-hand observations in a school setting.

Districts must insist that collaboration include a transparent dissection of the

university or program’s curricular alignment with school turnaround competencies and the district’s needs. The development of skills specific to increasing student achievement and turning around low performing schools must be embedded in the curriculum. Skilled analysis of data, expert knowledge of curriculum, instruction, assessment and supervision, competent and focused coaching expertise, and the understanding of how to positively affect the social-emotional needs of an entire school community must proceed up the taxonomy ladder from basic knowledge to exemplary execution. Preparing principals to systematically rid the toxicity of low expectations and create a safe, supportive and enriching school climate that promotes high levels of achievement and wellbeing for all will require the collaboration of committed professionals willing to share experiences and hold each other accountable. Papa and English (2011) state, “Principals who turn around low performing or failing schools cannot do it alone and never do it alone” (p. 4).

Another essential component of principal preparation is a rigorous and relevant embedded internship experience that connects key turnaround leader theories with actions and behaviors. Such extensive experiences should scaffold in complexity and involvement, from passively observing, to participating and eventually leading, exemplary improvement efforts. “Quality internships cannot be accomplished during “seat time” in a university classroom. Like any results-driven work, they require significant investments of energy, time and resources — investments that many university leadership programs have thus far been reluctant to make.” (SREB, p. 3). This requires field experiences that are relevant and make time for reflection with a mentor coach a priority. Critical, supportive developmental feedback provided by a mentor

coach should guide the intern's continuous reflection and growth. Program accountability involves continuously analyzing how each experience contributes to becoming a highly effective principal and impacting increased student achievement.

Implications for Further Research

The results of this study highlight many topics related to the preparation of principals that may contribute to increased student achievement. Since this study was limited in its methodology to a focus group of only elementary principals, conducting a study involving the perceptions of secondary principals may reveal significantly different perceptions on principal preparation programs. Also limiting this study to principals in a decentralized urban school district limited the generalizability of the results. Future studies might involve principals in a rural, charter, private or centralized school setting. The current emphasis on district "grow your own" (Joseph, 2009) and non-profit collaboration with universities may be areas of future study. The impact of mentor coaches, multi-semester internships, participant selection instruments, district-level support, student performance measures, or district-specific competencies in principal preparation programs and the results on student achievement also lend themselves to possible future studies. All have the potential of studying a principal's level of preparation to effectively increase student achievement.

The principal's role has greatly evolved from the infancy of our nation when the principal began the day by lighting the wood-burning stove in the one-room schoolhouse. Today's principals are called to light the fire of desperately needed change in instructional practices and to create a safe environment warmed by high expectations and rigorous standards so that every student can attain high levels of academic achievement.

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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

CONFIDENTIAL RESEARCH FORM

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
CONFIDENTIAL RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE:

The Importance of Principal Preparation Programs to Increase Student Achievement

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Theresa M. Campos, Doctoral student, from the Executive Education Program in the College of Education at the University of Houston. The purpose of this research is to investigate principal perceptions of principal preparation programs. This study is being conducted as part of Ms. Campos' doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Steven Busch.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to determine to what degree urban elementary principals perceive their own principal preparation program effectively prepared them with the skills and knowledge to increase student achievement.

PROCEDURES

You will be one of approximately 10 subjects to be asked to participate in this project. Your participation in this project will be voluntary. If you participate, you will be asked to take part in a video-recorded focus group conducted by Theresa M. Campos during which you will be asked to answer questions regarding your perceptions of your own principal preparation and how effectively you perceive you were prepared with the knowledge and skills needed to increase student achievement. Participants unwilling to grant permission to be videotaped or who do not agree for the videotapes to be used in publications/presentations will not be able to participate in this study.

The focus group will last approximately forty-five minutes and will be conducted at the Hattie Mae White Education Center, 4400 W. 18th Street, Houston, Texas, 77092, in a room to be determined based on availability.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your participation in this project. Each subject's name will be paired with a code number by the principal investigator. This code number will appear on all written materials. The list pairing the subject's name to the assigned code number will be kept separate from all research materials and will be available only to the principal investigator. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits. Video-recorded responses will be assigned a number to ensure confidentiality and will be locked in a secure location.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences to participants of this study.

BENEFITS

While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation may help investigators better understand existing gaps in principal preparation programs. This data will inform how to design and implement more effective principal preparation programs that address the skills and knowledge needed to prepare school leaders to increase student achievement.

ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

INCENTIVES/REMUNERATION

No compensation will be offered to participants.

PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. It may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual subject will be identified.

AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF VIDEO TAPES

If you consent to participate in this study, please indicate whether you agree to be video taped during the study by checking the appropriate box below. If you agree, please also indicate whether the video tapes can be used for publication/presentations.

___ I agree to be video taped during the interview.

___ I agree that the video tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.

___ I do not agree to be video taped during the interview.

___ I do not agree that the video tape(s) can be used in publication/presentation.

SUBJECT RIGHTS

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.
2. All procedures have been explained to me and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me.
4. Any benefits have been explained to me.
5. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact Theresa M. Campos at 713.696.0600. I may also contact Dr. Steven Busch, faculty sponsor, at 713.743.3902.
6. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also refuse to answer any question.
7. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (713-743-9204). ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.
8. All information that is obtained in connection with this project and that can be identified with me will remain confidential as far as possible within legal limits. Information gained from this study that can be identified with me may be released to

no one other than the principal investigator Theresa M. Campos, and her faculty sponsor, Dr. Steven Busch. The results may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations without identifying me by name.

I HAVE READ (OR HAVE HAD READ TO ME) THE CONTENTS OF THIS CONSENT FORM AND HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED TO ASK QUESTIONS. I HAVE RECEIVED ANSWERS TO MY QUESTIONS. I GIVE MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I HAVE RECEIVED (OR WILL RECEIVE) A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR MY RECORDS AND FUTURE REFERENCE.

Study Subject (print name): _____

Signature of Study Subject: _____

Date: _____

I HAVE READ THIS FORM TO THE SUBJECT AND/OR THE SUBJECT HAS READ THIS FORM. AN EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH WAS GIVEN AND QUESTIONS FROM THE SUBJECT WERE SOLICITED AND ANSWERED TO THE SUBJECT'S SATISFACTION. IN MY JUDGMENT, THE SUBJECT HAS DEMONSTRATED COMPREHENSION OF THE INFORMATION.

Principal Investigator (print name and title): _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF ENDORSEMENT FROM SCHOOL OFFICE

November 12, 2012

Mrs. Theresa M. Campos, Doctoral Candidate
University of Houston
College of Education – Executive Education
Stephen Power Farish Hall
Houston, TX 77004

Dear Mrs. Campos,

This correspondence serves as official notification of endorsement to conduct your dissertation study within the Houston Independent School District (HISD) Elementary Schools at the Hattie Mae White Educational Center, 4400 West 18th Street, Houston, Texas 77092.

Your topic: ***The Importance of Principal Preparation Programs to Increase Student Achievement*** will provide the district with a principal's perspective on how their own principal preparation program prepared them with the skills and knowledge needed to increase student achievement.

Since you have described your study as a qualitative phenomenological study, it will require that you conduct a focus group of 10 elementary school principals. To that end, you are expected to seek official approval to conduct your study through the HISD Office of Research and Accountability. This letter of endorsement should be attached to your letter of request to that office. The research and accountability office will ensure through its processes that the district and its employees, who agree to participate in the study, are well protected and represented over the course of your research.

On behalf of the Elementary School Office, we wish you the best on your doctoral journey; and if additional support is needed, please feel free to contact our office.

Sincerely,



Ms. Karla Loria, Chief School Officer
Elementary Schools Office I
Houston Independent School District



Dr. Sidney Zullinger, Chief School Officer
Elementary Schools Office II
Houston Independent School District



Mr. Samuel Sañabia, Chief School Officer
Elementary Schools Office III
Houston Independent School District

APPENDIX C

DISTRICT APPROVAL TO CONDUCT STUDY



HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

HATTIE MAE WHITE EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT CENTER
4400 WEST 18th STREET • HOUSTON, TEXAS 77092-8501

TERRY B. GRIER, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

www.houstonisd.org
www.twitter.com/HoustonISD

Carla J. Stevens
Assistant Superintendent
Research and Accountability Department
Tel: 713-556-6700 • Fax: 713-556-6730

November 26, 2012

Theresa Campos
4001 Hardy Street, Bldg. C
Houston, Texas 77009

Dear Ms. Campos:

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) is pleased to approve the study "The Importance of Principal Preparation Programs to Increase Student Achievement". The study will investigate the extent urban school principals perceived their preparation program effectively prepared them to function as principals. Further, the study will examine how the program influenced their skills and knowledge to increase student achievement. The study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of doctoral degree requirements at the University of Houston. The projected date of study completion is December 31, 2013.

Approval to conduct the study in HISD is contingent on your meeting the following conditions:

- The target population is 10 elementary principals leading schools rated academically unacceptable in at least one subgroup of the 2007–2010 Texas school-rating system. Principals also must have at least one year and not more than five years of principal experience. The HISD Elementary Chief Schools Officers approved the study.
- The study will involve the collection of qualitative data from a video-recorded focus group. The focus group will last approximately 60 minutes.
- Voluntary consent is required of elementary-school principals who participate in the study.
- The researcher must follow the guidelines of HISD and the University of Houston regarding the protection of human subjects and confidentiality of data.
- The HISD Department of Research and Accountability will monitor this study to ensure compliance to ethical conduct guidelines established by the Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP) as well as the disclosure of student records outlined in Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- In order to eliminate potential risks to study participants, the reporting of proposed changes in research activities must be promptly submitted to the HISD Department of Research and Accountability for approval prior to implementing changes. Non compliance to this guideline could impact the approval of future research studies in HISD.
- The final report must be submitted to the HISD Department of Research and Accountability within 30 days of completion.

Any other changes or modifications to the current proposal must be submitted to the Department of Research and Accountability for approval. Should you need additional information or have any questions concerning the process, please call (713) 556-6700.

Sincerely,

Carla Stevens

CS: vh
cc: Michele Pola
Mark Smith
Julie Baker

Arnold Viramontes
Samuel Sarabia

Karla Loria
Sidney Zullinger

APPENDIX D

UNIVERSITY APPROVAL TO CONDUCT STUDY

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

January 17, 2013

Theresa Campos
c/o Dr. Steven Busch
Curriculum and Instruction

Dear Theresa Campos,

The University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1) reviewed your research proposal entitled "The Importance of Principal Preparation Programs to Increase Student Achievement" on October 19, 2012, according to Institutional guidelines.

At that time, your project was granted approval contingent upon your agreement to modify your protocol as stipulated by the Committee. The changes you have made adequately fulfill the requested contingencies, and your project is now **APPROVED**.

- **Approval Date:** January 17, 2013
- **Expiration Date:** October 1, 2013

As required by federal regulations governing research in human subjects, research procedures (including recruitment, informed consent, intervention, data collection or data analysis) may not be conducted after the expiration date.

To ensure that no lapse in approval or ongoing research occurs, please ensure that your protocol is resubmitted in RAMP for renewal by the **deadline for the September 2013 CPHS meeting**. Deadlines for submission are located on the CPHS website.

During the course of the research, the following must also be submitted to the CPHS:

- Any proposed changes to the approved protocol, prior to initiation; AND
- Any unanticipated events (including adverse events, injuries, or outcomes) involving possible risk to subjects or others, within 10 working days.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,



Dr. Daniel O'Connor, Chair
Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1)

PLEASE NOTE: All subjects must receive a copy of the informed consent document, if one is approved for use. All research data, including signed consent documents, must be retained according to the University of Houston Data Retention Policy ([found on the CPHS website](#)) as well as requirements of the FDA and external sponsor(s), if applicable. Faculty sponsors are responsible for retaining data for student projects on the UH campus for the required period of record retention.

Protocol Number: 13083-01

Full Review X Expedited Review

APPENDIX E

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR COVER LETTER

COVER LETTER TO FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

January 25, 2013

Dear Principal,

You are being asked to participate in a focus group for principals with at least 1 year and no more than 5 years of principal experience, and whose school data reflects at least one student sub-group as academically unacceptable according to school profile data from 2007-2011. As a participant, you will be asked to voluntarily participate in a focus group discussion regarding your perceptions of your own principal preparation program, specifically, how it prepared you to increase student achievement.

The focus group will require approximately 60 minutes of your time. You will be asked in advance to sign a consent form (attached) to participate in the study and to permit videotaping of the focus group discussion. Participants unwilling to grant permission to be videotaped or for the videotapes to be used in publications/presentations will not be able to take part in the study. Participants will be numerically coded and no identifying information will be recorded in the results of the study. Video recordings will be viewed only by the principal investigator (myself) and archived in a secure location at the University of Houston, Room 112, Farish Hall, for a period of 3 years.

The focus group will take place after the instructional day at the Hattie Mae White Educational Center, 4400 W. 18th Street, Houston, Texas, on a mutually agreeable date and time. Refreshments will be provided.

If you are willing to consent to participate in this study, please complete and sign the attached Consent to Participate in Research form and return it in the enclosed postage paid envelope via US Mail to:

Theresa M. Campos
7215 Sheffield Falls Court
Houston, Texas 77095

Once Informed Consent documents have been received, I will be contacting you to arrange a date and time for the focus group. Please contact me if you have any questions or require additional information. I can be reached on my cell phone at 713-857-6564, or at my office at 713-696.0632.

Sincerely,

Theresa M. Campos

This project has been reviewed by the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713) 743-9204.

APPENDIX F

PRINCIPAL DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

Principal Name: _____

Number of years as a principal: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Gender: (Circle) M F

Number of years teaching experience: _____

Number of years as an Assistant Principal: _____

Number of years at current school: _____

Sub-group(s) rated academically unacceptable: _____

Student population: _____

Grades served: _____

Year Master's Degree was conferred: _____

Master's Degree conferred in: _____

APPENDIX G
FIELD NOTES FORM

FIELD NOTES FORM - FOCUS GROUP

QUESTION: # _____

P. 1

P. 2

P. 3

P.4

P. 5

P. 6

P. 7

P. 8